

**ROMANCE AND INDUSTRY ON THE ROAD TO AVONLEA**

by

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## ABSTRACT

A co-venture between CBC and Disney Channel, the television series *Road to Avonlea* (1990 – 1996) is widely accepted as the successful reconciliation of two competing production styles—industrial generic and distinctively Canadian. The series represents a case from which to theorize conditions for distinctively Canadian drama able to travel well. Under what conditions was *Road to Avonlea* lauded as distinctively Canadian within Canada, while becoming a Disney mainstay and gaining access to over 150 export markets?

Well known in film theory, mode of address is developed and extended to policy by analysis of production history, as well as textual criticism of the form and process of adapting stories by Canadian author L.M. Montgomery. What is the mode of address resulting from creative, industrial and policy conditions, and what contribution can analyzing mode of address make to policy evaluation of Canadian television drama? Did CBC and Disney's objectives diverge because of their different organizational philosophies, or did they converge? What creative and economic demands pressured the production, and how did these manifest themselves aesthetically and meaningfully? How did adaptation, production context and social history influence interpretation of Montgomery's fiction from page to screen? Did interpretation render the series more or less culturally specific than its sources?

Through familiar themes and conventions and a euphemistic construction of 'the island', *Road to Avonlea* offers a portable mode of address, meeting industrial objectives normally associated with placeless Canadian drama. But the series also participates in Canadian recognition through its PEI setting, Montgomery's stories and other references that *locate* it, helping CBC fulfil its cultural mandate of a nationally specific mode of address. Contradicting conventional wisdom in industry and policy discourse, *Road to Avonlea* demonstrates that 'the local' does not necessarily pose a problem to the export of television drama. Rather, the series' romance with community suggests nostalgia for 'the local' is a sentiment with transnational potential. Mode of address contributes to policy evaluation here, suggesting the need for a new paradigm. The case challenges rigid conceptualizations of place and distinctive Canadian themes in industrial definitions of Cancon.

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To friends and family who have only ever known me as a student, this is it! And to my partner Neil Monckton, the road would have been much longer without you.

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, global economic pressures on the domestic television industry pose challenges to the production of distinctively Canadian drama that features Canadian settings and characters, as well as references specific to Canada's historical and cultural realities. The pressure to compete against the American entertainment juggernaut puts emphasis on placeless, industrial or generic dramas because conventional wisdom holds that such programs, in their homogeneity and non-specificity, can more readily bypass differences of nation, region or culture. In Canada, such globalized genres have traditionally eschewed local perspectives and place-specific storytelling in order to sell well internationally.

Yet the notion of a distinctively Canadian television presence continues to feature prominently in policy debates, often as an ideal to be striven for, with rewards in the way of generous subsidies offered to those productions seen as fulfilling this ideal. These pressures create a split within Canadian television production between dramas regarded as 'distinctively Canadian' or made for Canada, and those defined as made in Canada but indistinct. While there is agreement regarding the existence of such a dichotomy in the production industry since the 1990s, little consensus exists over what exactly defines distinctively Canadian drama. How is 'distinctively Canadian' understood, and does this definition need rethinking? Moreover, does a series' recognizably Canadian content<sup>1</sup> necessarily preclude it from travelling well in the global television market? In addition, what are the conditions that would make for such international portability? In other words, what would it take to reconcile the two modes of television production previously described? This dissertation explores the case of the drama series *Road to Avonlea* (1990 – 1996)<sup>2</sup> to demonstrate that such reconciliation is both desirable and possible, though not without risk.

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<sup>1</sup> In Canadian broadcasting policy, particularly for the purposes of allocating funds and determining broadcast quotas, "Canadian content" is generally defined by the citizenship of the creative personnel. But "Canadian content" came to take on a different meaning in the 1990s, with the call for "distinctively Canadian content"—that is, stories that were not only told by Canadians but were for and about them, as well.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete episode list including credits and broadcast dates refer to Appendix E.

Inspired by the stories of L.M. Montgomery, *Road to Avonlea* was a rural-historical family romance set in Prince Edward Island in the early part of the twentieth century. The choice of *Road to Avonlea* as a case study for exploring the notion of ‘distinctively Canadian’ is with a view to understanding how a program recognized for its cultural specificity in one context could succeed internationally in others.

In the history of Canadian television, no long-running drama series other than *Road to Avonlea* has so soundly challenged the industry dichotomy outlined above yet received so little academic attention.<sup>3</sup> The series, therefore, offers a rich opportunity for pursuing questions about television production, national specificity, and the transnationalization of culture. The involvement of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and The Disney Channel as investors in the Sullivan Entertainment series adds to the richness of the questions explored. On the one hand, the CBC is a national public broadcaster with a philosophical commitment to telling Canadian stories to Canadian viewers. On the other hand, Disney is a giant corporation with a global reach and a reputation for stereotyping cultures and their stories in the push to dominate the international entertainment market. Did the CBC and Disney’s objectives for the series necessarily diverge because of their different organizational philosophies, or did they in fact converge? What were the creative and economic demands on producing *Road to Avonlea*, and how did these manifest themselves in the series both aesthetically and in terms of meaning? Under what conditions was it possible for *Road to Avonlea* to be lauded as distinctively Canadian within Canada, while becoming a beloved mainstay of The Disney Channel and gaining access to over 150 export markets? Along the way, what were the cultural gains and/or losses? In answering these questions, I propose that television content must be evaluated aesthetically and qualitatively to best ascertain the cultural effects of television policy. I thereby lay a claim to the relevance of qualitative cultural criticism to policy studies.

*Road to Avonlea*’s significance as a case study for exploring these concerns also stems from the series’ connection to L.M. Montgomery. The iconic Canadian author of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) who also immortalized Prince Edward Island in most of her fiction wrote the stories from which *Road to Avonlea* is adapted. Like *Road to Avonlea*, Montgomery’s

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<sup>3</sup> Up until 2002 with the publication of two articles (Kotsopoulos and Lefebvre), the series had received no scholarly attention with the exception of one article (Kotsopoulos, 1999).

cultural resonance is not limited solely to Canada, as her work continues to support an international following since the initial publication of *Anne of Green Gables*. Therefore, Montgomery's cultural portability and enduring appeal have much to reveal about the transcultural possibilities of popular culture. Why do the themes, characters and settings Montgomery portrayed still have the ability to captivate the contemporary imagination, nationally and cross-culturally?

As a case study of adaptation, *Road to Avonlea* furnishes important clues. Understood as the cultural transformation of source texts over time, adaptation teaches us about the role of interpretation in securing Montgomery's continuing international popularity and remarkable longevity. How did adaptation, production context and social history contribute to the interpretation of Montgomery's fictional world from page to television screen? What were the meanings taken from or added to Montgomery that enhanced *Road to Avonlea's* portability, not just across cultures but across time, making the imaginary place she created just as relevant and appealing at the turn of our century? Did interpretation render the television series more or less culturally specific than its source texts? What was the mode of address produced via adaptation that enabled the series to be distinctively Canadian, and at the same time, number-one rated on both the state broadcaster in Iran and The Disney Channel in the U.S.? Is such a mode of address harmful or beneficial to local cultures, cultural diversity, and cross-cultural understanding?

The goals then that organize this study and the research questions asked are twofold: first, understanding the meaning of distinctively Canadian, and second, explaining the conditions for cultural portability. In this way, *Road to Avonlea* represents a singular opportunity for studying the global in miniature. Finding expression here are the issues that dominate discussions about the transnationalization of culture, particularly with respect to television. Indeed, the research on transnationalization and television co-production best reflect the concerns of this dissertation.

International co-production arrangements are increasingly important in the global television industry and serve both economic and cultural functions. Economically, the primary benefit of a co-production arrangement is the ability to pool resources, especially by accessing government incentives and subsidies from each of the countries involved, in order to produce a television drama with the highest production values possible and access to more than one national market. Culturally, co-productions are meant to stave off the threat

of one kind of transnational culture, i.e., American, by (paradoxically) producing dramas that must be transnational in character in order to appeal to the diverse national audiences of the various co-producing partners involved. Competing scenarios emerge as to the limits and possibilities of co-production, but generally most researchers suggest that the economic benefits outweigh the cultural ones.<sup>4</sup> Loss of cultural specificity by way of creative compromise and a reliance on industrial genres tend to be identified as the least favourable aspects of co-production. However, a less prevalent suggestion is the idea that expressing some cultural specificity from each of the partner nations actually enhances marketability to the other (Attallah, 1996, pp. 186-7; Tate & Allen, 2003). In other words, while the first scenario holds that sameness is the key to transnational success, the other argues that difference has its attractions, too.

The purpose of an in-depth, qualitative analysis of *Road to Avonlea* is to test the above assertions, given the series' production context *vis-à-vis* the CBC and Disney, and to consider the implications for a Canadian television policy increasingly oriented around co-production and export sales.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, within policy studies, there is a pronounced need for qualitative analyses of Canadian television drama that can inform the direction of future public policy. Such analyses are underrepresented in both Canadian cultural studies and Canadian policy studies, especially when contrasting the wealth of academic research conducted on television drama in the U.S. and Great Britain, and when considering the national policy significance accorded to distinctively Canadian drama. Therefore, this case study is meant to fill an already-identified gap (Collins, 1990; Fletcher, 1998; Murray, 1999b), and demonstrate the manner in which qualitative cultural criticism and case study method can inform the policy arena.

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion, see Attallah (1996), Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn (1997), Negrine & Papathanassopoulos (1990).

<sup>5</sup> Canada-U.S. co-productions like *Road to Avonlea* are technically referred to as “co-ventures” because they are non-treaty co-productions. That is, both countries have not signed onto a bilateral international co-production treaty that would make it possible to qualify projects as domestic productions on both sides of the border. The purpose of international co-productions of the treaty variety is to qualify as domestic content in both countries, which satisfies national broadcasting quotas, but more importantly, gives access to investment from government funding agencies in both nations (Hoskins *et al*, pp. 97, 101-2). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will simply refer to *Road to Avonlea* as a co-production.

## *From Industry to Romance*

The case also represents a significant intervention in Montgomery studies, and has wider implications for the study of popular culture. By and large, the popularity of Montgomery and the affective appeal of her writing, *Anne of Green Gables* in particular, have been theorized from a Western liberal-feminist perspective, though this perspective is rarely explicitly identified as such. The focus has been on the gendered nature of the heroine's rite of passage, and her resistance (or surrender) to patriarchal constraints as represented by family members or members of the community at large.<sup>6</sup> The difficulty these interpretations sometimes pose is the general tendency to mistake the *feminist* reading for *the* reading. But research into Japan's fascination with *Anne of Green Gables* and all things Montgomery throws this mistaken identity into relief, as the feminist reading is not popular there (Akamatsu, 1999; Stoffman, 1998; Trillin, 1999). Nor was it in communist Poland, where Montgomery was read subversively as part of an anti-totalitarian political agenda (Wachowicz, 1987). Moreover, a pilot study I conducted on *Road to Avonlea* in 1996 challenged the preeminence I accorded to the portrayal of women in my assumptions about how the series must be popularly received, and posited other frameworks for interpretation that later resurfaced in the actual study. My eyes were opened to audience experiences of the series that did not give gender the dominance I did, but rather, focussed on issues related to— what can only be best summed up as— form of life, and warranted further consideration. My point is not to discount the importance of gender to Montgomery's appeal or the significance of feminist inquiry to Montgomery studies, but to make room for other explanations that would contribute to understanding this author's popularity, cross-culturally and over time, while avoiding the problems outlined above.

The prominence accorded to Montgomery and her creation, Anne Shirley, within Japanese culture also throws into relief how problematic the notion of 'race' is as a category for explaining human experience. When people in the West are perplexed by Japan's love affair with *Anne of Green Gables*, I suspect it emanates more from the perception of racial difference than cultural difference— with the possibility of any cultural similarity not even registering. To put it another way, if Swedes were crazy about Anne, would this garner as

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Åhmansson (1991), Berg (1992), Drain (1992 and 1992a) and Robinson (1995).

much attention? For this reason, I prefer to think about the questions I pose in relation to cross-cultural concerns rather than issues of 'race'.<sup>7</sup> The phenomenon of Anne in Japan is not a case of Asian girls suffering from false consciousness (i.e., internalized racism), or an unusually aggressive bout of Canadian cultural imperialism (i.e., false consciousness again) that compels worship of the white girl Anne. Rather, love for Anne and her world comes from seeing Japanese values, experiences and desires reflected in Montgomery's creations. The salient point is to understand the cultural portability of the values, experiences, and desires portrayed. In this way, Montgomery in popular culture becomes a valuable jumping-off point for studies in the transcultural.

To that end, *my hypothesis is that the enduring appeal of Montgomery is linked to form of life in the twentieth century*. Montgomery's idealized portrayal of the pastoral and pre-industrial world, her passionate descriptions of spiritual communion with nature, and her sympathetic depiction of a state in which sentimental feelings govern, show her debt to Romantic conventions deployed a century before she began to write. But romance itself has an even longer tradition in Western culture, evolving from a distinct literary form in medieval times to a quality or sensibility deployed in the popular culture of modernity. Indeed, Northrop Frye (1976) sees romance as inseparable from modern popular culture and likens it to "secular scripture". At the heart of romance is the quest for identity with the movement from alienation to identity involving ascent from a demonic world to an idyllic one (Frye, p. 54). Alternatively, Gillian Beer (1970) thinks of romance as "a cluster of properties":

... the themes of love and adventure, a certain withdrawal from their own societies on the part of both reader and romance hero, profuse sensuous detail, simplified characters (often with a suggestion of allegorical significance), a serene intermingling of the unexpected and the everyday, a complex and prolonged succession of incidents usually without a single climax, a happy ending, amplitude of proportions, [and] a strongly enforced code of conduct to which all characters must comply (p. 10).

According to Beer, romance also requires a degree of distance from the real world, and so, invokes the past, but often through well-known stories that are familiar and reassuring (p. 2). The use of Montgomery's stories for television adaptation is a good example. For Frye, these

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<sup>7</sup> Where 'race' does figure in my analysis is in the treatment of history and setting in *Road to Avonlea*. See Chapter 3.



references to other stories make romance self-referential, even parodic at times, and certainly more remote from reality than realism, which as an aesthetic practice, makes use of reality as its referent (p. 59). Instead of the mimesis or actuality demanded of representational practices such as realism, romance offers exaggeration, imagination and sensation (Beer, p. 53; Frye, p. 37). In romance, multiple stories are interwoven in episodic fashion, oriented around a sensational ‘and then’ structure, often making use of coincidence, rather than a linear cause-and-effect logic (Frye, p. 46). Most importantly, the world of romance is *an ideal one* that is, however, described in such sensuous detail as to seem material (Beer, p. 3). Romance intensifies and exaggerates human experiences and behaviour, too, with stylized, archetypal figures that act out extreme impulses (Beer, p. 3, 9). In other words, characters exhibit strong emotions. This, in combination with the abundant attention to interpersonal relationships, helps domesticate the past, closing the gap between ‘then and now’ (Beer, p. 2). At the same time, that gap cannot be fully closed until the reader— or in the case of *Road to Avonlea*, the viewer— accepts without reservation the codes of the imaginary world to which she or he is being invited. Unless able to accept this romantic code, stories will appear absurd, themes irrelevant, characters ridiculous, performances affected, and settings implausible (Beer, p. 8).

Despite this seeming divorce from reality, romance engages the hopes, wishes and fears of its era, but at a symbolic, allegorical level. Both Beer and Frye remind us that romance taps into the sensibilities of the day or the desires of a community to act as wish fulfillment. For Beer, romance flourishes during times of rapid change, and in releasing attendant anxieties that cannot find expression elsewhere, demonstrates the revolutionary function of romance (pp. 12-13). Frye also notes a radical function for romance, but writes of the future rather than revolution. He proposes that romance unites “the past and the future in a present vision of a pastoral, paradisaical, and radically simplified form of life [that] obviously takes on a new kind of urgency in an age of pollution and energy crisis, and helps to explain why romance seems so contemporary a form of literary experience” (p. 179).

With the above definition in mind, my dissertation asks, what is the contemporary romance with Montgomery’s romantic imagination? And what does romance speak to at the close of the twentieth century? Using Beer and Frye’s definition of romance draws out the broader cultural and contextual meanings of ‘Avonlea’. Indeed, one of the underlying discourses that emerges within Montgomery studies, though it is never fully drawn out, is the

idea of the fictional Avonlea as a collective fantasy responding to the ills associated with modernity, both in Montgomery's time and in contemporary time.<sup>8</sup> As a cross-cultural explanation of Montgomery's popularity and longevity, this hypothesis has stronger potential than the focus on gender because securing a definition of feminine experience that cuts across time, space and culture is risky and untenable, as the Japanese research suggests. *Road to Avonlea's* status as a late twentieth-century invocation of Montgomery offers a ground to test this proposition and theorize on the conditions for storytelling with a global reach, thereby bringing us back to the issues informing this study.

### *Theory and Rationale*

To answer the questions proposed, I adopt Terry Lovell's dualistic view of the entertainment industry as embodying both *affective* and *economic* rationales that work in tandem with each other in an uneasy relationship. Lovell (1981, pp. 47-52) argues that popular entertainment contains utopian elements, "which express the hopes, fears, wishes and simple refusals of the dominated," and give us a glimpse of 'something else', another way of being in the world. Our pleasure comes from the very expression of wishes and desires, otherwise constrained by the status quo we inhabit. These utopian expressions constitute the "defining elements" of the entertainment industry, Lovell maintains, as they are "essential to the whole meaning and appeal of popular entertainment." In other words, in order for an entertainment product to be attractive and, by implication, profitable, it must in some way appeal to or connect up with the realities, fears and wishes of its audience. Therefore, Lovell explains, the entertainment industry operates under two rationales in conflict with each other: first, capitalism's drive for profit and domination; and second, popular entertainment's utopian, wish-fulfilling function.

To explain, on the one hand, entertainment products cannot challenge the system from which they profit—doing so is the equivalent of biting the hand that feeds you. To this I would add that the drive for profit and domination, of which Lovell writes, has wider implications for content, such as the avoidance of controversial themes or issues, and the

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<sup>8</sup> This notion tends to be suggested in relation to Montgomery spin-offs, such as tourism and merchandise. See Fiamengo (2002) and Lynes (2002).

dependence upon tried-and-true genres, as well as accepted aesthetic conventions. On the other hand, and according to Lovell, entertainment products must also show resistance to the status quo (give a glimpse of utopia) in order to attract an audience and turn a profit. Significantly, Lovell's theory posits that popular entertainment does not come simply from above (entertainment companies) or from below (what 'the people' want), but is actually a negotiation between the two— one that is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. The *romance* and *industry* in the title of this dissertation gets at Lovell's dualistic framework. What emerges is the sense that rather than being mutually exclusive binaries, both the affective and the economic are mutually constitutive: romance informs industry as much as industry informs romance. Certainly, the mediation of Montgomery within popular culture in a series such as *Road to Avonlea* exemplifies such a confluence of romance and industry.

The rationale for the design was with a view to demonstrating and articulating this confluence. The first section involves closely examining the industrial conditions under which *Road to Avonlea* was produced. This examination includes interviews with producers and writers; a review of documents referencing the series in government and trade publications, as well as mainstream newspapers; and research on television policy and industry trends pertaining to the series' timeframe. The aim is to uncover the various economic, social and political forces at work on the series and to examine their implications for distinctively Canadian, as well as culturally portable modes of address. The question of content and its relationship to political economy figures importantly here, highlighting the inextricability of romance and industry in the analysis of popular television drama.

Approaches from film studies and cultural studies, aspects of Montgomery studies and Disney studies and various theories of nostalgia intertwine to inform the second component or cultural history. In developing a multi-layered investigation, the overarching goal is to define mode of address in *Road to Avonlea*. Mode of address refers to the notion that every text has in mind an ideal or hypothetical addressee, who is an effect of the text. That is to say that in order for meaningful communication to occur, storytelling must necessarily involve placing limits on the number of interpretations available, usually through the use of widely accepted conventions. In television terms, these limits on meaning encode a rhetorical viewer who is expected to have a particular experience or reading of the series or

episode, based on that encoding.<sup>9</sup> Mode of address also expects that the viewer brings certain knowledges to the text that are key to interpreting it. My use of mode of address as a concept is not to suggest that all viewers apprehend one meaning that is fixed within the text for all time. Rather, mode of address simply recognizes that not all meanings are possible and that the television text has the power to limit the variety of readings available, for instance, through recognizable genres. To that end, discussions of domestic melodrama and costume drama as genres with their own concerns and characteristics are useful to analyzing the themes and conventions of *Road to Avonlea*.

Also from film studies, the understanding of adaptation as historically responsive interpretation (McFarlane, 1996; Naremore, 2000) situates the series within a matrix of social, economic and cultural relations. This understanding, in combination with the cultural-studies view that texts represent such relations as much as they are both part of and within them (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987), inform my notion of Avonlea-in-history, as a further means of analyzing mode of address. That analysis necessitates recourse to Montgomery studies to provide historical context, in addition to comparison and contrast, for defining the affective appeal of Avonlea, then and now. Similarly, Disney studies and theories of nostalgia contribute tools for situating this appeal within the context of mass culture and its aesthetic and ideological treatment of history, and within the context of modernity and the relationship its popular narratives construct to the past. Finally, results of a questionnaire posted to *Road to Avonlea* fans on the Internet play an important role in testing hypotheses of the case study and generally establishing the parameters of romance.

### ***Method and Organization***

In total, I conducted seven interviews in the fall of 2001. Three of these were with producers representing either the CBC or The Disney Channel, and four were with writers for the series. Questions were with a view towards discovering overlaps and divergences between the co-producers over the purpose of the series (i.e., its value to the respective

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<sup>9</sup> While my use of the term “encoding” acknowledges a debt to Stuart Hall (1980), I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the importance of film studies particularly theories of spectatorship, in helping me define mode of address. Judith Mayne’s *Cinema and Spectatorship* (1993) was especially useful in this respect.

partners and their expectations for it at the time)—and over the content of the series, specifically the setting, and the themes and values portrayed. Along these lines, I asked questions about the role of adaptation in bringing Montgomery’s stories to a contemporary television audience. In seeking out overlaps and divergences, I was also interested in gathering information on the negotiations and compromises that may have occurred during the production, and in what ways the organizational philosophy of each co-producer may have been articulated in these negotiations.<sup>10</sup> A survey of press coverage on the making of the series filled in gaps left by Kevin Sullivan’s decline of an interview. Sullivan is Chief Executive Office of Sullivan Entertainment and the creative force behind *Road to Avonlea*.

The Internet questionnaire, which resulted in 50 completed surveys, was sent to self-selected participants, who were members of either an L.M. Montgomery or a *Road to Avonlea* discussion group. The groups to which I posted my initial request for participants were English-language only. They comprised the Avonlea clubs at the American-based Yahoo, the Kindred Spirits list hosted by the L.M. Montgomery Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island, and the L.M. Montgomery forum, a discussion group dedicated to Montgomery scholarship and hosted by the University of Toronto. I invited recipients to forward my request for participants to anyone who was a fan of the series. Questions about the series were open-ended and focused on reasons for participants’ attachment to *Road to Avonlea*, the moral or lesson conveyed in the series, the series’ relationship to lived reality, participants’ experience of setting, and their awareness of the production context. I wanted to establish resonant narrative arcs and the appeal of the series (i.e., what expectations did it fulfil, what desires did it satisfy, and what role did setting play here) as a ground from which to pursue the textual analysis and theorize mode of address. The time lag between the series’ first-run (1990 – 1996) and the completion of the questionnaire (2001) presented itself as a problem, given my interest in historicizing mode of address. For that reason, the questionnaire results serve as a modest, though worthwhile, check on my assumptions, but do not appear as fully integrated into the overall discussion as one might expect.

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<sup>10</sup> I obtained ethical approval for my research from Simon Fraser University’s Research Ethics Review Committee. See Appendix A. For a list of the questions posed to executive producers and writers, see Appendix B.

Additionally, I reviewed industry literature and policy documents in Canada to establish television trends at the time, determine the degree to which the series was anomalous or representative, and ascertain the overall reception of the series. I examined other trends in popular culture of the period, as well as the general social climate, to flesh out *Road to Avonlea's* historical moment, thereby developing a both necessary and valid point of reference from which to interpret the series' overall meaning and grasp its resonance in context. Armed with this context, I watched all 91 episodes of *Road to Avonlea* three times. I looked for significant narrative arcs, recurring themes, the use of genre, the impact of adaptation, and the construction of setting. The latter in particular involved attention to the cultural and social mores portrayed on the series, and the visual and aural markers establishing the setting (or not) as Prince Edward Island, Canada, in the early twentieth century. Theme, genre, adaptation and setting were important to describing the series' mode of address and assessing the meaning of 'Avonlea' over time. To assist in the latter, I read eighteen novels by Montgomery, published in the author's lifetime. These also included the four texts from which *Road to Avonlea* was initially adapted—*The Story Girl* (1911), *Chronicles of Avonlea* (1912), *The Golden Road* (1913), and *Further Chronicles of Avonlea* (1920). Prior to embarking on this research, I had never read Montgomery—nor visited PEI, which I did eventually in 1998 and 2000. I also consulted scholarship on Montgomery, her life and her work, to determine salient themes for her times and for contemporary times.

The methods listed above inform each other, and are woven throughout the dissertation. For instance, information from the interviews prompted evaluation of guest episodes and a close analysis of "Aunt Janet Rebels", an episode from the third season. Similarly, fan responses to the character Gus Pike led to a detailed analysis of his thematic significance to the series' concerns. Likewise, delving into examples of popular culture that were similar to *Road to Avonlea*, as well as into the social climate of the time, suggested viable interpretive frameworks for the textual analysis. Along these lines, the writers' reflections on writing for a period piece contributed invaluable insights relevant to analyzing the use of genre and the construction of setting. From the outset of this research, I privileged adaptation's role in meaning-making, and this naturally led me to the writers to the neglect of considering, for instance, performance as adding another layer of meaning to the series. Finally, the dynamics of belonging, as explored in feminist scholarship on Montgomery,

necessitated a look at community as a key thematic in investigating the affective appeal of 'Avonlea'.

In defining the series' mode of address, each of the methods used offered important insights. However, it was in trying to apprehend the meaning of 'Avonlea' in context that I discovered historical materialism to be the most useful. In this respect, I am indebted to Janet Staiger's work, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992). Staiger proposes a historical-materialist, context-activated theory of interpretation due to "the *historical fact* that the range of interpretations is constrained" not exclusively by the text itself but also by external factors, such as prevailing ideologies and the conditions of reception—by the context, in other words (her emphasis, p. 34). Following Hans Robert Jauss and Tony Bennett (via Pierre Machery), Staiger develops the idea of "encrustation": every text carries layers of meaning, deposited by successive acts of interpretation. The interpretive frameworks through which a text has been perceived form the context or "background that sets up assumptions about a text's meaning and thus influences its current interpretation" (Staiger, p. 46). Staiger does not intend her approach to be used as a method of analyzing texts themselves, as she is interested instead in analyzing their reception. However, her general theory of a context-activated approach to interpretation, via the notion of encrustation, was instructive in fashioning a cultural analysis of *Road to Avonlea* that was sensitive to history and context, and to the layers of meaning accrued to the series. Besides which—and as Meaghan Morris (1998, p.7) similarly observes—any case study "involves an act of delimiting a context," and is in fact a study of context.

Chapter 1 examines the demands placed upon *Road to Avonlea* as a co-production of the CBC and The Disney Channel, and the effects of these demands on content. Chapter 2 establishes *Road to Avonlea's* iconic significance as a distinctively Canadian drama within popular and policy discourses, and then, questions this claim by investigating the commonality between the CBC and Disney's goals, and the implications for the series' construction of setting. Chapter 3 analyzes the impact of genre and adaptation on the series' historical and cultural specificity to explain *Road to Avonlea's* mode of address as that of a borderless romance as suitable for the CBC as for The Disney Channel and wider export. Through an analysis of key narrative arcs, Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the romance with community in *Road to Avonlea* as a nostalgic-affective response to a crisis of values carrying the potential for both national specificity and transnational resonance. A qualitative survey

of Internet fans in Chapter 6 brings together the concerns of this dissertation, focussing on the relevance of genre and nostalgia to understanding the portability of the series.

The dissertation looks at *Road to Avonlea* as the successful reconciliation of two competing production styles— industrial generic and distinctively Canadian— during a period regarded as a highpoint for Canada’s television industry. I argue that a drama series’ distinctively Canadian content does not necessarily preclude it from travelling well, when tied to familiar genres, high production values, and a flexible mode of address, open to both national and transcultural appropriations. But neither familiarity nor flexibility nor the promise of visual pleasure can fully explain a story’s ability to travel well. Rather, attention to a story’s affective dimensions enriches understanding of cultural portability. In the process of adapting Montgomery’s fictional world of Avonlea to the television screen, Sullivan Entertainment creates a narrative of displacement and belonging, of disenfranchisement and community whose affective appeal is to speak to, from and about a twentieth century, transnational condition—that of modernity. *Road to Avonlea*’s meditation on modernity carries cross-cultural potential, contributing to the series’ status as a borderless romance. However, the relative convergence between the CBC’s and Disney’s aims for the series suggests that what makes content both ‘local’ and ‘global’ must be approached carefully in relation to Canadian public broadcasting and its cultural mandate, and with respect to the ever-increasing policy emphasis on television of a transnational character.



## CHAPTER ONE/ THE MOUSE AND THE MOTHER CORP IN THE BUSINESS OF COMPROMISE

*Road to Avonlea* ran for seven seasons, premiering on the CBC on January 7, 1990. By the time the series concluded on March 31, 1996, it had set the record for the highest-rated-ever, English-language Canadian drama,<sup>11</sup> and was consistently in the Top Ten overall most-watched Canadian programs outside of Quebec (Atherton, 1995). In the first season, the hour-long series drew an average between 1.8 and 2.6 Canadian million viewers (Nicholls, 1990). The debut episode alone was the second most-watched television show in Canada that week, behind *The Cosby Show* (Nicholls, 1990). According to Hugh Fraser of *TV Times* (1991), “The series’ 2.5 million audience was the record for a Canadian TV series launch.” No small feat considering *Road to Avonlea* lacked the star power and the promotional dollars of someone like Bill Cosby. The series was still going strong when it launched its sixth season, attracting 1.7 million viewers for the first episode and 1.8 million for the second (Lee, 1995a).<sup>12</sup> The CBC strategically placed the program during its Sunday night Family Hour at 7 p.m. as a lure for further Sunday night viewing, indicating the level of the corporation’s involvement and confidence in the series.<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, *Road to Avonlea* lived up to the corporation’s expectations, becoming its most successful and one of its longest-running dramatic series. In its final season, *Road to Avonlea* held the second-highest average audience for a CBC program: at 1.3 million Canadians, the series was sandwiched between

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<sup>11</sup> The *Toronto Star*’s Sid Adilman (1995) reported that *Road to Avonlea* is the highest-rated English-Canadian television series with 2.5 million viewers soon after its premiere.

<sup>12</sup> In September 2003, it was widely reported in the Canadian media that CTV’s talent show *Canadian Idol* had “[pushed] aside the previous ratings champ *Road to Avonlea*” to become “the highest-rated, English-language, Canadian-produced series” (Davidson, 2003). The conclusion was based on average seasonal audience, with *Canadian Idol* scoring 2.06 million viewers in 2003 over *Road to Avonlea*’s 1.97 million viewers in 1990. But since *Canadian Idol* falls under the category of music and variety programming, *Road to Avonlea* still in fact holds the record for highest-rated, English-Canadian drama series.

<sup>13</sup> The only program *Road to Avonlea* was scheduled against with consistency over the years was CBS’ newsmagazine *60 Minutes*.

two other venerable CBC institutions— *Royal Canadian Air Farce* with close to 1.5 million and *Hockey Night in Canada* with just under 1.3 million.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, *Road to Avonlea* was the most expensive television production ever mounted in Canada at the time.<sup>15</sup>

During its 91-episode run, *Road to Avonlea* was lavished with numerous awards recognizing its achievements in acting and drama. These prizes included, among others, four Emmys, five Cable Ace awards, sixteen Gemini's, five medals from New York's International Film and Television Festival (two of them gold), and for three years, the John Labatt Classic Award for most popular program in Canada (as chosen by the public).<sup>16</sup> As further testament to this Canadian success story, Sullivan Entertainment has sold the series to more than 150 countries (McLaughlin, 1996)— more than *Baywatch*, which claims over 140 (Barth, 1998).<sup>17</sup> *Road to Avonlea* has been seen in Iran, where it captured a stunning 75 percent of the viewing audience, as well as in Bolivia, Brunei, China, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Japan, Indonesia, Macedonia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> In the history of the Canadian television industry, *Road to Avonlea* is singular.

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<sup>14</sup> From "Top Canadian Regular Programs" (season to end of March 1996), according to average audience— *Royal Canadian Air Farce*: 1,494,000; *Road to Avonlea*: 1,311,000; *Hockey Night in Canada*: 1,282,000 (CBC, 1996, p.17).

<sup>15</sup> Nicholls (1990) called *Road to Avonlea's* budget "the largest ever for a Canadian series." Boone (1990) said, "*Road to Avonlea* is the most expensive series in the history of Canadian television." Fraser (1991) reported that the series' "\$1.5 million per episode is Canadian TV's record budget— more appropriate to the Canadian film industry than TV."

<sup>16</sup> For a complete list of awards and nominations, see Appendix I.

<sup>17</sup> I could not obtain more detailed information on exports, nor indeed on other financial aspects of the series. Despite several attempts at contact over the years, this dissertation was completed without input from Sullivan Entertainment. In an email to the author dated January 7, 2003, Amy May McDougald, assistant to Kevin Sullivan, President of Sullivan Entertainment Incorporated, stated: "Thank you for your interest in *Road to Avonlea*. Mr. Sullivan is now deeply involved in other projects and consequently has put *Avonlea* behind him. He thanks you for asking him to participate but respectfully declines and wishes you all the best."

<sup>18</sup> This list has been cobbled together from various sources including email correspondence with *Road to Avonlea* fans, as well as press accounts (Alain, 1993; Knelman, 1996; N. Smith, 1995; Smyka, 1995; Steyn, 1992; Tolusso, 1994; Vlessing, 1995b; York, 2000). Moreover, *Playback's* Leo Rice-Barker (1996) reports that Sullivan Entertainment has sold its programming to "the majority of Asian markets for several years."

*Road to Avonlea* gave Canada's English-language public-broadcaster important recognition value, acting as its flagship show for seven years. Yet the series also had important recognition value for America's The Disney Channel, where it aired simply as *Avonlea* and impressively as that station's "highest-rated series", according to a Disney news release ("Emmy and Cable", 1994). The drama's ratings reversed the historic pattern of number-one-rated American shows on Anglo-Canadian channels. As *Montreal Gazette* reporter Ted Shaw (1990) put it, "*Road to Avonlea* has made its mark in the centre of popular culture, the United States." Indeed, Shaw also reported that the series was The Disney Channel's "biggest draw for subscribers." These subscribers rose from 5 million in 1989—before the series premiered on March 5, 1990—to 16 million U.S. homes by the time the finale aired December 8, 1996 (Flower, 1991, p. 228; Knelman, 1996).<sup>19</sup> Jude Schneider, a former Disney executive who worked on *Avonlea*, said it was "a quality show, a jewel in our schedule. We shot fewer episodes, and they cost multiple times what the other shows cost per episode."<sup>20</sup>

One of the ironies or paradoxes of *Road to Avonlea* is that it exists in the Canadian imagination as a national cultural icon, despite the reality that it received roughly fifty percent of its financing from The Disney Channel—on average \$8 million per season.<sup>21</sup> The other half came from Canadian sources including the CBC, Telefilm Canada, the Ontario Film Investment Corporation, and in its last season, the Canadian Television and Cable

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<sup>19</sup> Getting more detailed information on the audience for *Avonlea* in the U.S. has proved to be challenging for two reasons. First, The Disney Channel was not "very big into that [audience research] until later on," according to Schneider. I interviewed her on October 25, 2001. Second, I was refused access to the Walt Disney Archives. In a letter to the author dated Nov. 5, 2001, Kristine Wilder of the Walt Disney Company's Office of Counsel informed me that "we must regretfully decline your present request."

<sup>20</sup> Email to author, Nov. 14, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> CBC executive Deborah Bernstein said that essentially half of the funding came from Canada, the other half from the U.S. Interview with the author, Oct. 4, 2001, unless otherwise noted.

Production Fund.<sup>22</sup> In a *Toronto Star* interview, Kevin Sullivan, CEO of Sullivan Entertainment and creative force behind the series, explained that each season of thirteen episodes cost roughly \$15.6 million.<sup>23</sup> In spite of Disney's participation, many Canadians perceive *Road to Avonlea* as a Canadian series made by, for and about Canadians.

But, as this dissertation argues, *Road to Avonlea* carries a unique and paradoxical status as both a distinctively Canadian romance and a generic industrial drama—paralleling discussions of Montgomery's source texts as both regionally specifically and transnational, as both Canadian and universal. As a non-treaty Canada-U.S. co-production, *Road to Avonlea* is the result of a negotiation between similar tensions, sometimes competing, sometimes complimentary, and varying from implicit to explicit. Not surprisingly, such a negotiation can bring with it contradictory results. W. Paterson Ferns (1995, pp. 253-4), an influential independent television-producer in Canada, says that co-production represents both limits and possibilities, and the challenge is “to see its potential light *and* to recognize its dark side.” To its detractors, states Ferns, co-production is “a dirty word,” meaning “compromise” and “a threat to quality.” Meanwhile, advocates maintain that quality comes with a steep price tag, especially for small nations, and one way to get that quality on the screen is through co-production arrangements meant to top up the budgets of Canadian-produced series. Making high quality, domestically funded, indigenous productions is difficult in Canada because it is cheaper for Canadian distributors to pay licence fees for already-made American shows that are dumped into our television market.

For Canadian independent producers, co-production arrangements involve pre-sales to broadcasters or cable channels that pay a licence fee for the right to distribute a program. *Financial Post* entertainment reporter Gordon McLaughlin (1996, p. 9) describes the pursuit of such arrangements as a “Grail-like quest” for Canada's independent producers seeking

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<sup>22</sup> Without Disney or Sullivan's co-operation, getting detailed information about the financial contributions to the series over its seven-season run has proven impossible. Moreover, both the CBC and Telefilm reminded me that details about a series' financing or licensing are considered competitive, and therefore, confidential information within the television industry. As such, the CBC was unable to provide specifics regarding its contribution to the series. Telefilm, however, was able to comply, perhaps because its involvement was as an investor not a licensor. See Appendix J for a breakdown of Telefilm's contribution.

<sup>23</sup> The series' budget appears to have increased in the final two seasons by \$1 million to \$16.6 million annually (Cuthbert, 1994).

American pre-sales. To be sure, Americans have also found these arrangements attractive because of the low Canadian dollar, a situation that has benefited the independent production sector in Canada (Dalglish, 1995). However, when a program is pre-sold to an American partner, it can mean having to tailor the show to U.S. audience needs and negotiating with development staff and the creative department over content, as was the case with *Road to Avonlea*. But the situation here is even more complicated than a simple pre-sale, as Sullivan Entertainment had to contend with creative input from both sides of the border from two channels having divergent philosophical mandates.

To come back to Fern's phrasing, the production history for *Road to Avonlea* suggests the light- and dark-sides of co-production. While all parties involved made specific compromises, as considered below, there is no denying that the high-quality look of the series—the result of its generous budget—was one of its most important assets.<sup>24</sup> The CBC's audience research at the time reflected the corporation's concern that viewers were enjoying *Road to Avonlea*'s high production values. Measurements of audience enjoyment included the look, setting, costumes and photography (see Chapter 2). Fans I surveyed on the Internet in 2001 were very appreciative of the series' production values. In fact, 42 percent cited setting or look as a reason for choosing to watch *Road to Avonlea* (see Chapter 6). But as a co-production, what compromises did *Road to Avonlea* entail, and what was the noticeable impact, if any, on content? An investigation of the production history shows that compromises came in two areas: the first, stemmed from competing definitions of genre, and the second, from differing promotional cultures. This chapter reveals how the divergent cultures of the CBC and The Disney Channel affected dealings with Sullivan Entertainment and the content of the series.

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<sup>24</sup> In my 1996 pilot study, I analyzed 1990 reviews of the series' premiere in Canadian newspapers, as a means by which to gauge how the series is talked about. All reviewers made comments appreciative of the series' production values. Boone – “meticulously crafted” and “eye-pleasing”; Blakey – “scores highly” on production values; Haslett Cuff (1990a) – “beautifully produced” and “carefully crafted”; Riches – “beautifully filmed” and “good attention to olden days detail”; Turbide – “the tidy look of a storybook place” and “lush pastoral beauty”; Zerbisias – “lush art direction, gorgeous costuming and picture-postcard cinematography.” In a 1990 review I came across after I completed the pilot, *Globe and Mail* writer Morton Ritts called the series “a good-looking production with its large budget well spent.”

My purpose is not to imply that television executives are meddling, but to realistically describe the apparent conditions under which the series was made— a not uncommon creativity-by-committee with Sullivan at the helm trying to steer various interests while maintaining autonomy. As Sullivan himself put it, “Sometimes I’ve felt like an arbitrator trying to resolve the differences among the various sides” (quoted in Shaw, 1994).<sup>25</sup> To illustrate, any direction given to the story department came directly from Sullivan not from the CBC or The Disney Channel. Heather Conkie, who wrote the most episodes of any writer on *Road to Avonlea*—22 out of 91— related that Sullivan shielded writers from dealing with executives over content issues: “If there were notes, you weren’t sure where they were coming from.”<sup>26</sup> *Financial Post* reporter Martin Knelman (1996) echoes this point:

[T]here was a certain level of paranoia about Disney right from the start among the day-to-day staff of *Avonlea*... The actors could never be sure whether the changes were coming from Disney or the CBC or Sullivan, but the assumption was that when things became mushier and more conventional, the pressure was coming from Disney.

Contradictory accounts emerge, though, in that sometimes Sullivan asserts that relations between all parties were amicable— making for “a happy team” (quoted in Nicholls, 1990)— yet more often than not, he expressed dissatisfaction stemming primarily from his dealings with Disney.

### *The Black and White Morality of the Networks*

In making *Road to Avonlea*, Sullivan negotiated with executives representing both The Disney Channel and the CBC, who had considerable creative input. Bernstein, the CBC executive in charge of production from development to the fifth season, describes a process in which executives were involved in approving every stage, reading story treatments and drafts, and viewing dailies, rough cuts and fine cuts. Although *Road to Avonlea* was not an in-house production of the CBC, the corporation’s involvement in creative matters placed its

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<sup>25</sup> As mentioned, Kevin Sullivan would not grant me an interview. All quotations come from press accounts at the time of the series’ production, thereby giving Sullivan’s observations immediacy hindsight cannot. At the same time, I recognize that I am at the mercy of what reporters choose to report.

relationship to the series outside the simple definition of patron. Indeed, when working with independent producers, Deborah Bernstein, who is now the CBC's Executive Director of Arts and Entertainment Programming, explains the CBC operates with a payment schedule based on production and creative approval of scripts, pre-production, principal photography, rough and fine cuts, and final technical acceptance. Additionally, The Disney Channel insisted that independent auditors oversaw the books, so that there was "no budget bleeding from one season into the next," according to Cathy Johnson, executive in charge of production for Disney from development to the fifth season.<sup>27</sup> As a co-production rather than a straight licence deal, Johnson, now-retired, said The Disney Channel "had the right to look over the books at the end of each season to make sure we were getting our money's worth." Reports suggest that negotiations over the budget were often so protracted that they held up the production schedule, creating a crisis situation that put the show in jeopardy (Adilman, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Knelman).

Deborah Nathan,<sup>28</sup> on *Road to Avonlea* for four years as senior story editor, writer and associate producer, explained the process of story selection for a typical season. The cycle would begin with the story editor submitting thirty-six story ideas to the group, which comprised CBC and Disney executives, Sullivan himself, the story editor and the assistant story editor. After meeting for two to three days, the group would approve fifteen of those stories, three of which were typically designated for guest stars. Eventually, the production would shoot thirteen of those fifteen stories. To get to that point, budget, actors' availability, and co-producers' concerns influenced what writers could do in an episode. Raymond Storey,<sup>29</sup> who wrote episodes for the last four seasons, explained some of the more mundane effects of budget on scenes, for instance, whether a character could ride off in a horse-and-buggy, or a bicycle because it was cheaper. Writers also had to accommodate actors'

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with the author, Oct. 9, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> All correspondence from Cathy Johnson was in the form of email, beginning Nov. 7, 2001. Johnson remained involved with *Avonlea* in the last two seasons, too, as she became head of standards and practices at The Disney Channel. She still read each script, saw every episode, and provided continuity.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with the author, Sept. 10, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the author, Aug. 30, 2001, unless otherwise noted.

departures or absences from the series, and develop story lines accordingly. For example, Sarah Polley's reduced commitment to the series led to an ever-increasing emphasis on other main characters, most notably the adult figures. As the drama shifted from Sara Stanley's point of view (Polley's character), *Road to Avonlea* became an ensemble series less light-hearted and less comedic than its earlier seasons.<sup>30</sup> The shift in tone and perspective also importantly accommodated the ageing of the child actors remaining, and made the series' less kid-oriented and more open to serious themes—which appears to have been Sullivan's overarching vision for the drama. As *Family Hour*, this vision of the series was likely also the CBC's, but especially so given the corporation's qualitative audience research on the 1993 season. This research revealed that “stories about family life” were a more important factor in viewers' decision to watch at 85 percent than “stories that focus on children” at 59 percent (CBC Research, 1994). At times, however, this vision for the series encountered some resistance from Disney.

Canadian press accounts suggest that Sullivan struggled with Disney over the more adult, perhaps more bittersweet aspects of the material—those that did not conform to the channel's definition of family entertainment. At work are differing modes of address tied to different conceptions of audience expectation. What does a mode of address entail at Disney? At this point it is useful to take a detour into Disney studies. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells (1995, p. 5) argue that, while constructing Disney as a monolith must be guarded against in critical studies, what can be agreed upon is “the ‘trademark’ of Disney innocence”—a concept Henry A. Giroux (1999) uses in his analysis of the Mouse Corporation. ‘Disney innocence’ promises a particular experience of fun that is at once magical and safe, wedded to an idealized view of childhood. The expectation created is of pure entertainment, cleansed of messy political connotations and painful historical memories. As a mode of address, ‘Disney innocence’ presents an optimistic and happy world that is “seemingly apolitical” and “seemingly ahistorical” (Bell, Haas & Sells, pp. 2-3).

Not surprisingly then, Sullivan said he found himself having to protect “the eclecticism and quirkiness of the material” from Disney's tendency toward “sentimentality” (quoted in Knelman and Nicholls, respectively). The *Toronto Star's* Jim Bawden (1996) also

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix F for a list of characters.



reports that Sullivan “resisted continuous attempts to ‘Disney-fy’ the series.” The article suggests this meant avoiding adult-oriented themes and expunging any hint of ‘issues’ in the pursuit of Pollyanna-like tales. But Sullivan viewed the series as a cross between adult fare and family entertainment. “I didn’t even like it when we were nominated for Emmys in the children’s categories,” he said (quoted in Bawden). The drama was nominated that way because The Disney Channel submitted *Avonlea* as an entry in the children’s categories, again demonstrating a particular definition of the series that did not mesh with Sullivan’s or the CBC’s. In Canada, the series was nominated for Geminis alongside other primetime dramas. Sullivan also noted that

Some of our episodes were definitely not for kids only. My favorite is one called “Memento Mori” where Hetty tries to become a famous writer and fails and must accept it. We had one character (Patricia Hamilton’s Rachel Lynde) battling a stroke in other episodes. Issues were always an integral part of the stories (quoted in Bawden).

Episodes did not always conform to ‘Disney innocence’, and *Avonlea* was not always ‘the happiest place on earth,’ to borrow the Magic Kingdom’s slogan. Sullivan’s comments support my assertion that differing views of family content sometimes emerged between the CBC, Sullivan and Disney, leading to compromises on all sides. Indeed, Sullivan has been outspoken on the challenges of Canada-U.S. co-productions to creative control. He has said that the content of co-production is compromised by the melodrama that U.S. networks demand (Atherton, 1996)— what he calls “the black and white morality of the networks” (quoted in Lee, 1995b).

The episode “Another Point of View”, as the CBC/Sullivan called it, helps to illustrate Sullivan’s claim. After Hetty resigns when her teaching methods are widely criticized, *Avonlea* hires a new teacher (guest star Christopher Lloyd), who challenges her classical principles of teaching with “modern” methods. In place of the 3Rs—what Alec calls “recitation, repetition, repression”— Professor Alistair Dimple asks students to act out historical events with costumes and props. Rather than memorizing names and dates, his method is to immerse the students in historical context because they learn better that way. For Dimple, facts ought to be presented in a “palatable, even interesting manner.” But Hetty disapproves (at least at first): “Education requires facts not fiction.” The CBC/Sullivan reading of the episode, as exemplified by the title, foregrounds and valorizes the new

teacher's alternative perspective on teaching. Titles are important as they offer a guidepost for interpretation. Disney called the episode "Facts and Fictions", establishing a contrast between what is truthful and what is not. More significantly, the title also makes reference to the new teacher's shady identity—he is not a real teacher but an out-of-work thespian posing as one. Evidence that the students benefited from his teaching style, challenging conventional wisdom about education, is not emphasized in Disney's reading. Rather, the reading avoids the murky challenge inherent in legitimizing the unconventional viewpoint of someone not who he claims to be.

### *When Aunt Janet Rebelled*

During the making of *Road to Avonlea*, executives from both channels had input on the content of the series, making suggestions or requesting changes. However, everyone I interviewed was reluctant to discuss specific differences over content because they are either still working in the industry, or could not remember any differences in significant enough detail, given how much time had passed. However, a few examples were noted: Disney reportedly objected to a story in which a baby died, one that included the birthing of a foal, and one in which Janet King joined the suffragette movement.<sup>31</sup> Although uncorroborated individually, together the examples speak to differences regarding what is appropriate for a family drama, as the series was defined. Together, the examples also support the familiar contention that Disney operates with a saccharine set of values. Sometimes, these values did not mesh with what the CBC and Sullivan Entertainment more liberally accepted as suitable for family viewing.

To be sure, this experience of working with Disney is not strictly a Canadian one. As Joe Flower documents in his book, *Prince of the Magic Kingdom* (1991, p. 232), American television producers and writers have also complained about Disney's desire to play it safe when it comes to storytelling and about its demand for sugar-coated content "[slathered] with 'heart and poignancy.'" (For this reason perhaps, Storey joked that he would often send memos to his Los Angeles colleagues signed, "Notes from the Planet Presbyteria.")

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<sup>31</sup> Baby death— email to author from Johnson, Jan. 3, 2002. Foal birthing and suffragette story— interview with Nathan.

Moreover, though both the CBC and The Disney Channel wanted a series to which families could relate, the language used to describe what that meant further highlights different expectations of family entertainment. Disney's focus was on generic experiences that would be in keeping with 'Disney innocence'. Johnson said that *Avonlea*

... fit with the audience expectations of what Disney stood/stands for: family entertainment, something for all members of the viewing audience, a true family series [with] sibling rivalry, tragedy, adult bickering, love, mischief, fun, danger, gossip, snootiness— everything anyone could experience in their lives.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Bernstein, the CBC had an interest in showing “what families go through” and in ensuring the values and situations portrayed “should not be seen as just the olden days.” To be sure, this emphasis was one with which Disney heartily agreed, as Johnson relates.<sup>33</sup> However, the CBC took this to mean making sure the series' mode of address spoke to contemporary families, their values and concerns—which is not the same entertainment experience Disney promised. Sullivan expressed a similar focus to the CBC's, remarking that “kids running through fields and the world they were involved in didn't have any real threats.” After the first season, Sullivan wanted to take the series “in a slightly different direction... to bring an essence of reality to it” (quoted in Fraser, 1991). Sullivan implied that the American network found this different direction perplexing, but that “As the series got its recognition, Disney began understanding it a bit more” (quoted in Bawden).

Concerns over the episode “Aunt Janet Rebels” illustrate the philosophical schism over family entertainment. In this episode, Janet King is moved when she hears a suffragette speaking on getting the vote for women, and begins to question her identity. “What do you see when you look at me?” she asks Alec in the middle of the night, who responds that he sees “the woman I love, my beautiful wife, and the mother of my children.” But a close-up of Janet conveys that she is unhappy with Alec's assessment. Having agreed to collect fifty signatures on a national petition asking the government to grant women the vote, Janet visits the local cannery to speak with the women there. Janet learns that the local cannery pays women poverty wages. She persuades the women that in order to get better wages, they

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<sup>32</sup> Email to author, Nov. 27, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> Email to author, Dec. 16, 2001.

must first fight for a political say in matters, and several sign the petition only to be promptly fired for their convictions by Angus MacCorkdale, who runs the cannery for his wealthy wife and is against suffrage.

Alec is supportive of his wife's efforts until they begin to affect life on the farm: Janet cannot keep up with her domestic duties because of her political activities, and Alec finds himself the principle caregiver to the infant son he must now bring with him when tending the farm. When Alec orders her to "stop this nonsense", she moves in with Hetty, who thinks her petition is "silly". Throughout, Janet experiences the embarrassed disappointment of her family, and the angered dismay of community members. Though she expresses fear that she is being a bad mother, Janet cannot give up on the struggle, not after what she has seen. Knowledge has radicalized her in her fight for the vote, fair wages for women, and "the future of girls."

At the same time, Janet does have Peter Craig's support, a boy who cannot live with his mother because her wages at the cannery barely cover her own room and board, and consequently, he must earn his own keep. She also has the support of her niece, Sara, and most significantly, the cannery women, whom she joins in a strike and lands in jail for her role. Eventually, Alec offers Janet his support again, even gathering signatures for the petition, after he has confessed his fear to Hetty: "I needed her help and she wasn't there. It maybe frightened me." Through Sara and Peter's intervention, the strike is ended: they visit the owner of the cannery to explain the situation. When Margaret MacCorkdale realizes that her cannery is losing money because of the strike, she orders Angus to settle with the workers. An agreement is reached, the workers cheer Janet, now released from jail, and Alec offers her the reins of their carriage. "You drive," he says. At the farm, Felicity expresses new understanding of her mother's position and the importance of her labour within the home. Once eager to be in charge of the household as "practice" for when she is married, Felicity admits to the newly returned Janet, "We tried to do everything just like you, Mother. We couldn't. I couldn't. I now understand what you were trying to do." While the Disney

version ends here, the CBC elected to include the final scene showing the reconciled couple sharing a bedtime kiss.<sup>34</sup>

Nathan, senior story editor during “Aunt Janet Rebels”, stated that “the CBC was all for an episode about suffragettes as opposed to Disney.” But the disagreements between what each network wanted, she said, “ruined the episode ... there was no way to really compromise and have a cohesive story.” She added that Disney “really didn’t want politics in the series at all... It didn’t deal with issues in that way.” Johnson, the Disney executive producer at the time, expressed her concerns about the episode:

I didn’t want our Aunt Janet— our wonderful mother and wife— to turn into a shrew like Aunt Hetty. We already had one strident voice for a female. I also felt that there was no foundation for her zealousness. I couldn’t see her breaking the law and landing in jail. I still wonder about it, but it was shot, so it is in the can forever now.<sup>35</sup>

The incident supports Storey’s contention that the CBC was all in favour of episodes promoting “liberal values” around female empowerment, while The Disney Channel tended more toward “wholesome, right-wing” family values. The episode negotiates these

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<sup>34</sup> Episodes that aired on The Disney Channel and the CBC were not always identical. In nine instances, Disney deviated from the episode titles Sullivan Entertainment gave (Figure 1). As well, sometimes, the Disney episodes were longer, likely because the channel, as pay TV, did not have to accommodate commercial breaks. According to Lefebvre, The Disney Channel elected to include extra scenes in a total of seventeen episodes (Appendix E). Moreover, Disney would reportedly on occasion omit a scene or slightly rearrange the order of scenes. Therefore, analysis of the series is challenging, particularly as I am working with Disney airings for the first five seasons, with tapes graciously provided to me by Maryam Haddad, an American fan I ‘met’ through an early *Road to Avonlea* email group called The Road to Avonlea Underground. For the last two seasons, I am using CBC broadcasts I taped myself, either as first-run episodes or in repeats. Moreover, episodes that currently air on Bravo in Canada are altered from the original— for instance, they feature Marilyn Lightstone (Muriel Stacey’s portrayer) as narrator. Additionally, the sequence in which episodes originally aired was not consistent between both channels. The Disney Channel sometimes changed the order to highlight guest episodes (Appendix E). Made at the behest of Disney, these episodes were a means by which to publicize the series, and by extension, the channel itself, which hailed the family drama as an exclusive, available only to subscribers.

<sup>35</sup> Email to author, Aug. 22, 2002. In an earlier email, Feb. 21, 2002, Johnson noted: “My recollection is that I had a problem with her sudden personality change. She had been the perfect mother and wife, had suffered at Aunt Hetty’s hands cheerfully, and I just couldn’t see her turning militant ... I thought that her ending up in jail was just too much. She was a mother with kids at the time, a farm to run, and I just didn’t embrace it ... The episode was of course done, but it did not perform as well as any story which had more kid appeal.”

ideological tensions, thereby creating a lack of cohesion (to come back to Nathan's criticism) best exemplified in its confusion of social issues and its ham-handed attempt at resolution. During the strike, the plea for decent wages for women transforms into a call for fair wages for everyone at the cannery. This sleight-of-hand obscures the women's issues that set the narrative in motion. The settlement with the workers fulfils the need for a happy ending, and also conveniently distracts from the lack of resolution on the suffrage question.

Not surprisingly then, when Alec becomes the fiftieth signature on Janet's petition, it is because "I'm just glad to have you back," and not because of his earlier claim of support for women's suffrage. Having Janet back is now the focus and not the struggle for the vote. After this episode, Janet returns to being a "wonderful mother and wife" and drops her interest in getting women the vote, as though her suffragette days never happened, in a break with character continuity uncharacteristic of the series as a whole. Over the seven seasons, other main characters build on their experiences, and grow and change as a result. The only subsequent inkling we get of Janet's radical past is two seasons later in "Someone to Believe In". When Alec expresses interest in federal politics, Janet says he "could do something for farmer's wives." But it is Alec who suggests helping them get the vote.

To be fair, "Aunt Janet Rebels", though it does cram too much into it, is a fine episode that warmly deals with the effects of political activism on family life, making solid connections between the personal and the political. It is also one of the few episodes that makes reference to historical conditions, and deals with social issues that would still resonate with the contemporary viewer, making it a departure from 'Disney innocence', which sanitizes history of any political struggle. The episode shows that women's rights were fought for, that these struggles often entailed personal sacrifice and social ostracism, and that women's work, whether in the factory or in the home, was (is) often devalued. Where the episode is compromised is in the lack of cohesion and in the subsequent lack of character continuity. Likely, differences over the episode led the parties involved to drop this narrative thread, returning Janet to her traditional homemaker role. For Nathan, this episode was "the only time that I can remember that we tried to do something that had to do with politics because you just can't win."

Significantly, the CBC called this episode "Aunt Janet Rebels", while Disney named it "Aunt Janet's Rebellion". The different titles are indicative of the divergent takes on this story line and the attendant concerns it inspired. "Aunt Janet Rebels" is open-ended and

ongoing, and offers an active, even militant image of Janet (Disney’s main concern) by connecting her with a verb—“rebels”. Disney’s title by contrast demarcates a finite event—a fleeting incident that is contained—while the use of the noun “rebellion” closes off active connotations associated with the action-oriented “rebels”. Of the 91 episodes, there only were nine for which the CBC and The Disney Channel gave different titles, but they nonetheless are useful in exploring the differing emphases at the two channels (Figure 1). They also suggest differing emphases between Sullivan Entertainment and Disney since the CBC titles are those Sullivan gave.

**Figure 1. – Different titles given to *Road to Avonlea* episodes by the CBC/Sullivan and The Disney Channel**

<b>The CBC/Sullivan</b>	<b>The Disney Channel</b>
Old Lady Lloyd	Song of the Night
The Hope Chest of Arabella King	The Blue Chest of Arabella King
The Ties that Bind	Sister of the Bride
Another Point of View	Facts and Fictions
Vows of Silence	True Confessions
Aunt Janet Rebels	Aunt Janet’s Rebellion
The Dinner	Felicity’s Grand Design
Moving On	Sara and the Marshal
Home Movie	Jasper’s Home Movie

The Disney titles are light-hearted or more literal in contrast to the CBC/Sullivan ones, which tend toward the somber or the metaphorical. For instance, Disney’s “True Confessions” is less ominous-sounding than “Vows of Silence”— about the bickering over a family heirloom. Similarly, Disney’s “Song of the Night” possesses a pleasant ethereal quality that “Old Lady Lloyd” surely does not, even though the latter respects the original name Montgomery gave to this story. Additionally, the Disney titles more often attach the episode to a specific character or guest star, even though the themes usually touch all the characters or have thematic implications not limited to the world of Avonlea. In this way, the Disney titles seem to close off the challenging themes presented, suggesting a desire to squeeze the series into a comfortable definition of family entertainment in conformity to ‘Disney innocence’.

For example, “Moving On” in the fourth season refers to the fact that Sara is growing up. Indeed, in this season, the character’s hairstyle and clothing change to mark her passage from childhood to young womanhood. In the episode, Sara develops an attraction

to a man considerably older than her, and plans to run away with the travelling Wild West show in which he stars. Disney called this episode “Sara and the Marshal”, highlighting it as a guest episode in which Treat Williams plays said marshal, and shifts the attention to character away from the sobering theme of childhood’s end. Disney’s title “Jasper’s Home Movie” also connects the episode to a specific character, working upon our knowledge of his quirky love of modern inventions. Calling the episode “Home Movie”, the CBC/Sullivan title does not identify the story with a particular character, and instead, invites a chain of ambiguous associations related with the idea of a home movie. The episode itself is a defense of home: with the help of Jasper and his moving-picture technology, Hetty shows the Avonlea community what it stands to lose if all agree to sell their homes to the American entrepreneur Harold B. Dunn.

Disney’s titles offer readings that make light of the more weighty issues presented, and fit with Sullivan’s suggestion that Disney was not interested in stories portraying issues or subjects of a mature nature (Bawden). The Disney title “Felicity’s Grand Design” gives levity to an episode addressing loaded concerns about self-respect and moral conduct. The Disney reading focuses the episode around Felicity’s scheme to have a romantic evening alone with Gus, and draws upon our knowledge of her as a character given to high-blown aspirations. But her scheme only takes up the first 20 minutes of the episode. The remainder explores the serious implications of “The Dinner”—as the CBC/Sullivan referred to this episode. (The title also refers to a side story—the dinner between Clive and Hetty and the suggestion of a possible flirtation.) Questioning her sense of responsibility, her self-respect and her respect for the moral code of her parents and her community, Alec reprimands Felicity for being alone in the house with Gus and forbids her from speaking to him anymore. Meanwhile, Gus refuses to come to King farm until Alec respects him because he does not want to ruin his chances with Felicity. Janet chides Alec’s blustering, accusing him of being fearful that his eldest child has grown up. When Hetty comes to Gus’ defense, arguing “he’s a gentleman through and through to the core of his being” and more of one than Alec was at his age, the concerned father relents.

The CBC/Sullivan titles tend to be ambiguous and mostly avoid linking episodes to a specific character. In this way, the CBC/Sullivan do not provide as tidy an interpretation as Disney does, and sometimes even offer double meanings. For instance, “The Ties that Bind” deals with the impending marriage of Olivia King and Jasper Dale, and the attendant



anxieties and expectations that accompany such a life change for the couple and family members alike. Hetty King, who is indeed “Sister of the Bride”, as the Disney title notes, figures prominently as she interferes in the couple’s desire to elope, takes over the wedding plans, and eventually alienates Olivia and Jasper, as well niece Sara, with her domineering ways.

But the episode is about more than Hetty—it is about the ties that do indeed bind people together, for good and for bad. Sometimes these ties make people behave badly and sometimes they mean we must sacrifice our desires for the good of others. Hetty’s attachment to her sister Olivia, whom she considers “more like a daughter,” having raised her since their mother’s death, causes her to act possessively, as she faces her fear that Olivia will no longer be living with her at Rose Cottage. Understanding the root of the problem increases viewer empathy for Hetty, whose fears are allayed in several ways. At the wedding reception, Jasper says he is not taking Olivia away from the King family, but is honoured to become a part of it. Olivia tells Hetty she will miss her and Rose Cottage, and agrees that the wedding was “a wonderful idea” because “it wouldn’t have been right for me to be married without my family surrounding me.” Meanwhile, Hetty assures Olivia that she will always be there for her, and welcomes Jasper into the family.

### *Artificially Constructed Situations*

All in all, according to Sullivan, “It’s true that if Disney had had their way, *Avonlea* would have been a very different show” (quoted in Knelman). But Disney did get its way some of the time. The biggest and most apparent concession Sullivan made to Disney in exchange for its deep pockets was one to three episodes each year, out of the thirteen, starring a famous actor. That meant mainly American, though there were the Brits Dianna Rigg and Michael York, who presumably, would be known to the adult viewers of *Road to Avonlea*. There were also Canadian guests such as Bruce Greenwood, Sheila McCarthy and Gordon Pinsent. Perhaps with the exception of Eugene Levy and Kate Nelligan, the Canadian actors did not carry the same prestige or draw as an American star like Madeleine Kahn—certainly not for viewers of The Disney Channel, never mind the CBC. Moreover, by and large, the Canadian guests, unlike the American or international ones, are there to

support the main characters rather than vice-versa, as evidenced in episodes showcasing Cedric Smith's talents in character studies of his Alec King.<sup>36</sup>

The series also had Canadians Colleen Dewhurst, Patricia Hamilton and Marilyn Lightstone in prominent guest-starring roles that reprised their characters— Marilla Cuthbert, Rachel Lynde and Muriel Stacey, respectively— from the *Anne* mini-series, which helped publicize the series as a spin-off. But the big-name guest episodes began in earnest in the second season.<sup>37</sup> Disney saw these as important to publicizing both the series and the channel itself, available only by subscription at the time.

These episodes did indeed generate media attention in the United States and Canada, and also brought two Emmy awards to the show that went to Christopher Lloyd and Dianne Wiest for their guest performances in “Another Point of View” and “Woman of Importance”, respectively. Storey said, “Even though faithful loyal viewers had mixed feelings about [the guest stars], every time they came onto the show, we were on the front of *TV Guide*.” Similarly, Sullivan noted that, “Securing a guest star who does not do a lot of television, like Faye Dunaway, can lead to getting covers. But in Canada, those events generally do not affect overall ratings” (quoted in Lee, 1995c). The hype around guest stars seems to have been a short-sighted strategy in Sullivan's view; he preferred on-air promotions highlighting the regular cast, which he saw as going hand in hand with creating characters that viewers would care about (Lee, 1995c). While a famous guest star might attract first-time watchers, viewers will not keep coming back unless they develop an attachment to characters. Johnson did not “think that [American] audiences cared that much” for the guest stars, but that their appearances “fulfilled important needs: press and publicity [which was] very important at the television critics association meetings” where *Avonlea* would showcase what was new that season.<sup>38</sup>

Although done for pragmatic reasons, the effect of the guest stars on content is noticeable. Most of the episodes are stand-alone pieces for which story arcs involving the

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<sup>36</sup> These include “Evelyn” with Meg Tilley, “Someone to Believe In” with Gordon Pinsent, and “King of the Great White Way” with Eugene Levy and Sheila McCarthy.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix G shows special guest stars.

<sup>38</sup> Email to author, Feb. 21, 2002.

main characters are suspended as the Canadian actors take a back seat to the guest stars. Certainly, the Faye Dunaway-Maureen Stapleton appearance in “What a Tangled Web We Weave” takes the prize for such an episode, which, though it does give us some background on a supporting character, Pierre Lapierre, does very little to advance the narrative or our understanding of the main characters. Instead, we are treated to Dunaway swanning around the set in a series of exquisitely detailed costumes and sporting an aristocratic Polish accent. “It’s Just a Stage” works similarly with Madeleine Kahn playing a visiting prima donna who has agreed to appear in a fundraising event. As with the Christopher Lloyd episode “Another Point of View” and Stockard Channing’s appearances in “Enter Prince Charming” and “The Minister’s Wife”, much of the story is built around the guest character’s eccentric behaviour, showcasing their acting abilities to good effect, while the main characters lend their support. Meanwhile, “All that Glitters” with Michael York, “A Dark and Stormy Night” with Christopher Reeve and “The Disappearance” with Robby Benson and Diana Rigg involve the younger cast in helping to solve a mystery. All of these episodes feel ‘stand alone’ in that they can be removed from the serial, without causing a disruption to narrative continuity.

The better guests seem to fit the world of the series because of the quality of their interactions with the main cast. In fact, the better guest episodes actually assist us in understanding something about the main characters—whether it’s their current state of being or a past event that deeply affected them and thus explains their character’s psychology. The episodes featuring Peter Coyote as Hetty’s old flame (“Old Quarrels, Old Love”), and Ned Beatty as her new beau (“The Calamitous Courting of Hetty King”) help explain why Hetty is a spinster by choice. Michael York’s memorable turn as Captain Ezekial Crane in “Sea Ghost” teaches us about Gus Pike’s past, and increases audience empathy for his character. Dianne Wiest’s guest role as Izzy Pettibone’s estranged aunt in “Woman of Importance” offers insights into Clive’s history, and helps Izzy (Heather Brown) and her new stepmother, Muriel, gain new understanding of each other. Kate Nelligan’s turn as Sydney Carver brings to light Olivia’s insecurity as the wife of a man of science. In “After the Honeymoon”, Olivia wonders if Jasper is attracted to Sydney because “She’s so clever—she’s a scientist.” But the episode solidifies the still-new marriage when Jasper assures Olivia “You’re a newspaper woman and the woman I love.”

Co-productions are notorious for, what Bernstein calls, “artificially constructed situations” which, in attempting to accommodate the national/cultural interests of the

production partners, end up with contrived, synthetic scenarios. On *Road to Avonlea*, as should be apparent, these contrivances involve either a mysterious stranger with no connection to Avonlea whatsoever or a long-lost relation with an estranged connection to someone in the community. Some members of the cast and crew were unhappy with these scenarios, viewing them as an insult to the Canadian actors, and even the CBC and Telefilm questioned the need for American stars (Shaw, 1994). Alternatively, Storey argued that

The reason why we were able to get those people, the reason why we could get Stockard Channing is because she knew she'd get an Emmy nomination just for accepting the contract. She knew she was going to get a good script, she was going to get a good director, and she was going to get high production values.

Channing did receive a nomination, as did Dewhurst (twice), Coyote, Greenwood and Nelligan for their guest roles, and as noted, Lloyd and Wiest were Emmy winners. For Storey, the quality of the guest stars attracted was a testament to the quality of the show. Most fans of the series I surveyed echoed all of the sentiments above, ultimately displaying ambivalence (see Chapter 6). On the one hand, 61 percent said that the guest stars contributed positively to the series. As discussed, several guest episodes enhance knowledge of the main characters' psychology and history. On the other hand, 44 percent complained that the least appealing episodes were those not focussed on the main characters. In other words, some of these episodes draw too much attention away from the main cast and disrupt viewer attachment.

Overall, Sullivan was not pleased with this concession to Disney, expressing that the guest star episodes were "hard to write because you have to somehow get the rest of the regular cast involved in their story... We never felt they were our strongest episodes because we were generally writing around a foreign entity coming into our main cast" (quoted in Ryan, 1996 and "New TV series", 1995, respectively; also see Johnston, 1994). Nathan echoes this sentiment, saying that although writing a guest episode "was fun for the writer... the toughest part was [that] you had to have [the guest star] interact with your cast." Schneider, the executive producer who succeeded Johnson at Disney, viewed the American guest stars as a practical matter. "The Disney Channel demanded the guest stars because we needed them for marketing and publicity." Though the American guest stars "made everybody in Canada uncomfortable," she said, "that was just really to serve our market."

She also agreed that those episodes “were synthetic—they weren’t organic to the story.” Moreover, Schneider said the guests drained money from the budget that could have gone into the general production, and this was also a source of Canadian resentment.

In the end, Disney and Sullivan’s conflicting promotional preferences are indicative of the differing promotional cultures of the United States and Canada. A star system drives the American television industry, while such a system barely exists in English Canada—even less so during *Road to Avonlea*’s time. As such, when it comes to promoting serial drama, attachment to characters is encouraged over attachment to star power. The dispute over guest stars supports Colin Hoskins, Stuart MacFadyen and Adam Finn’s finding (1997, p. 109) that “[d]ifferent organizational cultures can cause difficulties” in co-production. Still, the Canadian press did pay attention to Faye Dunaway’s guest appearance. Of the regular cast, only Sarah Polley<sup>39</sup> seemed to warrant any feature-length articles devoted to her alone. The other Canadian cast members—including superlative acting veterans such as Jackie Burroughs, Lally Cadeau, R.H. Thomson and Cedric Smith—did not receive this kind of individual attention, and instead, were grouped together in general articles about the series.<sup>40</sup> The guest stars seemed to have the promotional effect in Canada that Disney encouraged in the U.S.

Despite his negative feelings, Sullivan approached the relationship pragmatically recognizing that The Disney Channel’s investment helped make the series a reality. At that

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<sup>39</sup> Using the CBCA (an index of Canadian periodicals), I found six articles on Sarah Polley about her time on the series—five in 1994 on her decision to depart from the series, and one on the premiere. Zachary Bennett, Michael Mahonen and Gema Zamprogna, who helped round out the younger cast, received no similar coverage according to the index. Unlike her co-stars at the time, both younger and older, Polley was and continues to be an object of media interest.

<sup>40</sup> I searched each actor’s name as subject on the CBCA, for the years in which they appeared on *Road to Avonlea*. None of Canada’s daily newspapers (i.e., those in the index) profiled these cast members individually. They did, however, appear together in articles about the series in general—mainly at the start of a season, though several pieces also marked the series’ finale. Meanwhile, Faye Dunaway’s guest appearance wracked up three headlines. *Vancouver Sun*—“Biggest piece of Hollywood to hit Avonlea” (Stevenson, 1995a); Canadian Press newswire—“Road to Avonlea nabs Faye Dunaway” (no author, 1995); *Montreal Gazette*—“Dunaway plays Polish countess who pays a visit to Avonlea” (Stevenson, 1995b). The *Toronto Star* ran an article not cited in the index — “Dunaway: Avonlea royalty filmdom’s queen of mean roles has carved enviable career from her relentless perfectionism” (Zekas, 1995). Dunaway’s appearance also garnered a Canadian *TV Guide* cover, proclaiming “Faye Dunaway: From Chinatown to Avonlea” with a feature story (Brioux, 1995) and even warranted a mention in *Maclean’s* (Wickens, 1995).

time, *Road to Avonlea's* budget and production values was unprecedented for a Canadian television drama. As Sullivan put it, “the fact is the show just would not have happened without Disney” (quoted in Knelman). Moreover, the deal with Disney gave Toronto’s Sullivan Entertainment access to the sought-after and lucrative U.S. market. The profits made on *Road to Avonlea* and *Anne* enabled Sullivan to invest in a non-co-production, *Wind at My Back* (1996 – 2001), for the first time (Adilman, 1996). Sullivan’s subsequent musings during the making of *Wind at My Back* indicate he was pleased he did not have to negotiate with development people at an American network (McLaughlin). “Having an American partner for *Wind at My Back* was too complicated and not necessary. This way we can maintain control of it both creatively and distribution-wise,” he stated (quoted in Adilman, 1996). Another partnership with Disney was out of the question, Sullivan said, as “Disney now wants to control all sales rights internationally for shows they co-produce. They were not in that position with *Avonlea*” (quoted in Adilman, 1996). Sullivan also implied that the move to the new project minus American investors was precisely because of the cultural compromises *Road to Avonlea* required (“New TV series”; Adilman, 1993).

Sullivan’s animosity towards U.S. co-productions may have led him to seek partners in the U.K., where his company has set up an international office, as well as a perhaps more culturally compatible partnership with British actors Trevor Eve and Sharon Maughan and their company Projector Productions. Sullivan said this arrangement “fits perfectly with our mandate to pursue U.K. co-productions” (quoted in Yaffe, 2001). Speaking on behalf of the CBC, Bernstein came to a similar conclusion, stating, “quite truthfully, in terms of drama ... sometimes the Brits are more logical partners [than the Americans].” She explained that co-productions with Britain do not entail Americanized content, which would be anathema to the CBC. As well, there is no competition over the broadcast window, as the two nations are an ocean and several time zones apart.

### *A Lot More Heart*

The Canadian press was unabashed in its willingness to claim *Road to Avonlea* as a distinctively Canadian cultural phenomenon (see Chapter 2). At the same time, and ironically, Disney’s reading of the series as innocent escapism predominates in coverage. It is hard to know whether this press did the series harm or good in Canada. Certainly, the focus

group I conducted in my 1996 pilot study collectively objected to a ‘Disney reading’, arguing that the series in fact dealt with issues that bore a relationship to their lives or to contemporary reality. Even some fans in my Internet survey show uncomfortable awareness of the ‘Disney reading’, and seem sensitive to it when they mention that *Road to Avonlea* has a message, but it is not “overdone” or “sappy”.<sup>41</sup> Conkie also thought that reviewers tended to unfairly characterize the series as “sweet treacle”. I myself have encountered this interpretation on numerous occasions when explaining the subject of my research to individuals who have never seen the series, but are quick to make judgements as to its frivolous, saccharine qualities.

I suspect it is this sensitivity that once led Sullivan to remark that *Road to Avonlea* “became camp” (quoted in Zekas, 1996). He was comparing *Road to Avonlea* to *Wind at My Back*, the series his company created for the CBC’s Family Hour to replace *Road to Avonlea*, and described *Wind at My Back* as more “realistic” and having “a lot more heart” than its predecessor (quoted in Zekas).<sup>42</sup> But Schneider offers an alternative take: “I remember thinking that some of those shows were interminable and painfully downbeat. No American company would have made them, and no American network would air them, because they just weren’t very entertaining.” As a result, the drama struck her as being “very Canadian”.<sup>43</sup> *Wind at My Back* ran for five seasons, and was replaced with two seasons of *Emily of New Moon* (1998 – 1999)—a Montgomery adaptation like *Road to Avonlea* but produced jointly by Cinar Corporation and Salter Street Films. As Benjamin Lefebvre (2002, p. 184) notes:

Though both series purport to belong to the ‘family drama’ genre, they both openly and realistically explore such themes as illegitimacy, drug addiction, child abuse, and the effects of extreme Protestant repression. As such, they are both the antithesis to *Road to Avonlea*. Though financed entirely in Canada, neither series has come close to replicating *Road to Avonlea*’s impact on Canadian popular culture.

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<sup>41</sup> I discuss respondents’ identification of messages in *Road to Avonlea* in Chapter 6.

<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, Sullivan said *Wind at My Back* is “much more real and poignant” than *Road to Avonlea* (Cuthbert, 1995a).

<sup>43</sup> Email to author, Nov. 14, 2001.

What are we to make of a scenario in which neither *Wind at My Back* nor *Emily of New Moon* can achieve the same domestic popularity or international success as *Road to Avonlea*? Several factors could explain this outcome, but likely *Road to Avonlea*'s status as a co-production played an important role, particularly in the negotiation of what family entertainment means. In other words, going after Disney as the fall guy for everything that is wrong with *Road to Avonlea* is too easy.

Typical of co-production, divergent tensions pulled at the series, whether conflicting promotional cultures or differing interpretations of family entertainment. Sometimes, the focus on high-profile guest stars indeed weakens *Road to Avonlea*'s serial quality, delaying narrative arcs or disrupting viewer engagement with the main characters. However, these episodes did attract excellent performers, as well as media attention. And differences regarding the tone of the series—i.e., the degree of Disney-fication to be undertaken—suggest that the parties involved were not always operating within the same definition of family drama. What came later at the CBC on Family Hour is a good indication. The Depression setting of *Wind at My Back* and the gothic Presbyterianism of *Emily of New Moon* are more era-specific and less escapist than *Road to Avonlea*. Their settings seem to foster and invite issues and themes decidedly counter to 'Disney innocence', perhaps then making them, in Sullivan's sense, more realistic—or at least emotionally and ideologically messier (i.e., having "a lot more heart") than the idealized view of childhood 'Disney innocence' promises.

When it comes to family drama, Sullivan's concerns with realism and the CBC's interest in relevance run counter to 'Disney innocence'—notably, the expectation of pure escapism. While the content of *Road to Avonlea* is not entirely in the thrall of 'Disney innocence', nor is it devoid of escapism. The drama is not as sappy as what has come to be expected of Disney, but neither is it as maudlin as *Emily of New Moon* is. If anything, the series really does represent a negotiation between two competing ideas of family entertainment, each of which contributed to content, and ultimately, to *Road to Avonlea*'s quality. As the rest of the dissertation explains, *Road to Avonlea* dramatizes issues and themes with contemporary resonance at the same time that its pastoral setting makes it portable, lending it to generic identifications necessary to the creation of a flexible mode of address. In other words, what makes the series 'Disney' had as much a hand in the series' success, as what makes it 'CBC'.



The next chapter shows that any differences were organizational as much as they were national in character. Despite these, the production does not appear to have been uncharacteristically embattled. Indeed, the former executives I consulted spoke warmly and fondly of each other and their days working on the series. In fact, if the episode titles are any indication, the aims of the CBC and The Disney Channel converged much of the time. The next chapter begins to explore the nature of this convergence and its implications for policy.

## CHAPTER TWO/ THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE AVONLEA

In Canadian broadcasting policy, conventional wisdom suggests that television programs that result from co-production are industrial or generic as opposed to indigenous or domestic; in other words, while they may be made *in* Canada, they are not made *for* Canada. In a *Toronto Star* article, Greg Quill (1996) reports that after the United States, Canada is the second largest exporter of television programs thanks to these generic productions.<sup>44</sup> These shows usually feature indistinct locales and make use of familiar genres such as crime drama or action/adventure. Ted Riley, president of Toronto's Atlantis Releasing, sums up the situation in Quill's article: "What matters is genre, not location." Co-production is, first and foremost, a financial arrangement not a cultural one. After all, producers enter into co-production arrangements because making indigenous television with high-production values in their home country is expensive. As Richard Collins (1994, p. 396) proposes, "co-productions are becoming more and more important forms through which resources are concentrated and markets secured for high-cost media productions." Furthermore, according to Frederick J. Fletcher, co-production has been one response to "the increased flow of imported materials," resulting from globalization trends such as the growth of transnational media conglomerates and new distribution systems (p. 371). If this is the case, then what kinds of stories are we telling?

Questions of content have particular resonance in Canada, where most of our television programs come from the United States, and consequently, it is often proposed that Canadians must have access to producing and receiving Canadian stories that reflect Canadian places and people, in order for Canadians to understand themselves. Indeed, in its "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" (2001), UNESCO proposes that democracies must protect the cultural rights of citizens as much as they enshrine political rights: "M arket

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<sup>44</sup> *Playback's* Pamela Cuthbert (1995b) made the same claim at the time, stating that "Canada is second only to the U.S. in international programming sales, with film and television revenues exceeding \$3 billion annually."

forces alone cannot guarantee the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, which is the key to sustainable human development.” Within this context, both co-productions and export sales pose inherent philosophical risks. For Fletcher, “Canadian myths, symbols, and values are sacrificed for marketability outside of Canada. Productions for the global market tend to avoid close connections to specific local histories, aiming to appeal to international audiences” (pp. 371-72). Meanwhile, Meaghan Morris (1988, p. 250) identifies an alternative scenario in what she terms the “export-drive allegory” whereby producers capitalize on well-known stereotypes of their home country within content as a way of gaining access to foreign markets.

Fletcher’s contention maintains the industry dichotomy of made in Canada versus made for Canada, and no doubt, numerous industrial generic productions from action adventure like *Relic Hunter* (1999 – 2002) to speculative fiction like *The Outer Limits* (1995 – 2002) support his thesis. However, Morris’ thesis warrants closer inspection, as a perhaps less prevalent but nonetheless present, Canadian production strategy, best exemplified in the comedy series *Due South* (1994 – 1999), and in family-oriented nature/adventure drama such as *Danger Bay* (1985 – 1990). Paul Attallah identifies the latter as an exportable and successful “Canadian genre” (p. 168). But both feature markers of Canadianness such as Mounties, native people and with respect to the nature/adventure drama, the Canadian wilderness. Marsha A. Tate and Valerie Allen’s study concludes optimistically that *Due South’s* integration of distinctively Canadian elements is not a recipe for domestic and export failure, as conventional wisdom holds. Rather, perceived Canadian cultural differences can enhance success in both markets as “potential assets that can be tapped to help a program distinguish itself from the competition” (p. 77; cf. Attallah, p. 187). Certainly, this conclusion challenges entrenched perceptions from an economic standpoint. But it also supports Morris’ idea of “export-drive allegory”— selling national clichés to access foreign markets—and raises cultural questions about defining distinctively Canadian content. Is Cancon grounded in the contemporary and/or historical realities of Canadian society? Or is Cancon ‘Disneyfied’— made to the measure of other peoples’ (even some of our own) fantasies of Canada as a benign land of helpful Mounties, wise natives, and majestic wilderness?

Whether Canadian content is sacrificed, as in Fletcher’s view, or conversely, made into a cliché, as Morris maintains, both instances suggest the importance of closely examining the effect of global television trends on storytelling in Canada. As I will show,

*Road to Avonlea* demonstrates how Fletcher and Morris' scenarios can work in tandem: the series severs specific ties to Edwardian-Canadian history, culture and experience, giving *Road to Avonlea* the portable quality of an industrial generic drama. Yet it also contains enough symbols and cues to identify the series as set regionally and historically sometime in Canada's past. However, as I argue next chapter, without context, these markers and cues emerge as groundless, floating signifiers that contribute to Canada's romanticized image as cultural innocent, facilitating the series' easy passage within the Disney universe.

The very fact that the series exemplifies a dual orientation that is at once generic yet specific made it suitable for both The Disney Channel and the CBC. This chapter discusses both organizations' aims for the series. The Disney Channel and the CBC had their own ideas of what they were buying. Moreover, each channel approached *Road to Avonlea* as a priority show, one that anchored its prime-time line-up, but for different purposes. What needs to be explored is *Road to Avonlea's* suitability for The Disney Channel and the CBC, despite their differing mandates. My contention is that this apparent 'fit' has policy implications for distinctively Canadian content, specifically around the demands of international co-production and public-private partnerships between the CBC and independent producers such as Sullivan Entertainment. But first, understanding the context in which both networks were operating in the decades of the '80s and '90s will help us better evaluate this 'fit'.

### ***Branding Disney and The CBC***

While one could assume cultural differences between Canada and the United States are minimal, making co-production arrangements a snap, deep philosophical differences regarding culture and the valuation of content exist and can colour the relationship, as the production history in Chapter 1 already indicates. The main philosophical split that colours the differences between the producing partners on *Road to Avonlea* is the American view of television as 'industry' and the Canadian view of television as 'culture'. Simply put, Americans treat television dramas as moneymaking commodities. In Canada, television's status as 'culture' is ambivalent in practice in that there is much talk about the idea of carving out a space for distinctively Canadian programs. Yet policies that support television production in this country remain largely industrial not cultural, wedded to job- and revenue-

generation with inadequate incentive to produce Canadian dramas for Canadians. Nevertheless, this philosophical rift is in fact a well-known one, garnering international attention in the trade arena, where the United States has accused Canada of protectionist policies.

What makes this divide especially evocative in the case of *Road to Avonlea* are the producers involved—Disney, mammoth emblem of American private industry and producer of so-called global culture, and the CBC, beleaguered symbol of federal-cultural policy and public disseminator of Canadian stories. The transformation of Disney into how we understand it today—as a far-reaching and highly profitable media giant—begins in 1984, when new owners install new managers, led by CEO Michael Eisner and known as Team Disney. In 1984, Disney was in serious financial trouble—in debt to the tune of \$900 million U.S. (Flower, p. 138). As Janet Wasiko explains in *Understanding Disney* (2001, p. 34), since that time,

... the Disney empire has extended its tentacles more widely and tenaciously than ever before. While drawing on valuable assets and previous policies, Team Disney introduced new strategies which must be understood in the context of the entertainment business of the 1990s. As with the other major Hollywood companies, Disney's expansion did not depend solely on motion pictures, but on a variety of business activities in which the new management team aggressively exploited the Disney brand name, as well as diversifying outside the traditional Disney label.

With diversification came expanding opportunities for the consumption of Disney products world-wide and the synergistic promotion of the Disney brand— from screen to stage to video to store to theme park, and not necessarily in that order. In his autobiography, Eisner (1998, p. 240) relays that The Disney Channel, along with the stores and theatrical productions, had a “powerful impact on the growth of the Disney brand.” Notably, much of this growth occurs during *Avonlea*'s tenure on The Disney Channel from 1990 to 1996. Reflecting the unhappy fortunes of its parent company, “The Disney Channel was still a hole to throw money into” in 1984, when Team Disney took over the reins of the year-old cable service, whose \$100 million U.S. start-up cost “carried a big risk as a pioneer effort” (Flower, pp. 94-7). For the next five years, The Disney Channel was “the fastest-growing cable service” in terms of subscriptions (Flower, p. 228), but did not break into the black until 1990 (Gomery, 1994, p. 80), the year it began showing *Avonlea*. Team Disney heralded

the 1990s as “The Disney Decade” (Wasko, p. 36). The company’s profits rose from \$98 million U.S. in 1984 to \$800 million U.S. in 1990 to \$1.2 billion U.S. in 1996 (Wasko, p. 33).

Throughout this time, Disney continues to maintain the brand identity it has been known for since Walt’s days, offering entertainment that is happy and safe, and seemingly unconnected to the material world of politics, history and commerce. Carrying on in the tradition of classic Disney, the New Disney emphasizes its universal appeal—the promise of a magical experience of childhood wonder. But the 1990s also herald increasing criticism of Disney’s global reach with fears of cultural homogeneity, ‘Americanization’, and diminished local expression being voiced. Critics began to argue that Disney’s universality and innocence mask its true identity as an aggressive transnational corporate enterprise. Certainly, spokesmen from Walt himself to Michael Eisner have been careful to suppress Disney’s globalizing capitalist agenda from the public’s purview in order to safeguard its brand of ‘Disney innocence’. Disney has tried to respond to criticisms of cultural imperialism by incorporating the local into the generic, the specific into the universal in its theme parks and animated features but with varying degrees of cultural sensitivity, some more successful than others. The Disneyfication of diverse cultures and histories, through offensive cultural stereotypes and sanitized historical representations, however, remains a prevailing concern.<sup>45</sup>

During this time, the CBC’s economic fortunes were not as auspicious. The CBC had to contend with a neo-liberal ideological shift at the federal level, which inaugurated a series of budget cuts to the public sector, beginning in 1984 under the Conservative government, as well as a new set of directions in Canadian television policy. These objectives were outlined in the 1982 Federal Cultural Policy Review (or Applebaum-Hébert Report), commissioned by the Liberal government, and then instituted the following year in the document *Towards A New National Broadcasting Policy*. According to Marc Raboy (1996, p. 187), an expert on public broadcasting, the report “endorsed a new economic thrust and made recommendations to shift the emphasis in public funding from the CBC to the private sector.”

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<sup>45</sup> My understanding of the New Disney is indebted to several works, including Wasko’s. See also Bell, Haas & Sells (1995), Flower (1991), Giroux (1999), Smoodin (1994), Ward (2002), and Wasko, Phillips & Meehan (2001).

Raboy notes that the purpose of the report was to enhance the private sector's ability to create high-quality television that Canadians would watch and that could be exported internationally. As a result, the CBC began eliminating its in-house production in 1984, and changed from a producer to a patron of Canadian programming. The CBC's support of Sullivan Entertainment was in keeping with the corporation's new objective to "continue to encourage and assist Canadian independent production,"<sup>46</sup> as was recommended in the 1982 policy review, and subsequently adopted by the federal government (Canada, 1983) and indeed by the CBC (CBC, 1985, pp. 42-3). The Canadian independent production sector experiences growth thanks to these policy initiatives, including the 1983 creation of the Canadian Broadcast Program Development Fund (part of the transformation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation into Telefilm Canada in 1984) that gave direct subsidies to independent television producers.<sup>47</sup> All in all, the CBC endeavoured to make the best out of a situation that put the emphasis on— that is, more money into— the private sector and less on public broadcasting.

The CBC regarded *Road to Avonlea* as part of a five-year plan to "Canadianize" its schedule (CBC, 1985, pp. 18-19; CBC, 1990, p. 8). In 1982, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee argued the CBC's purpose should be to provide an "alternative to private broadcasters" (Canada, 1982, p. 273). Along these lines, the 1986 Task Force on Public Broadcasting determined 'Canadianization' as one of the ways the CBC could set itself apart from the private Canadian channels and their Americanized schedules (Canada, 1986, pp. 9-11). A 1994 CRTC decision reaffirmed this public-broadcasting mandate in a review of the CBC's licence (CRTC, 1994). By providing services and programming that the for-profit Canadian channels do not— the argument went— the CBC would make itself relevant to Canadians as a public broadcaster who connects the regions, reflects the nation and serves its citizens.

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<sup>46</sup> Listed as an objective in the CBC's Annual Reports (1994, p. 25 and 1995, p. 25).

In some ways, the economic pressures the CBC was experiencing were similar to Disney's. Even though one entity used the language of national public policy and the other the market, both were nonetheless motivated to develop a brand identity and mode of address that would set it apart from competitors. Both The Disney Channel and the CBC regarded *Road to Avonlea* as pivotal to the construction of their respective brand identities of 'Disney innocence' on the one hand and 'Canadianization' on the other. Indeed, based on interviews and correspondence with television executives involved in the series' development,<sup>48</sup> the CBC and The Disney Channel had different ideas regarding the content they were buying, yet each in their view received what they had paid for. Moreover, executive producers expressed that, in fact, both institutions had the same purpose in mind for the series and that relations were amicable and co-operative. Yet conflicting discourses emerge on the value of the series to the respective partners. The value attached to the series speaks to the differing ideological frameworks and organizational structures of a for-profit program-provider such as The Disney Channel and a public broadcaster such as the CBC. When I initiated contact, Schneider, formerly with Disney, made me aware of the fact that some of my questions carried these assumptions, particularly the notion that Disney operated as a monolithic corporation with automatons for employees. As Schneider put it,

There is a tendency to demonize Disney as a large corporation with a lot of marching orders. Actually, there were never more than two or three individuals, mainly working off their own knowledge, experience and

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<sup>47</sup> In 1995, Sullivan Entertainment becomes a poster child for the success of this funding program. According to *The Hollywood Reporter's* Etan Vlessing (1995c), the company "emerged as the top-performing independent producer within Telefilm Canada's production revenue-sharing program. The program, which aims at redistributing a portion of revenues back to companies producing an above-average return on Telefilm investments in their projects, handed back to Sullivan CAN\$2.1 million (\$1.5 million). That figure was more than triple the funds returned to the next highest producer."

<sup>48</sup> I conducted telephone interviews in the fall of 2001. For the executives-in-charge of production, I went with the names listed in the *Road to Avonlea* credits, and through some detective work, managed to find the two executives formerly with Disney, who were listed—Cathy Johnson and Jude Schneider. I subsequently learned there were additional Disney executives, who had creative input but did not appear in the credits. My main goal, however, was to interview the CBC and Disney executives involved in the development phase—Deborah Bernstein and Cathy Johnson, respectively. Correspondence with Johnson was exclusively by email. Although the interviews and correspondence were unstructured, Appendix B shows the list of questions I covered. Participating executives received this list ahead of time.



prejudice, who shaped the Disney contributions to the show. When we do talk I'll be happy to elaborate about what was 'Disney' and what was 'just us'.<sup>49</sup>

This initial exchange proved invaluable to modifying my questions and my approach to the subsequent interviews. Mainly, I increased my focus on the work experience of the individuals to balance out my interest in the institutional contexts. Even so, and as I will show, the interviews confirm the presence of incongruent organizational philosophies that still managed to evolve into a series that satisfied both channels. *Road to Avonlea's* policy definition as a domestic drama demonstrating Canadian content and its industry definition as a generic family drama with content sporting high portability made that evolution possible.

### *Under the Maple Leaf's Banner*

In Canada, public subsidies help support the production of both generic and domestic dramas. The Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) determine what qualifies as Canadian enough to receive public funding. The purpose is to encourage the growth of a domestic industry that will provide jobs for Canadians and generate revenue within Canada. It is an industrial policy not a cultural one, particularly since the Canadianness of a production is based not on its content but on the passports of the creative team. A ten-point system determines a production's Canadian content and its eligibility for government assistance. Points are awarded based on the Canadian citizenship of key creative members including director (two points), writer (two points), and leading performer (one point). As well, the independent producer, either the director or the writer, and at least one of the leading performers must be Canadian. This system determines Canadian content for broadcasters in Canada, who are required to meet quotas for Canadian content in fulfilment of their licensing agreements with the CRTC. To clarify, what ends up on screen does not qualify as Canadian content; what happens behind the scenes does. While the points system does protect Canadian jobs, it also importantly ensures public money is spent within Canada. At the same time, though, the content itself is a non-issue. While public money supports

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<sup>49</sup> Email to author, Aug. 19, 2001.

private independent producers in Canada, it is unclear what the cultural or social benefits are for citizens in general.

According to the criteria established, *Road to Avonlea* was a ten-point series, qualifying for the benefits of an all-Canadian production. The fact the series is based on the work of a Canadian author, takes place on Prince Edward Island, and features Canadian characters did not garner any points at the time. (The series was produced prior to the Canadian Television Fund's establishment of a "Visibly Canadian Elements" bonus in 1998. That bonus was abandoned in 2003.)<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, these distinctly Canadian features rated highly with the CBC and had no register, negative or positive, with The Disney Channel. In fact, Schneider was taken aback by the idea that Canadians might have a proprietary interest in Montgomery as a Canadian icon, considering her well-known international appeal, particularly in Japan. As Schneider put it, "We didn't know that you felt you owned her." Moreover, Schneider claimed that "there's no name-brand value to Lucy Maud Montgomery" in the United States the way there is in Canada.

If Montgomery's iconic status in Canada did not register with Disney, then what did register was the points system itself. Johnson said, "that was tough to get used to... Here [in Hollywood], we just didn't consider nationality." Because Canada's creative pool is smaller than Hollywood's, Johnson experienced some frustration at waiting to find the right people

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<sup>50</sup> Criteria for the bonus were as follows: "The central story is biographical and documents the life of an actual Canadian or group of Canadians. The central story is based on and is about an actual noteworthy Canadian event. The central story is based on and is about an actual Canadian issue or issues. The project is based on an original screenplay written by a Canadian or is based on a published or soon-to-be published work written by a Canadian. The storyline obviously takes place in Canada" (CTF, 2002). However, the CTF still has its four Essential Requirements in place (CTF, 2003). These are the following, "in order of importance" according to the guidelines: "1. The project speaks to Canadians about, and reflects, Canadian themes and subject matter. 2. The project has 10/10 points (or the maximum number of points appropriate to the project), as determined by the CTF using the Canadian Audio-Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) scale. 3. Underlying rights are owned, and significantly and meaningfully developed, by Canadians. Eligible projects must be developed by Canadians. Canadian creators must have significant and meaningful involvement in the project, from concept to final script. The project may not be based on foreign television productions, format buys, foreign feature films (unless based on a published Canadian literary work) or foreign fully developed final-version scripts. 4. The project is shot and set primarily in Canada." These requirements satisfy the "spirit and intent" of the CTF, defined as follows: "... to support the production and broadcast of a specific type of culturally significant television and film production. These productions speak to Canadians about themselves, their culture, their issues, their concerns and their stories. These productions reflect the lives of Canadians across the country and reveal Canadians and their society to the viewer."

with Canadian citizenship to work on *Road to Avonlea*. “That was frustrating, when by law, we couldn’t use Americans.” On the Canadian side, the points system appears to have defended Canada’s public investment. Bernstein corroborated that from time to time Disney would bring up the issue of using Americans, but “we’d just make that go away.” The CBC and the writers I interviewed give a large proportion of the credit to Sullivan for defending Canadian interests on the show. All in all, the different philosophies governing the organizational practices of television production in Canada versus the United States impressed upon Johnson whose personal experience was of a reportedly “nationalistic, almost anti-American atmosphere” rather than a conflict between market versus public organizational cultures.

In discussing *Road to Avonlea* as a co-production between The Disney Channel and the CBC, the tendency is to assume that the CBC came out the big beneficiary because of the Mouse Corporation’s rich coffers. In other words, somehow and against all odds, David managed to pull one over Goliath. But what were the benefits that accrued to Disney due to their involvement with a Canadian co-production, one involving the CBC, a public broadcaster regarded venerably in other parts of the world? Even though it was Sullivan who made the decision to pull the plug on the series after seven seasons, Schneider speculated that The Disney Channel would not have continued its involvement because the production was very expensive.

The series was The Disney Channel’s “first hour-long original weekly dramatic series” (Cotter, 1997, p. 292). As a fledgling entity that was financially unstable for its first seven years, The Disney Channel undoubtedly welcomed the Canadian investment from public sources (i.e., loans from Telefilm Canada and money from the CBC), given the expense of producing a high-quality period drama. The series’ Canadian content, as defined according to citizenship by the points system, and more culturally by the CBC in terms of setting, story and character (outlined later) actually benefited Disney: the series had access to Canadian government funding that would normally not be available to a non-treaty co-production. Moreover, this co-production arrangement gave Disney indirect access to third markets, such as China and Iran, that would have been impossible unless under the Maple Leaf’s banner.

The infiltration of third markets was partly due to the series’ status as a family drama. Looking at the significance of family drama to the international market of the 1990s helps to explain *Road to Avonlea*’s cultural portability, as well as its appropriateness for both Disney

and the CBC. Sullivan Entertainment's emergence as a successful independent production-company resulted from the regulatory and investment context described above, and from television trends at the time, including the resurgence of the period piece in popular culture (Chapters 3 and 4) and a strong international market for family entertainment. According to industry publications such as Canada's *Playback* and *The Hollywood Reporter* in the U.S., family programming was high on the list for buyers in the 1990s (Vale, 1995; Vlessing, 1995a; Hughes, 1994). Toper Taylor, senior vice president of Nelvana Communications, remarked on the growing demand for family programming adapted from recognizable literary sources (Vlessing, 1995a). (Sullivan Entertainment's lock on the L.M. Montgomery franchise would support this claim, as would Nelvana's 1995 productions of *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*.) Don Pagnutti, former chief financial officer for Sullivan Entertainment, described the company's specialty family fare as a strong international seller (Kelly, 1997).

Three factors help to account for this situation. First, Sullivan Entertainment's sale of *Road to Avonlea* and other family programming from its library benefited from American foreign policy in those countries where the United States is viewed with animosity. For instance, Quill reported in 1996 that Sullivan Entertainment had sold 60 hours of programming to China while "Disney [had] yet to get a foothold" in that market. Similarly, writing on *Road to Avonlea*'s enormous popularity in Iran, *The Globe and Mail*'s Geoffrey York (2000) explained that "American television shows are largely eliminated from the Iranian market because of the U.S. economic embargo and the freeze in relations between Tehran and Washington." According to York, this situation paved the way for programming from "less controversial countries like Australia and Canada."

Second, *Road to Avonlea* and programs like it capitalized on the over-abundance of action-oriented programming, coming out of both Asia and Hollywood in the 1990s. Sarah Clarke, sales representative with Sullivan Entertainment, said that the company's family dramas have acquired a niche in Asia because they offer an alternative to the glut of domestically produced, action-style content (Rice-Barker, 1996). *Variety*'s Brendan Kelly (1996) noted that Canada has earned a reputation as a maker of family-oriented shows—"a specialty of producers in the Great White North"—thanks to independent producers such as Sullivan Entertainment. This assessment corresponds to Will Straw's notion of Canadian cultural production as "compensatory" (2002, pp. 104-5):

... Canadian culture typically compensates for those gaps that the cultural products of the U.S., Great Britain and France have left open. At one level, Canadian culture moves to fill these gaps in a strictly strategic sense, through the identification of open and underserved markets. Less obviously, Canadian culture will fill these gaps as a result of the more informal and unconscious processes by which those undertaking creative careers in Canada adapt to the possibilities available to them.

Along these lines, Collins (1994, p. 395), who has studied the Canadian television industry extensively, reported on an “undersupply” of live-action child-friendly programming on the international television market, but remarked that “Canada has a notable record” in this format. Similarly, Attallah offers that Canada’s steady success in the nature/adventure drama rests upon the fact that

...relatively little high-quality children’s or family drama is produced internationally, and especially not in the USA. This has created an obvious opportunity for Canadian producers. The international demand for this genre, which Canadian producers have continued to make with ever-greater refinements and higher budgets, has come from virtually around the world, irrespective of language and culture... (p. 169)

*Road to Avonlea* bears many similarities to the nature/adventure drama Attallah discusses. Both feature child actors and caring adults in a natural Canadian setting, a lack of violent or controversial subject matter, and an emphasis on pro-social values of a very basic nature (e.g., helping people or being truthful). These neutral and indeed neutralizing qualities offset the problem of cultural discount, contributing to *Road to Avonlea*’s portability in the same way they do for the nature/adventure drama.

A third factor in Sullivan Entertainment’s international success has been the ability of its programs to sail through censor boards. Clarke maintained that one reason for Sullivan Entertainment’s success in the Asian market is that “the programs will get by the censor board, which is the biggest issue” (quoted in Rice-Barker, 1996). York supports this claim, saying that Canadian television shows “benefit from the strict religious censorship in Iran” because they “require less censorship than those of other countries.” Sullivan agrees that Islamic censorship has been a key component to his company’s presence in the Middle Eastern market (York). The ideological tenor of *Road to Avonlea*, born of its status as family entertainment, makes the series able to travel well because it embodies basic values of a transcultural nature, all in a pleasant natural setting—pastoral PEI. The series’ non-

controversial content, combined with Canada's non-controversial international image, has worked advantageously for Sullivan Entertainment.

Sullivan Entertainment's success in the 1990s is not an anomaly since that period marked an historic highpoint in the Canadian television industry. The explosion in cable and specialty channels in Canada and the U.S. created an increased demand for content and openness to Canadian suppliers. Changes in Canadian policy that cutback the CBC's funding required the corporation to decrease in-house production and become a buyer of Canadian content. In the meantime, the federal government increased funding to Telefilm Canada with the purpose of supporting independent television production. But at the time, Telefilm covered only about one-third of production costs, and Canadian licence fees about one-fifth. Therefore, Canadian companies wanting to make programs with high-production values began to seek international partners (Attallah, pp. 175-187)— as Sullivan Entertainment did with Disney. As Attallah sums it up, each of these factors contrived to create unprecedented growth in independent television production, and shifted Canada from being a "television importer" to a "television exporter" (p. 189).

Due to this cultural and economic climate, Sullivan Entertainment develops into "one of Canada's most successful private-sector producers" (Vlessing, 1997). In 1994, after changing its name from Sullivan Films to Sullivan Entertainment, the company moves into its own building, and continues to extend its corporate structure. Sullivan Entertainment establishes international offices in Los Angeles and London; it sets up a distribution arm in 1995, which in 1998, reports revenues of \$5.5 million (Binning, 1999), and in 2001, over 400 hours of film and television in its library (Yaffe). When *Road to Avonlea* permanently winds down production in 1995, the company Sullivan established in 1979 and now runs with his wife and business partner, Trudy Grant,<sup>51</sup> is spending \$34 million annually on production and development ("What Canada's prodcos", 1996). In 1996, to prepare for the making of *Wind at My Back*, the company constructs a permanent production facility on five acres of land, which becomes known as "the largest studio back lot in Canada" (Yaffe). Throughout the 1990s, the company garners recognition domestically and internationally for certain kinds

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<sup>51</sup> My research focuses on Sullivan, as Grant has not been involved in the creative side of the business to the same extent. Moreover, Grant does not act as spokesperson for the company to the same degree as Sullivan in media accounts.

of programs. In Canada, Sullivan Entertainment becomes recognized as a producer of distinctively Canadian dramas for Canada's public broadcaster, and in export markets, as a creator of generic family dramas, whose period settings offer a welcome alternative to the prolific action/crime genre.<sup>52</sup>

The political economic context discussed in the previous sections starts to suggest some of the conditions that made *Road to Avonlea* attractive to The Disney Channel and the CBC, as well as an export success. So far, I have mainly considered Canadian content from the perspective of the points system, but what of it culturally? Given the series' geographical location and historical setting, where did distinctively Canadian content figure in the interpretation of 'Avonlea'? In other words, what was the significance of time and place to the respective partners involved? For Disney, Montgomery's fictional town of Avonlea represented both a timeless fantasyland and a lucrative commodity. For the CBC, 'Avonlea' was a mainstay of Canadian cultural identity and a socially cohering myth. The rest of the chapter continues to explore organizational attitudes towards content and viewers to shed light on timely questions regarding the relationship of co-production to storytelling and of content to public broadcasting. These attitudes can be seen to intersect in crucial areas, suggesting potential trouble spots with respect to the direction of public broadcasting and television drama in Canada in recent years.

### *As Much a Fantasy Place as a Fantasy Time*

For The Disney Channel, *Avonlea*— as it was called there— was a key ingredient in a marketing strategy designed to differentiate the service from others through the distinctive content it would provide to subscribers. Schneider said that what the channel was looking for at the time in terms of its programs “was what we called ‘evergreens’, which meant shows that were timeless in their ability to capture the imagination.” She explained that before and during much of *Avonlea*'s run, The Disney Channel, starting with its inception in April 1983, was a subscriber-driven, advertiser-free, pay-cable station. Initially, the channel

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<sup>52</sup> *The Globe and Mail's* Doug Saunders and Gail Macdonald (1999) call Sullivan Entertainment a maker of “proudly Canadian shows” and “the poster child for Canadian-content television.” In a *Toronto Star* article on the *Butterbox Babies*, Quill (1995) said the “reconstructed period piece” is “the

was not available as part of basic-cable packages. As such, The Disney Channel developed *Avonlea* as part of a programming niche that would make family households subscribe to it specifically because it offered something other services did not. In fact, by the time *Avonlea* stopped airing in 1996, The Disney Channel had completed the switch to basic cable—as well as wider-ranging programming, now that it “faced the imperative of attracting a mass audience for the first time” (Eisner, p. 253).<sup>53</sup> The result, according to Schneider who now works independently, is that The Disney Channel of then looks nothing like The Disney Channel of today, whose programming is largely contemporary—the complete opposite of the period-oriented evergreens.

Prior to that transformation, The Disney Channel’s mission was to create a programming model that evoked what is known in the industry as ‘the Disney magic’— a sense of innocence and timelessness, of fantasy and escapism. To achieve this magic, said Schneider, “we tended to do everything that was period. We did nothing contemporary at that point. Everything was meant to be timeless and elegiac, and have that kind of quality that we were very concerned about [which was] looking like the Disney programming was high quality.” Creating this high-quality look went hand in hand with getting subscribers. In order to attract them, The Disney Channel had to have perceived value. “And one of the ways to give it that perceived value,” explained Schneider, “was that we did period things that looked beautiful, that took you somewhere else... period meant we wanted to look high quality and we wanted to be high quality.” In contrast to the CBC, discussed below, The Disney Channel’s interest was in generic content that would fulfill particular expectations— a sense of timelessness and escape, and the experience of quality entertainment— all invoked by the period look. In this way, *Avonlea* was to participate in the making of the Disney brand.

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specialty of the Toronto-based production house Sullivan Entertainment.” *Playback* referred to Sullivan Entertainment as a producer of “historical dramatic mainstays” (“News briefs”, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Eisner explains that Disney wanted to see the subscription service become part of basic cable packages. To facilitate this conversion, a “hybrid strategy” was adopted in the early ‘90s. Cable operators were given “the option of carrying The Disney Channel in their basic menu of offerings to subscribers.” Some markets offered The Disney Channel as a pay channel, while others carried it in their basic cable packages. Eisner argues that the strategy “proved highly effective” in that the number of households reached went from six million in 1990 to fifteen million in 1994 (pp. 252-3).



Though never explicitly expressed as one of Disney's demands, Schneider stated that what the channel bought from Sullivan and sold to its American subscribers was a non-specific invocation of the past that

... very much exists in the imagination... I don't think that we ever emphasized that it was Canada. I think it was as much a fantasy place as it was a fantasy time... I think we always encouraged people to view it as a time and a place from the distant past and not be specific about the location across the border.

Likewise, one of Johnson's theories as to why "having the series set in Canada never, ever presented a problem" was "a rather unclear idea of where this 'Prince Edward Island' really was." Part of that may come from the series' visual presentation of Prince Edward Island. Visually, the series offers up a generic construction of the island with location shots that function as postcard images—exportable, stereotypical, and abstracted from context. The postcard PEI includes lighthouses, red cliffs, fishing villages, dramatic beaches, and of course, Green Gables.

In the series' first season, for instance, doubles regularly stand in for the Avonlea children and frolic on the sand dunes of what is likely Cavendish Beach in Prince Edward Island National Park. But such establishing shots identifying the setting explicitly as PEI become infrequent in later seasons compared to the first two, making the location more and more indeterminate. In the fourth season in particular, such establishing images are noticeably absent. Opening credits for the first two seasons do feature PEI scenery almost as a character alongside the featured performers. But from the third season onwards, that scenery is reduced within the opening credits, as the focus is on the main cast. Moreover, the establishing shots of Dalvay-by-the-Sea, the White Sands Hotel in the series, only work as a PEI landmark if the viewer is already familiar with it as a real place—and it is hardly up there with the Eiffel Tower.

Since the production was based in southern Ontario, Sullivan Entertainment hired a second unit to film location shots on the island, which became stock footage the series often mined when it needed a pretty lighthouse or a picturesque shoreline. Sometimes, especially in later seasons, the Ontario lakeshore was good enough for these, likely given the expense of doubles and a second unit. Moreover, most exterior scenes—including meadows, forests and the various buildings comprising Avonlea—were filmed on a tract of land in rural

Ontario, which also sported a makeshift lighthouse. Here, pathways and trails coloured red— reportedly with crushed bricks and sometimes inconsistently— helped to further construct a postcard image of the island. According to Lefebvre (2002, p. 183), the result is that “the physical reality of Prince Edward Island is substantially reduced,” creating a euphemistic island seen through the idealizing lens of nostalgia. To put it another way, there’s no place like Avonlea.

What made the PEI setting of even less concern was the proven success of Sullivan’s *Anne* films in the United States with which Disney had been involved. The Toronto-based production company created the critically acclaimed, ratings-hit *Anne of Green Gables* in 1985, which was followed in 1987 by an equally successful sequel.<sup>54</sup> Johnson said, “The Disney Channel had received an overwhelming positive response to the *Anne of Green Gables* miniseries. As a result, we didn’t even do a pilot for *Avonlea*. That is unheard of in network television.”<sup>55</sup> Certainly, nearly a quarter of the fans I surveyed indicated the *Anne* miniseries as a reason for choosing to watch *Road to Avonlea*.<sup>56</sup> Without the positive experience of *Anne of Green Gables* and its sequel, it is unlikely The Disney Channel would have been comfortable with a Canadian setting for a television series. Without the *Anne* precedent, there undoubtedly would have been no *Road to Avonlea* (and quite possibly no Sullivan Entertainment as we now know it). Indeed, Sullivan noted that he came up with the idea for the continuing series “primarily because we had such an overwhelming response to the *Anne* series from around the world. It was an unusual circumstance because there was an existing market that wanted to see more” (quoted in Cuthbert, 1994).<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the explosion of American cable networks in the 1980s and ‘90s, The Disney Channel among them, created an increased appetite for programming and conditions favourable to Canadian suppliers like Sullivan Entertainment.

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<sup>54</sup> The Disney Channel aired the sequel as *Anne of Avonlea: The Continuing Story of Anne of Green of Gables*. In Canada, the sequel aired as *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* on the CBC.

<sup>55</sup> While the lack of a pilot is unheard of in the United States, it is the norm in Canada.

<sup>56</sup> I discuss fans’ reasons for choosing *Road to Avonlea* in Chapter 6.

One of the advantages of Sullivan's co-venture with Disney was that the channel had the money to make the series look good, a point not lost on the Canadians involved with the show, who display a mixture of pragmatism and cynicism in interviews. Undeniably, the relationship was reciprocal in that *Avonlea* also made The Disney Channel look good—which was the point. The Disney Channel used *Avonlea* as a high-quality selling point to fulfil its goal of perceived value. Indeed, "Disney promoted the show nicely," said Johnson, because it was "a priority show." Promotions included posters at theme parks in Anaheim and Orlando, and on-air segments with behind-the-scenes footage. The Disney Channel also had a slick magazine that would highlight the series in feature articles. Moreover, Johnson offered, "We had cable operators send out color flyers featuring *Avonlea* in their bills because Disney was a premium network and cost more money." The Disney Channel approached *Avonlea* as a marketing tool to sell another commodity—the channel itself. As Schneider said, "We didn't care so much if our audiences watched the show, as long as they ponied up [subscription fees] every month to pay for its availability to them."<sup>58</sup> Content was an issue insofar as *Avonlea* made The Disney Channel an attractive commodity.

Johnson said that with any co-production, compromises are made, but that Disney was satisfied with *Avonlea* in the end because "we were comfortable that there was a lot of money on the screen when the show was delivered... it certainly didn't look cheap." The series not only appeared on promotional materials to potential subscribers but, during weeks when the channel made itself available for free in order to attract new subscribers, *Avonlea* was marketed aggressively as a programming highlight, something you could only get exclusively on The Disney Channel.<sup>59</sup> Episodes aired at this time were often the ones featuring big-name American guest stars such as Stockard Channing, Faye Dunaway and Christopher Reeve, and help explain why they were not always aired in the order Sullivan Entertainment intended. Disney's overarching goal was to provide "enough memorable and

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<sup>57</sup> In 1995, *Playback* reported that Sullivan Entertainment held the Canadian record for most viewers of a Canadian miniseries for its version of *Anne of Green Gables*, which drew 5.6 million Canadian viewers ("News briefs", 1995). The *Montreal Gazette's* Mike Boone (1990) noted that "each *Anne* was a ratings smash and watched by more than 5 million Canadians."

<sup>58</sup> Email to author, Nov. 14, 2001.

<sup>59</sup> Lefebvre (2002, p. 177) argues that by calling the series *Avonlea* instead of *Road to Avonlea*, The Disney Channel was able to claim the series as an exclusive.

special programs each month that families would feel compelled to keep the service” (Eisner, p. 252). All in all, Disney used *Avonlea* as a means of branding the service as a provider of quality escapist fare that would transport the viewer to another place and time. The ability to transport the Disney viewer to a fantasyland depended on a setting that could function indeterminately, thus creating a mode of address independent of specific knowledge of the island. The postcard presentation of setting along with the conventions of family drama facilitate this indeterminacy, and also pull the series within the orbit of ‘Disney innocence’, dislodging ‘Avonlea’ from the specifics of regional or national history, geography and culture. If this ‘Avonlea’ represents the Disney reading, then what was the CBC’s, especially considering its goal of Canadianization, and what made convergence between the two program providers possible?

Film theorist and cultural critic Paul Willemen (1995) suggests that the national specificity of texts is a question of address. Specific knowledge may be at work in a text—for instance what Willemen calls “shorthand references to particular, historically accrued modes of making sense”; “connotations generated by particular landscapes”; and the “differing meanings” attached to images (p. 211). In other words, texts with nationally specific modes of address require a certain reading competency. In the case of *Avonlea*, the conventions of the period piece, defined by Disney executives in terms of “evergreens”—that is, a high-quality look combined with a vaguely referenced historical setting that is purportedly timeless—construct a mode of address that is not nationally specific but culturally flexible. *Avonlea*’s flexibility makes it a textbook case of co-production in Fletcher’s sense: close connections to specific locales and their respective histories and symbols are avoided, making the series accessible to viewers of different national origins.

Alternatively, it may be that the Disney executives I interviewed, and indeed even the American respondents to my questionnaire considered in Chapter 6, simply do not have the reading competency of which Willemen writes—they do not ‘read’ *Road to Avonlea* as Canadians. The series may carry a nationally specific mode of address that opens it to meanings available only within a Canadian context. What is more likely is that *Road to Avonlea* works in a contingent and contradictory fashion. The series generates meanings that are (a) socially shared and, therefore, accessible to transnational audiences; (b) non-specific and, therefore, able to interact with viewers of diverse cultures to produce relevant hybrid interpretations; and (c) nationally specific and, therefore, uniquely available to Canadians

located in a specific historical moment. Consequently, the issue of mode of address deserves further analysis, and should be crucial to any discussion of distinctively Canadian content. Framing the question in terms of mode of address, as defined by Willemen, avoids theme-parking Canadian content into a succession of Canuck clichés. Moreover, one of the by-products of this framing is being able to bridge policy studies to film studies, where mode of address has been of central concern.

### *Always Set Somewhere, Always Wholly Canadian*

*Road to Avonlea* has iconic status for not only the CBC, but in a public policy context on issues of distinctively Canadian content. In a 1995 parliamentary debate, *Road to Avonlea* was mentioned to showcase the CBC's ability to survive, prosper and fulfil its cultural mandate even in lean fiscal times.<sup>60</sup> The Mandate Review (1996, p. 61) recognized *Road to Avonlea* as a "contemporary achievement" for the CBC. At CRTC hearings conducted in 1998<sup>61</sup> and 1999,<sup>62</sup> *Road to Avonlea* was mentioned on several occasions by private citizens,

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<sup>60</sup> Albina Guarnieri, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, referred to *Road to Avonlea* on March 21, 1995, in response to criticism of the Liberal government's financial gutting of the CBC to the tune of \$350 million over a three-year period. According to Guarnieri, "In recent years the CBC has been focusing increasingly on bringing Canadian programming to Canadians. To counter the dominance of U.S. mass culture, the CBC's primary concern has been to attract large audiences to Canadian programming. That is just what the CBC has been doing. Witness the success of CBC productions like *Road to Avonlea*, *La Petite Vie*, *North of 60* and *Scoop*, to name only a few. CBC programming, especially in drama, has achieved excellence over and over again" (Canada, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> A review of Canadian television policy was held in Hull, Quebec in the fall. Rose Dyson, representing Canadians Concerned about Violence in Entertainment, stated that "we don't expect that every Canadian television program or movie will be *Road to Avonlea*," but hoped that some standards could be set for producers who received a public subsidy. Jim McKee, director of policy and communications for the Writers Guild of Canada discussed *Road to Avonlea* as an example of a distinctively Canadian program developed in Canada yet successful as an export. Ivan Fecan, director of television programming at the CBC between 1987 and 1994, and credited with originating the 7 p.m. Family Hour time slot, counted his contributions to *Road to Avonlea* as "among my proudest achievements" in the area of Canadian television.

<sup>62</sup> A review of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was held in various cities throughout Canada in March. Vancouver—private citizen Gordon Lenfesty said *Road to Avonlea* is part of CBC's success at providing "family-centred programs." Charlottetown—Premier Bind of PEI said he is "grateful to the CBC for supporting shows such as the *Road to Avonlea* and *Emily of New Moon*". Sudbury—private citizen Ronald Brisebois appreciated that he could go to the CBC for "spending quality time with my children" with shows like *Road to Avonlea*.

government officials and industry insiders, as an indicator of what the CBC is doing right, and moreover, as a successful example of an exportable yet distinctively Canadian program. In a 1998 speech, then-CBC president Perrin Beatty described the corporation's efforts to build a distinctively Canadian "brand loyalty" and referred to the *Road to Avonlea* cast's return to the public broadcaster in a new TV-movie as an example of this effort.<sup>63</sup>

Along these lines, in June 1994, Air Canada announced that *Road to Avonlea* would be the first Canadian series to air on its flights, replacing the American comedy *Cheers* ("Air Canada flies", 1994). Similarly, the English-language service of the CBC began airing *Road to Avonlea* re-runs on weekdays in 1998 as part of its efforts to Canadianize its American-dominated afternoon line-up. *TV Guide* called *Road to Avonlea* "probably Canada's greatest TV success" and "a family tradition in many Canadian living rooms" ("Farewells", 1995). The *Halifax Daily News* claimed, "It's the most-watched, most-loved dramatic TV series in Canada" (Johnston, 1994), while the *Winnipeg Free Press* declared it "perhaps the most celebrated of all Canadian TV series" (Oswald, 1995). And as the millenium was winding down, *TV Times* hailed *Road to Avonlea* as the twentieth century's top Canadian television show ("Canadian content", 1999).<sup>64</sup> No other Canadian television series has produced such an outpouring of affection in the mainstream press. Such evidence suggests that for many Canadians, *Road to Avonlea* has made a contribution to the cultural life of this country. Certainly, the discourse constructs a national romance with *Road to Avonlea*, but just how

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<sup>63</sup> To the American Marketing Association, Ottawa Chapter, September 24, 1998. Transcript available originally from the CBC web site, but no longer online.

<sup>64</sup> *Globe and Mail*—"the most consistently high-quality television series Canada has ever produced" (Haslett Cuff, 1990). *Montreal Gazette*—"the best Canadian program on television" (Boone, 1995). *Toronto Sun*—"as finely Canadian as anything our industry has ever produced" (Slotek, 1996). *Vancouver Sun*—"one of the most successful series ever produced in Canada" (Strachan, 1996).

encompassing and inclusive that romance is, is debatable.<sup>65</sup> Moreover and significantly, no one ever defines what makes the series distinctively Canadian, perhaps with the exception of its PEI locale—even though the program was made largely in southern Ontario. The Canadianness of the content is assumed and, more than anything else, tied to geography rather than perspective, theme or outlook.

However, part of the appeal for Bernstein of using Montgomery's stories as the foundation for a CBC television drama was the author's recognition-value within Canada as a Canadian icon. In other words, Montgomery's national significance was meant to enhance the perceived cultural value of the CBC as a transmitter of Canadian stories. In the early '90s, during *Road to Avonlea's* run, the CBC still featured American programming in its afternoon and primetime schedule. This situation served to underscore *Road to Avonlea's* distinctiveness by virtue of its Otherness in relation to the American programming. For this reason, the CBC enthusiastically regarded *Road to Avonlea* as "Canada's first authentic runaway hit" in its Annual Report for the 1989-1990 season (1990, p. 8).<sup>66</sup>

In the CBC's view, *Road to Avonlea* was 100 percent Canadian content—it featured Canadian stories and characters, took place in a Canadian setting, and used Canadian talent both on and off the screen. The crew, the writers, and the ensemble cast were all Canadian. Bernstein is clear that without these characteristics, the CBC would have had no involvement in the production:

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<sup>65</sup> Along these lines, *Road to Avonlea* did not resonate in Quebec in the same way that it did in English-language Canada. The series received favourable coverage in the English-language newspaper the *Montreal Gazette*. But in searching databases for French-language newspapers (at the time, I had access to two), I was unable to find any reviews or feature articles pertaining to the series. In interview, Bernstein confirmed that the series was not as successful in Quebec as in the rest of Canada. A good indicator of the series' lacklustre performance here is the fact that Radio-Canada did not air all seven seasons. First-run episodes of *Les Contes d'Avonlea*, as the drama was known in Quebec, aired on Radio-Canada between 1992 and 1997, and only for the first four seasons. Furthermore, in 1996, Radio-Canada dropped the series from prime time and began airing it on late afternoons. My thanks to Paul Therrien of CBC Research for providing me with scheduling information.

<sup>66</sup> This statement demonstrates short-term memory, considering that several CBC shows from the 1950s, such as *Don Messer's Jubilee*, routinely captured two million Canadian viewers a week at a time when the country's population was considerably smaller. Granted, the broadcast universe was also smaller and less fractured.

This was what was so unique and great about it [the series]. That Disney paid that much for it and yet they respected that aspect of it [the Canadian locale]. We didn't have to pretend we were in Idaho. Well, we wouldn't have. CBC wouldn't have, pure and simple. ... It's just not what we do. We're not interested in that kind of programming.

Moreover, it was *Road to Avonlea's* Canadian content that made it a suitable candidate for the CBC's Family Hour at 7 p.m. on Sundays. Family Hour is "always wholly Canadian," Bernstein explains, "it's always set somewhere." To put it another way, the CBC's definition of Canadian content exceeded the requirements of the points system to encompass questions of content in addition to the creative team's citizenship. The series' regional aspect—its Atlantic Canadian roots—also appealed to the CBC, as one of its objectives was to "reflect Canada and its regions to national audiences," though it recognized the series was made in Toronto, even if it was set in PEI (CBC, 1993, p. 20). Regional setting and Montgomery's iconic status in this country—as opposed to theme, perspective, or mode of address—function here as markers of Canadianness, and presumably have a special resonance for Canadian viewers.

However, these markers slide into Morris' notion of export-drive allegory, as supported by the CBC's contention that the sale of *Road to Avonlea* to other countries has had a spin-off benefit, namely strengthening tourism on PEI (CBC, 1994, p. 12). Montgomery is big business on the island of her birth, generating tourism since 1908, the very first year *Anne of Green Gables* was published. But 1985 also heralded a new phase in Montgomery's popularity, sparked by the publication of the first volume of the *Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* and by Sullivan's enormously popular television adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables*. Shelagh J. Squire (1992, p. 144) notes that visitors to the Green Gables heritage site stewarded by Parks Canada rose dramatically—by 52 percent—between 1985, when the first Sullivan *Anne* aired, and 1986.<sup>67</sup> By the early 1990s, nearly 300,000 visitors would be touring Green Gables each year (Baldwin, p. 123; Tye, 1994, p. 126). Meanwhile, Japanese tourism rose steadily from 1,180 visitors in 1986 to an estimated 15,000 in 1991 (Baldwin, p. 124). This spin-off benefit supports the Federal Cultural Policy Review

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<sup>67</sup> Based on Parks Canada data, the numbers increased from 165,124 to 217,292 visitors (Squire, p. 144).



Committee's emphasis on Canadian culture as foreign policy— that is, on representing Canada abroad through our cultural exports, as well as through cultural cooperation (Canada, 1982, p. 317, 327, 332).<sup>68</sup> As York put it in his *Globe and Mail* piece, *Road to Avonlea* gives “a boost to Canada’s world image” as “a land of gentle folk.” The visual presentation of the island constructs an idyllic fantasy that supports ‘Disney innocence’ at the same time that it addresses a tourist’s gaze, inviting visitors to the region and all the apparently pastoral pleasures it provides. When viewed in this way, there is very little difference between the Disney PEI and the Canadian version.

Bernstein also relates that *Road to Avonlea* helped the CBC “cement what is to us a very important franchise.” The CBC’s goal for the Family Hour franchise was to bring together Canadian households for just one hour of the week, instead of family members watching different programs on separate television sets. The CBC had tried out an anthology series in the Family Hour timeslot but it did not draw Canadian families to their sets. “*Road to Avonlea* actually accomplished that,” said Bernstein. “People actually did watch it together... As a public broadcaster it’s extremely important that we have Canadian stories and Canadian characters that families can watch together.” What the corporation had in mind was creating a weekly cultural event for Canadian households, one that would bring all members together in a common experience every Sunday for one hour. This goal goes against the grain of how television is often typically perceived—as a profoundly isolating activity, in which individuals consume privately.

Moreover, the goal of creating a communal television experience spoke to the CBC’s concerns at the time about increasing audience fragmentation. Bernstein explains that the “fragmented broadcast universe” put new pressure on the CBC “to clarify its role as a public broadcaster [by] not doing what everybody else does.” The increasingly fragmented audience for television, witnessed during and, even more so since *Road to Avonlea*’s tenure, gave the CBC’s goal prescience, and fits with the corporation’s recent attempts to carve out a nationally specific mode of address that will differentiate it from the private broadcasters.

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<sup>68</sup> In Canada, the linkage of tourism to television is not just a federal concern. Provincial tourism agencies for Newfoundland and PEI were sponsors of *Random Passage* (2002) and *Emily of New Moon*, respectively, specifically because of the spin-off benefits such productions are hoped to bring to a region.

Certainly, the corporation's reasoning was in keeping with the philosophy of the nation's public broadcaster—specifically, the idea that the CBC can have a socially cohering function in a country as culturally diverse and geographically dispersed as Canada's. Indeed, the desire to forge a cohesive national community through communications has been one of the engines driving Canadian broadcasting policy historically, best summed up by Bernstein: “part of why the CBC was created was to connect the country.”

But getting people to watch together is also a matter of content, and Bernstein expressed that what Canadians watch together has as much importance to the CBC as getting them to watch. Along these lines and unlike The Disney Channel, the CBC viewed *Road to Avonlea's* content as non-generic, specific to Canada, and of particular interest to Canadians. The series served a cultural function markedly different from Disney's interest in the subscription sales *Avonlea* could garner. Moreover, Bernstein had additional concerns about the content, extending beyond its hoped-for cultural specificity to Canadians to encompass social concerns. Besides the notion that content should reflect Canadian settings, stories and characters, Bernstein was concerned that the series also be relevant and accessible to Canadians and portray values that were inclusive despite being in another era.

As I indicated in Chapter 1, Disney was also concerned that contemporary viewers would be able to connect to the series despite the era differences. However, these concerns were expressed in terms of the entertainment value of certain family situations (e.g., sibling rivalry), which is a markedly different concern from the CBC's. According to Bernstein, making Montgomery accessible to the contemporary Canadian viewer involved pruning anachronistic features such as superstitious beliefs and negative attitudes towards spinsters, and taking a more contemporary approach to gender relations. The latter certainly supports my contention that the CBC was more liberal in its understanding of family drama than Disney. As an example, Bernstein discussed the opinionated and willful Hetty King to illustrate her point. According to Bernstein, “if we would have been straight Lucy Maud style, Hetty would have been like that because she's an old maid, as opposed to ‘I'm an old maid, but I like to think of myself as boss of the family.’” Indeed, the series makes it clear that Hetty has deliberately rejected marriage because she values her independence. She enjoys romantic dalliances, but prefers the single life, finding fulfillment in teaching, writing, and raising her niece Sara. These latter, more social concerns speak to the issue of mode of

address, which gets beyond the potential superficiality of distinctively Canadian content, to encompass who the text is addressing and how they are being addressed.

The kind of revisionism Bernstein describes is in fact a well-documented feature of adaptation (Cartmell & Whelehan, 1999; Lupack, 1999), considered next chapter, and can be responsible for watering down the historical and cultural specificity of source texts in the effort to make screen versions accessible and appealing. In fact, the CBC's desires made the series more amenable to The Disney Channel and an international audience, albeit inadvertently, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. However, within the context of Canadian television production, in particular co-production arrangements between Canada and the United States, *Road to Avonlea* is unique. It was able to maintain its geographic integrity in the sense that its Canadian location was not disguised— though ironically, the series was shot primarily at a southern Ontario location disguised as PEI. As Bernstein aptly puts it, “It might have been fantasyland to Disney, but it’s a real environment to Canadians.” Bernstein seems to have been aware that the series embodied a dual address that spoke to Disney’s American viewers in one way and to the CBC’s Canadian viewers in another. The last section theorizes this dual address, and points to some policy implications regarding the question of distinctively Canadian drama.

### *Canada’s Greatest Cultural Export*

Bernstein’s understanding of the series’ dual address corresponds to Mette Hjort’s argument (1996, pp. 528-29) about Danish cinema, produced with an eye towards both international and domestic audiences. The dual orientation of such cultural production, Hjort argues, “supports a minor culture’s politics of recognition” and involves elements that are “opaque, translatable, and international.” Opaque elements are “so firmly rooted within a given national imaginary that international audiences cannot be expected to understand their meaning”—they are not translatable yet they provide the minor culture with points of address not available to the foreign viewer. For instance, when Hetty calls for a Crown injunction to stop an American businessman from buying up Avonlea in “Home Movie”, it has special meanings for the Canadian viewer, familiar with Canada’s British legal heritage and historically uneasy relationship with the U.S. References to Canadian political institutions (Figure 2) and place names (Figure 3) also participate in the “minor culture’s

politics of recognition” of which Hjort writes. This recognition also corresponds to the CBC’s emphasis at this time on Canadianization—on constructing a mode of address that would speak to Canadians as Canadians. Hjort goes on to argue that the potential distance such references create for non-domestic viewers can be bridged by those elements that are translatable and international.

**Figure 2. – References to Canada’s political system in *Road to Avonlea***

Attorney General	Ministry of Public Health
Confederation Party (fictionalized)	Mounties
Daughters of the Dominion	M.P.P. (campaign poster)
Deputy Minister of Education	Ottawa
Dominion Day	Premier
Governor General	Prime Minister
Legislative Assembly	Province/Provincial
Lieutenant Governor of PEI	Wilfrid Laurier (portrait)
Minister of Health	

**Figure 3. – Canadian place names in *Road to Avonlea***

Avonlea*	North Rustico
Baie Comeau	Northwest Passage
British Columbia	Nova Scotia
Canada	Ontario
Cape Breton	Ottawa
Charlottetown	Prince Albert
Dalhousie Medical School	Prince Edward Island
Dalhousie University	Quebec
Fredericton	Rustico
Green Gables*	Saskatchewan
Halifax	Saskatoon
Isle of Prince Edward	St. John
Kingston	St. John’s
Malpeque	Summerside
Maritimes	Toronto
Moncton	Trois Rivieres
Montreal	Vancouver
New Brunswick	Yukon

*\*Asterisk denotes fictional place.*

According to Hjort, elements that are translatable may still have a distinctly national character, but “their cultural specificity does not prevent members of the foreign audience from grasping the relevant meanings.” Hjort gives the example of festive occasions: while cuisine varies from culture to culture, it is still possible to understand the significance

accorded to certain foods during certain times of the year. “In other words, processes of intercultural translation become possible when certain categories of social experience are shared by cultures that are significantly different in other respects” (Hjort, p. 529). For instance, when characters on *Road to Avonlea* celebrate Dominion Day, most Canadian viewers recognize the national holiday that annually fetes Canada’s becoming a sovereign country on July 1, 1867. But not knowing the historical significance of Dominion Day to Canadians does not inhibit the non-Canadian viewer from appreciating it simply as a festive summer holiday.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, elements that have an “international dimension” refer to works that are widely familiar because they have been translated into many languages or adapted into many forms. Montgomery’s novels, for instance, have been translated into more than 15 languages (Baldwin, p. 123). Looking at *Anne of Green Gables* alone, the novel was first translated into Swedish in 1909, in Polish in 1912, and in Japanese in 1952. As Cecily Devereux (2001) points out, the book has “an unbroken print history,” never going out of publication in Canada, and remaining in print consistently in Australia, Britain and the United States. Additionally, the novel has been made into two Hollywood films (1919 and 1934), a CBC musical (1956), a Polish stage play (1963), a Charlottetown stage musical (1965), a Japanese cartoon (1979) and several films for television—in France (1957), Poland (1958), England (1972) and Canada (1985).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Sullivan Entertainment claims to have sold its *Anne of Green Gables* to nearly every television market in the world (Binning, 1999). Certainly, the production company’s use of the Montgomery oeuvre both in the *Anne* miniseries and *Road to Avonlea* exemplifies Hjorte’s notion, and suggests that the cultural portability of these adaptations—their ability to carry off a flexible mode of address—is owing in part to Montgomery’s “international dimension”. When Sullivan Entertainment changes the name of the town from “Carlisle” in the source novels to the widely familiar “Avonlea” for the television incarnation, it’s in recognition of that “international dimension”.

Taken together, *Road to Avonlea* aptly illustrates the relationship of political economy to the content of television drama and the making of a transnational television genre able to

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<sup>69</sup> Appendix H lists additional cultural and historical references.

leverage its dual orientation to satisfy the needs of its co-production partners. Like the context from which it emerged, *Road to Avonlea* is itself a contradiction— a series with a distinctively Canadian setting that also functioned generically in the American and international markets. Certainly, the myth *Road to Avonlea* explodes is that a drama series set in Canada cannot be successful outside of Canada, but rather can become, in the *Montreal Gazette's* words, “Canada’s greatest cultural export” (Boone, 1995)—or more modestly, “Canada’s most popular TV export”, according to Canadian Press (Adilman, 1994a). To its credit, Sullivan Entertainment has distinguished itself from other big players in the Canadian industry, such as Alliance-Atlantis, by insisting that it is possible to succeed internationally with television drama set in Canada (Quill, 1996).

As shown, co-production is synonymous with creative compromise, a method of developing content whereby the differing needs and demands of the partners must be negotiated, resulting in a product with which all producers can be satisfied. The international partnership that brought *Road to Avonlea* to the television screen was a mix of private- and public-sector interests whose desires for the series at times diverged, and at other times overlapped, in the end expressing themselves in the final product. The Disney Channel and the CBC each had different definitions of ‘Avonlea’, rooted in the respective organizational philosophies of these investors. While The Disney Channel regarded the series as a high-quality marketing strategy addressed to prospective consumers, the CBC had cultural objectives in mind around constructing a mode of address deemed appropriate for Canada’s public broadcaster.

Yet in their romance with place, their industry objectives intersected, so that the island, whether specified or indeterminate, becomes a destination landscape for dreamers and tourists alike, making a Disneyland out of distinctively Canadian content. As argued, this intersection crucially served the branding needs of both channels, suggesting a troubling overlap between the aims of Disneyfication and Canadianization. That overlap echoes industry criticisms of the Canadian Television Fund’s “visibly Canadian” bonus, accused of encouraging national stereotypes. Although this bonus was meant to enhance indigenous storytelling, it could easily have supported Morris’s notion of “export-drive allegory”—

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<sup>70</sup> For a complete list of adaptations, see Lefebvre’s “L.M. Montgomery: An Annotated Filmography” (2000).

capitalizing on clichés of your home country to infiltrate foreign markets, or in this case, qualify for public funding domestically. As a case study, *Road to Avonlea* reveals the cultural risks posed in television policy that is linked to tourism and foreign policies, and that responds to the transnationalization of culture through an increasing emphasis on international co-production. In the long run, what does relying on exportable images of Canada that satisfy international fantasies mean to the fostering of a domestic television industry? What happens to storytelling when it is wedded to tourism and export, with inadequate acknowledgement or support given to its cultural and social significance at home?

The example of *Road to Avonlea* also suggests that succeeding internationally and being popular domestically necessitates the use of non-controversial content in combination with a mode of address that is not nationally specific but flexible enough to serve diverse markets. Similarly, even the CBC's cultural objectives regarding relevance, accessibility and inclusiveness make for a philosophical match with the economic objectives of the private sector, i.e., widening the terms of address to appeal to as large a market as possible—or in public broadcasting terms, *as many Canadian citizens* as possible. To put it another way, the CBC's desires around *Road to Avonlea* did not always differentiate it from a private broadcaster's or from Disney's. The question needs to be asked as to what mode of address the CBC has been aiming for exactly in the pursuit of Canadianization—whether broadcasting those elusive markers of Canadianess is enough for a public broadcaster, and whether other goals such as plurality and diversity might also be pursued. In any case, mode of address as a concept holds interesting possibilities as a theoretical enterprise when linked to policy studies of Canadian content. One of these possibilities is the chance to foreground aesthetic and textual concerns, introducing much-needed qualitative analysis into the policy arena, which the rest of this dissertation continues.

### CHAPTER THREE/ GENRE, ADAPTATION, AND THE MAKING OF A BORDERLESS ROMANCE

In the process of interpreting a source text, several contingencies come into play, which the resulting text must negotiate. An adaptation is the result of such a negotiation, as well as being a unique interpretation of the original. The uniqueness of this interpretation speaks to the special conditions of the adaptation's production, which differ from those of the source text. André Bazin (2000 [1948], p. 21) is perhaps the first film theorist to point out what seems obvious but is sometimes neglected in adaptation studies: that novels are not adapted for the screen but for an audience. An adaptation negotiates audience expectations shaped by social history and by industry. What an audience today expects in terms of portrayals of gender, for instance, may differ from those found in a novel from a century ago. The screen version may change such portrayals to accommodate the historically situated sensitivities and fantasies of a contemporary audience—and creative team, who is also located in a specific historical moment. Moreover, Imelda Whelehan (1999, p. 6) notes that the cost of producing a period piece is so great that screen adaptation necessitates targeting a more expansive audience than simply the readership for that book. Though writing of cinema, Whelehan's observations aptly apply to television:

[T]he potential cinema audience of even the most widely read classic will be largely made up of individuals who haven't read the text, and any critical consideration of an adaptation's reception might benefit from recognizing some of the practical realities involved in producing a commercially successful film— such as pruning culturally anachronistic features, trimming sophisticated narrative strategies into a recognizable popular film genre which is, in turn, an adaptation of other films, with intertextual links with its contemporary filmic counterparts (p. 4).

Such “practical realities” shape the outcome of adaptation, and illustrate the interconnectedness of audience expectations and industrial demands. In Canada, cultural policy is also interconnected, as it dictates directly the funding of productions, and indirectly, the direction and content of those productions. Adaptation is therefore best understood as



the interpretation of a textual source and a socio-economic context, one that encompasses non-literary, non-novelistic influences such as industrial conditions and the prevailing ideological climate (McFarlane, p. 21). In this understanding, there can be no definitive adaptation, only new interpretations that shed light on the cultural transformation of source texts.

Several works of scholarly criticism bring to light issues regarding the effects of adaptation on the meaning of Montgomery's romances for contemporary audiences.<sup>71</sup> By and large, this criticism focuses on character point of view and narrative events, and attempts to historically situate perceived differences in execution and meaning mostly with respect to the (potentially) feminist portrayal of gender. The scholarly focus on gender in the adaptations is not surprising given the feminist interest in Montgomery, her works and her life<sup>72</sup> yet it does create some omissions. The main omission, save for Christopher Gittings' analysis (1998) of *Emily of New Moon*, is the political-economic context in which these Canadian television productions occur. Because of this, we miss out on learning about the conditions for the production of indigenous drama in Canadian television, and the impact on meaning and content. Neglected is the understanding that screenwriters are adapting for a television audience and not for an audience of readers—they are adapting for people who have not necessarily read Montgomery. Though Montgomery's name carries cachet because of her writings, it does so in Canada whether or not one has read her books. As Ann F. Howey (2002, p. 170) states, "Sullivan's films depend less on faithfulness to source texts and more on the sheer recognition of name." Moreover, writers and producers are additionally adapting for investors such as the CBC and Telefilm Canada, with their respective policy mandates, and for an anticipated export market, with its particular set of industrial demands.

Indeed, as this chapter shows, the demands of adaptation are coterminous with those of co-production. In television, co-production affects both the kind of content chosen to adapt and the way in which that content is subsequently shaped in the adaptation. Generalized locations, simplified themes, and tried-and-true genres facilitate the portability of content across regional or national divides. Content is diluted, and cultural specificity is

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<sup>71</sup> For examples, see Frever (1998), Drain (1987), Howey (2002), Lefebvre (2002) and Poe (2002).

<sup>72</sup> For examples, see Åhmansson (1991), Reimer (1992) and Rubio (1994).

minimized, making for programs that travel well and are open to hybridized interpretations. After all, co-production demands that content meets the needs of the partners involved and, more pointedly, connects with or is accessible to the national/regional audiences targeted by the co-producers. Co-producing a period piece such as *Road to Avonlea* carries with it additional implications revolving around the construction of a historical past suited to more than one national market. Using the conventions of the costume drama and the domestic melodrama, *Road to Avonlea* flattens the historical past and creates a borderless romance as easily at home on The Disney Channel as on the CBC or on any of the other channels where the series aired internationally. Adaptation contributes to the transformation of Montgomery's imaginary Avonlea into a place not bound to the specifics of history or geography, and constructs a mode of address appropriate to a generic industrial drama.

In a series of personal interviews that I conducted in the fall of 2001, *Road to Avonlea* writers<sup>73</sup> suggested, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, that the reason for Disney's lack of concern over the Canadian locale was the lack of specificity in the series itself. The setting could function just as easily as turn-of-the-century PEI, thereby satisfying the CBC's Cancon concerns, as an island of the imagination. Conkie said that, although *Road to Avonlea* "was a Canadian story, it was also the story of an island, and there are islands everywhere. I think [that's what] made it such a hit worldwide." Indeed, the series was known as *Stories from the Island* in Iran, where in 1998, it became the highest-rated television drama in the history of Iranian television, attracting 75 percent of the television audience (York). Nathan maintained that Disney executives "bought the series because it was quaint and colonial. And the fact that it never really mentioned anywhere that it was Canada." She said that the one time she did mention a real event in Canadian history—the War of 1812—she received a call from Los Angeles questioning the claim that Canada won that conflict with the United States. Tellingly, Nathan, who had immigrated to Canada from the United States in the early

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<sup>73</sup> In selecting writers to interview, I compiled a list of those who had made the most contributions to the series over its seven-season run. Out of an "A-list" of seven, I secured interviews with four people. Two of these—Heather Conkie and Lucie Hall—were involved in the early years of the series, and consequently, worked closely with the Montgomery material, adapting it for the television screen. The other two—Deborah Nathan and Raymond Storey—were involved in later seasons, and at that point, were instructed to invent original stories while carrying on in the spirit of Montgomery and maintaining the series' continuity.

1970s, claimed that she never used her knowledge of both countries and their histories while writing for the series.<sup>74</sup>

Along these lines, Storey explained that details regarding Canadian history or the Canadian political scene of the early 1900s—the setting of *Road to Avonlea*—had to be avoided. On the series, characters frequently refer to Canadian places, such as Charlottetown, Halifax or Montreal, and will sometimes make reference to the Lieutenant Governor of PEI or other titular officials. These references provide local colour, but knowledge of their significance within Canada is not essential to the meaning and enjoyment of the series because there are never any specific references to Canadian historical figures or events of the era.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, even when Rachel Lynde refers to Temperance, it serves only as a means to highlight her character's self-righteousness. Moreover, Nathan is quite right in her assessment that the series rarely names Canada as the country of origin, whereas Prince Edward Island and especially “the island” garner mentions with far more regularity.<sup>76</sup> Taken together, such a strategy facilitates the construction of a period setting cut off from history and geography, Canadian or otherwise, making the series open to appropriation by Canadian, American, and international viewers. *Road to Avonlea* emerges as a transnational television genre, a borderless romance flexible enough to traverse the boundaries of culture, region, or nation.

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<sup>74</sup> Email to the author, Nov. 7, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> With the exception of the reunion movie *Happy Christmas, Miss King* (1998), which takes place during the Great War.

<sup>76</sup> Based on my viewing of all 91 episodes. To the best of my abilities as the sole investigator, I noted references to places, as well as other cultural or historical markers that might identify the setting. In the first season, Canada is not mentioned by name. The first reference comes in episode 19 or the sixth one of the second season entitled “May the Best Man Win.” Jasper mentions to Olivia his dream of travelling across Canada—which, funnily enough, doesn't necessarily situate the series within Canada, as anyone can have that dream though it probably helps to be Canadian. There are no mentions of Canada again until the sixth season, when Hetty encourages Sara to see her country in the episode “Comings and Goings”. In the series' finale the following year, Felix mentions reading a brochure, “Opportunities for Young Men in Canada,” and joins the navy.

## *The Look and the Feel of the Past*

What is a borderless romance? What are the characteristics of a transnational television genre? In other words, how can a series with Canadian settings and Canadian characters not be Canadian? *Road to Avonlea* owes its flexibility to its period setting, which provides us with the look and the feel of the past, a nonspecific ‘pastness’ that is the pleasing visual stage for stories of family, friendship, and community that are simple enough thematically to be international friendly. Such flexibility of period setting and story is in keeping with the conventions of costume drama and domestic melodrama, genres from which *Road to Avonlea* borrows.<sup>77</sup>

Marcia Landy (1991, p. 210) provides a useful definition of the costume drama: “Unlike the historical films, which claim to re-enact the lives and actions of prominent individuals [e.g., military heroes, monarchs, composers, etc.] with some accuracy, the costume dramas are fictional and play loosely with historical contexts, transposing history into romance.” The costume drama uses all the outward trappings of the historical film (i.e., the period setting, the costumes, the *mise-en-scène*, etc.), but it does not claim to document historical events or the lives of historical figures. As in *Road to Avonlea*, characters and situations are purely imaginary, with the historical setting functioning as a pastoral, sometimes dramatic, backdrop for romance and adventure.

This loose treatment of history allows viewers to appropriate issues explored in the costume drama as contemporary with their own. As Landy (1994, p. 135) says elsewhere, “The specific time of the events recedes, and they become . . . transhistorical and timeless and, therefore, as relevant for the present as for the past.” In this way, the costume drama creates a sense of continuity between past and present through the portrayal of concerns that have contemporary resonance—for instance, concerns about women’s roles or the place of the family in society (Bruzzi 1993, pp. 233–5; Landy, 1994, p. 126). Such discussions of the costume drama demand a recognition of this genre as a particular kind of romantic fantasy—

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<sup>77</sup> To analyze *Road to Avonlea* and its construction of the past, I turned to two areas of study that I found particularly relevant. Film studies offered analysis of the period piece as a recognizable genre with its own codes and conventions. This genre analysis was helpful in determining the mode of address *Road to Avonlea* constructs. Studies of the heritage industry were important to thinking through the representation of the past in popular culture and the implications for historical understanding.

one in which contemporary desires, anxieties, and fears find safe expression through displacement into a period setting. Typical of the romantic tradition in which it is rooted, costume drama's working through of modern concerns constructs a past that is thematically familiar yet visually exotic, relevant yet remote.

On *Road to Avonlea*, one predominant theme suggests such a fantasy displacement of contemporary concerns. It involves the female characters that, at various points during the series, confront questions regarding their gender roles. Each struggles with notions of work, love, family, and independence as means to self-actualization, inflecting *Road to Avonlea* with a liberal feminist perspective not really suited to its historical setting. Additionally, the women represent an array of lifestyle options (within the bounds of middle-class heterosexuality), offering something for everyone: single with a career and raising a child (Hetty), married with children and a career (Olivia), and married with children and no career (Janet). Each is positively rendered, and each is constructed as a deliberate choice. Hetty chose to be a spinster in order to focus on her career, Janet chose to be the housewife to a farmer, and Olivia chose to balance marriage with a career.<sup>78</sup> Hetty is entirely a Sullivan invention, Janet is a fairly close incarnation of her novelistic predecessor, and Olivia bears only a physical resemblance to her textual counterpart, who has no career aspirations whatsoever. Moreover, the fact that the women are maternal makes the series' liberal feminism easier to swallow in contexts that might not otherwise favour flagrant displays of female independence. Nevertheless, in the world of the series, it is a desirable and uncontested 'given' that middle-class women would want and should have the above array of options available to them.

Indeed, the *variety* of choices not the lack of choices poses challenges for Felicity, who in several episodes agonizes over which path to choose ("Felicity's Perfect Beau", "Otherwise Engage", "A Time to Every Purpose"). This situation is markedly different from

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<sup>78</sup> Counselling her daughter on the choices available to her, Janet tells Felicity: "I was married young and I've been very happy. But Hetty chose a career over a family and has been very happy. Olivia squeezed in a career and a family and has been very very happy" ("Felicity's Perfect Beau"). Commenting on the female audience for the series, Nathan noted, "You could choose to watch between Hetty and Olivia and Janet—the adult women. They were all different, representing completely different kinds of women—and the same on the younger level, representing different kinds of women. So I think [the series] satisfied the women's audience in that way when there wasn't any other programming, well before Xena or Buffy."

Montgomery's, when presenting middle-class women with such choices would not have been viewed in common-sensical terms. However, the series' concerns with career, women's roles and family are not completely alien to Montgomery's era given the rise of the New Woman and Montgomery's own struggles with balancing a writing career with marriage and motherhood. At the same time, *Road to Avonlea* inflects these shared concerns with a new sensibility that accepts modern liberal-feminist takes on gender as the norm. For instance, on the series, no one ever expresses the era-appropriate expectation that Olivia King will give up her career at *The Avonlea Chronicle* once she becomes Mrs. Jasper Dale. Likely for this reason, the female fans participating in my questionnaire on *Road to Avonlea* did not have much to say about the incongruity between the women's roles and the period setting. The apparent naturalness of the series' portrayal of womanhood stems from its use of modern liberal-feminist values, which would seem common-sensical to the American and Canadian women participating in the study (see Chapter 6). The period setting provides both an exquisite backdrop for the exploration of present-day anxieties and a lush escape from reality, making *Road to Avonlea* both relevant and escapist at the same time, and equally matched to the CBC's interest in relevance and Disney's desire for escapism. More significantly, the setting constitutes what Andrew Higson (1993, p. 113) would term a "modern past", in which olden-day artifacts merge with contemporary concerns, producing a pastiche of yesterday and today. The Edwardian Canadian setting—to which great attention was paid and no detail spared—establishes a look for the series, but does not give us a view of that era's concerns or values since stories are told from a contemporary perspective tailored to the expectations of modern viewers.

These expectations are in turn influenced by popular culture (e.g., familiar narrative trajectories and conventional generic forms) and social history (e.g., beliefs about gender or family that make one era different from another). According to Nathan, writing for *Road to Avonlea* entailed staying "within the confines of what the series is and also within the confines of the period ambience. We weren't complete sticklers... [T]he ways in which we handled some of the stories were very contemporary." In particular, Nathan cited the Sara Stanley and Olivia King Dale characters as "forward-looking" and "independent", meaning "you could do everything in terms of a modern feminist point of view." Conkie concurred with this view, stating "We gave the women a more contemporary idea of what they were capable of and what they could aspire to do." At the same time, both writers, along with

Storey, credited Montgomery for creating active, intelligent, strong-willed female characters to work with. "I think we were being true to ourselves as well as to Montgomery, as well as to what we would have wanted for women at that point," Conkie explained, who also thought that the show's contemporary feminist sensibility was an unconscious effort. "I think it just happened because that's what we would expect to write. We are not going to write women down." Perhaps for this reason the younger women are also updated from novel to screen: unlike the novel, Sara has no ambition to be as good a cook as Felicity, and as the seasons unfold, Felicity herself drops her interest in the domestic arts as career aspirations take hold. This reading of *Road to Avonlea* as a liberal-feminist romance fits with arguments made about the Sullivan *Anne* adaptations. According to Frever (1998) and Howey (2002), career and marriage are simultaneously possible for the televisual Anne, not so for the novelistic Anne (and only with great emotional cost for the real-life Montgomery). Yet in her television incarnation, Anne can have it all; she is a modern woman as easily at home in 1905 as in 1985. The novels are thus adapted for an audience who wants Anne to have both career and marriage. As Frever (1998, p. 47) puts it, "the creation of a heroine who pursues both marriage and career simultaneously speaks to contemporary visions of womanhood."

Writers' expectations about gender influence characterization and the direction of story, but there are additional influences as well. Any genre carries with it the implicit assumption that certain audience expectations will be met; a genre is in fact a nonverbal contract between creator and viewer. With costume drama, expectations are geared around its ability to deliver the look and the feel of the past, with characters and situations that are believable and relevant to the present-day viewer. Certainly, the CBC's research into the Canadian audience for *Road to Avonlea* recognizes these expectations and measures the ability of the series to meet them. For each season, the CBC's index measures viewers' enjoyment of each main character as well as storyline, dialogue, acting, pace, settings, and photography. In the 1991-92 season, the look of the program appeared as an additional index but was replaced for the remainder of the series by costumes as a measure of audience appreciation.<sup>79</sup> With the exception of the 1993-94 season, settings, photography, costumes, and look scored

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<sup>79</sup> Humour appeared as an index in 1989-90, 1994-95 and 1995-96, and music in 1993-94 (CBC Research).

higher with audiences than storyline and dialogue, also often surpassing acting and easily beating out the other categories. This scenario likely prompted *Montreal Gazette* journalist Tony Atherton (1996) to report that one reason Sullivan decided to stop making episodes of *Road to Avonlea* “was because he thought the show was getting more recognition for its costumes than its performances.”

For some cultural critics, costume drama’s use of a nonspecific and spectacular past carries problematic implications for audience reception and meaning—implications that seem to be confirmed by the CBC’s audience data. According to Higson, costume drama fetishizes the past as an object disconnected from history (p. 113). Martin A. Hipsky (1994, p. 102) makes the same point, arguing that the setting is superfluous to the plot; the setting becomes excessive spectacle, providing the audience with visual pleasure and an escapist fantasy outside history. Kevin Walsh (1992, p. 149) discusses a similar phenomenon within urban regeneration that he terms “heritagization,” defined as “the ahistoric aestheticization of space, through the exploitation of historical images.” Heritagization wallpaper over urban decay and de-industrialization, while it simultaneously destroys regional identities in the production of a sanitized, standardized past. These representations are often marked by a retreat to a pastoral condition, away from the taint of urbanization and industrialization and the social ills associated with them. In other words, the past is rendered as postcard. As well, the period-less quality of nature and landscape aids the portrayal of the past as innocent and safe—free of the contagion that plagues the modern world. Certainly, such a claim could be made for *Road to Avonlea*. Although it occasionally incorporates poor or working-class characters, the series revolves for the most part around the trials and tribulations of the middle-class Kings and their generally comfortable, genteel existence as landowning farmers or creative professionals. They live, work, and play in a park-like setting dotted with picture-book houses and accessorized with pinafores and horse-drawn buggies. Canada’s Edwardian past floats as an object disconnected from history, available for uncritical consumption rather than understanding or critique.<sup>80</sup> Nathan best summed up the experience of working on a program that adheres to such conventions, when she likened writing for *Road to Avonlea*

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<sup>80</sup> My observations here are indebted to the literatures on nostalgia, the historical film, and the heritage industry. See Chase & Shaw (1989), Rosenstone (1995), and Walsh (1992), respectively.



to “writing a fantasy. You’re on an island that’s stuck in a period of time, and the whole idea of course [is] that it’s very beautiful to look at, no matter what.”

### *The Past as Melodrama*

Moreover, as film historian Sue Harper (1987, p. 179) argues, costume drama produces “a vision of ‘history’ as a country where only feelings reside, not socio-political conflicts.” Aspects of domestic melodrama contribute strongly to costume drama’s apolitical and ahistorical construction of the past. Christine Gledhill (1987, p. 19) defines melodrama as modernity’s “central cultural paradigm”, while Peter Brooks (1976, p. 21) says that it is an all-encompassing “mode”, a way of experiencing and constructing the world unique to modernity. Not simply a genre, melodrama permeates much of Western popular culture, and perhaps even some non-Western culture, evolving into an international style as a result of Hollywood’s global reach. But melodrama first found its expression in the theatre of late-eighteenth-century France, and it was a cultural and philosophical response to changes in the Western world since the 1700s, a period marked by challenges to traditional institutions such as the church and the monarchy. For this reason, the French Revolution is a key moment, marking the inauguration of republicanism and the separation of church and state.

The ensuing de-sacralization of society—the movement toward secular humanism or philosophical liberalism—demarcates the West’s shift from tradition to modernity and owes a debt to Enlightenment thinking, specifically the notion that, by freeing individuals from superstition and institutionalized morality, they would act virtuously and responsibly on their own. The emphasis on individuals and their ethical consciousness explains melodrama’s preoccupation with internalized, personalized moral codes not dependent on an external moral authority. Melodrama dramatizes how we are supposed to conduct ourselves in a post-sacred world; it is also an attempt to re-sacralize the world—to make it morally legible—by rewarding virtue and punishing villainy. This re-sacralization involves heightening the everyday world through hyperbole and excess—in other words, making the ordinary and the personal sacred. The purpose is to create meaningfulness in a world bereft of moral authority (Brooks, pp. 1–23).

The episode “Someone to Believe In”, which ostensibly begins as a foray into Canadian politics of the time and ends up instead as a lesson on responsible fatherhood,

aply illustrates the thematic trajectory of melodrama and the implications for historical representation. Here, a federal politician John Hodgson, leader of the fictionalized Confederation Party, presents Alec with the opportunity to run for political office. Alec excitedly ponders the ways in which he could help the island's farmers with the problem of increasing freight rates that are "out of hand" and that benefit the railroad, a powerful lobbying force in government. But Alec learns that the party courting him accepts campaign contributions from the railroad, and as a result, John asks Alec to keep silent on his ideas regarding freight rates until after the election. A parallel, though equally important, plot involves John's daughter Adeline, a kleptomaniac acting out against her busy, dismissive and inattentive father. Felix discovers Adeline's secret and reveals it to John in order to get justice for his friend Albert, who is wrongly accused of stealing the money Adeline proffered. John tries to bribe Felix into silence, but Alec points out his son only wants justice not money and that the reason Adeline is stealing "is obviously something is making her unhappy" as she does not need the money. John chastises Alec— "Keep your small-town paltry homespun advice to yourself!" he spits. However, homespun advice, i.e., the personal ethical code by which ordinary people like Felix and Alec conduct them selves wins the day if not at the level of power and politics, then at the more sacred, individual and moral level. As Alec puts it, "There's lots of ways to make a difference, Felix. One of the most important is how you raise your children. I couldn't be more proud of you if you'd been elected Prime Minister."

The episode relies on melodrama to resolve Alec's ethical dilemma, and more importantly, to make his ordinariness meaningful. Even though Alec rejects a life of politics and will remain an ordinary man, he is rewarded with a virtuous son, a sign of his own virtue as a good and responsible father. Meanwhile, John is punished— not for being an unethical politician but for being a bad father. His villainy is rewarded with a liar and a thief for a daughter. But keeping the episode within the bounds of family entertainment, Adeline expresses remorse and promises not to steal again. The episode makes use of a vaguely referenced Canadian political scene as historical window-dressing; the real story is who makes a better father. As a result, history is 'melodramatized' through an emphasis on so-called universal constants of human feeling that obscure the specificity, diversity, and richness of the past—that is, the social and cultural conditions that make one time and place

different from another. As in romance, feelings domesticate the past, closing the gap between 'then and now'.

Melodrama's extreme personalization of social experience accounts for costume drama's apolitical, ahistorical, even borderless quality. The episode "Aunt Janet Rebels", discussed in Chapter 1, does not make specific references to Canadian history, even though the story line involves the issue of women's suffrage. In fact, Canada is never mentioned since the episode does not make it explicit which government is being petitioned for the vote. As melodrama, "Aunt Janet Rebels" focuses on the personal—the impact of Janet's political activities on family life and her relationships within the community. On *Road to Avonlea*, melodrama severs distinctively Canadian content from the specifics of time and place.

Moreover, film and television often rely on traditional narrative forms that construct the past from a first-person point of view, which further individualizes and personalizes history and, consequently, "denies the existence of history as process" and "promotes synchronous pasts" (Walsh, p. 104). The result is the creation of historical empathy rather than historical understanding. Historical empathy naturalizes the status quo (e.g., it's always been that way, they aren't so different from us), and further contributes to the non-specificity of the past. To put it another way, melodrama constructs a past that is not foreign enough. Yet a paradox emerges in costume drama: the past is foreign enough for us to enjoy its visual pleasures but not so foreign that we cannot relate to it as an audience.<sup>81</sup> As Sullivan says, "The period aspect... is distant enough for an audience to get entertainment value out of it. But it's still relevant enough that they can see something of their own lives in it" (quoted in Adilman, 1994b).

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<sup>81</sup> The CBC miniseries *Random Passage* (2002) is a recent good example. *Random Passage*, a co-production with Ireland, makes effective use of Newfoundland's spectacular geography as a scenic backdrop for the struggles of a remote, nineteenth-century fishing-village. That the landscape played a major role was reinforced by the fact that the tourism branch of the Newfoundland government was a key sponsor of the miniseries. However, there were few references to the events or the politics of the day, making the distinctively Canadian setting window-dressing for a melodramatic tale of virtue rewarded and villainy punished—in the words of the official web site, "A Story about Love and Survival." The mode of address was in keeping with that of an international co-production and the pressure to appeal to viewers located in more than one national market. At the same time, the immigrant narrative may have transcultural resonance with displacement a recognizable feature of contemporary geopolitics and a defining experience of the twentieth century.

The reason is that the specific content of domestic melodrama serves to make the imagined past accessible and familiar to the contemporary transnational viewer. The domestic melodrama, or soap opera, as it is better known, is international in scope and popularity and features multiple, interweaving narrative arcs with stories that revolve around interpersonal and kin relationships in a long-term, serial format (Barker, 1997, pp. 92–3). Although lighter in tone than strictly adult-oriented soap opera, *Road to Avonlea* shares many of domestic melodrama’s features, including long-running story arcs and a focus on personal and family relationships, which, along with the pastoral invocation of a genteel ‘pastness’ account for its ability to travel well. Nathan felt strongly that the series’ cross-cultural appeal stemmed from its dramatization of moral choice: “It’s about who we are as human beings, how we make decisions, and how our decisions affect or influence the moral values of our society.” Several studies on the international popularity of the America soap opera *Dallas* (1978-1991) support Nathan’s contention. These studies suggest that viewers of diverse cultural backgrounds are drawn to the moral dilemmas characters face, and that stories in which characters confront moral challenges are of transcultural appeal (Ang, 1985; Katz & Liebes, 1990; Silj, 1988). Along these lines, *Road to Avonlea* fans I surveyed in Chapter 6 indicate that some of the most appealing episodes were those in which characters negotiate personal challenges. This theme was repeated in their identification of Felicity and Gus as favourite characters. Respondents mentioned that watching these characters face personal challenges, and transform themselves as a result, constituted a significant part of their appeal. Moreover, in identifying the series’ message, fans noted interpersonal issues as the main focus of the series, highlighting the importance of family and community and of behaving responsibly toward others.<sup>82</sup>

Along these lines, *Road to Avonlea* dramatizes the characters’ struggles to make moral choices in a secular world—sometimes with comic, sometimes with serious, effect. In keeping with Montgomery’s concerns, both child and adult characters negotiate how their choices as individuals affect those around them—whether family members, friends, or the community at large. The younger characters often face the consequences of irresponsible choices. For instance, when Felicity accepts a bet to makeover the shy and unwitting

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 6 for a full discussion.

Clemmie, she makes Clemmie miserable about herself, and loses her friendship in the process. Of course, by the end, Felicity is remorseful that her actions have hurt a dear friend, all is forgiven, and a lesson is conveyed about being your self (“Felicity’s Challenge”). Whether themes range from the fairly juvenile to the emotionally complex, episodes show the ripple effect of individual decisions. For example, when Alec survives an accident in which his childhood friend Emmett drowns, he deals with his feelings of guilt and sense of responsibility to the widow (“Evelyn”). Taking on the management of two farms, his own and his dead friend’s, Alec incurs his wife’s jealousy and sets the town gossiping over the time he spends with Evelyn, the deceased’s considerably younger wife. The episode is resolved once Alec confronts his sense of guilt, and Evelyn realizes she must learn independence if she is to build a new life.

These stripped-down stories of kinship and communal ties are eminently translatable, and form the essence of international friendly drama. ‘Avonlea,’ as a fictional construct, circulates as no place but ‘home’—provided that the setting functions as a pleasing prop and does not locally inflect the story to such a degree that it alienates non-local viewers. *Road to Avonlea*’s mythic invocation of rural Edwardian Canada is apparently not so alien, for it is peopled with characters who face challenges familiar to anyone who is part of a family or a community. They just happen to dress funny. It is not surprising, therefore, that CBC Research found that the majority of *Road to Avonlea* viewers surveyed considered the series “involving” and “believable,” while a minority regarded it as “unrealistic” and “trivial.”<sup>83</sup>

### *Of Pot Boilers and Regional Idylls*

In adapting Montgomery’s characters and stories for television, a watering down of historical specificity occurred. According to Bernstein, the CBC wanted the series to retain “the flavour of Lucy Maud Montgomery,” yet have “a contemporary flair.” In other words, the aim was to create a point of address for the modern viewer. But when it comes to

adapting Montgomery's romances for the contemporary screen, are they in fact so regionally or historically specific that a watering down must occur? There is debate over the degree to which Montgomery's writing is indeed specific to time and place, whether her work reflects PEI tradition and culture or even a broadly defined Canadian ethos.<sup>84</sup> My position is contradictory because of Montgomery's own contradictions, which I believe lend her writings to different interpretations and account for her international popularity as well as the longevity of her work. I agree with Janice Fiamengo in her conference paper (2000) that Montgomery's use of the English Romantic tradition makes her construction of place nonspecific, "an already ordered park-like nature populated by elfin spirits and ancient pagan deities." Shirley Wright's view (1982, p. 180) seems to support this reading. Wright points out that Montgomery gives an incomplete picture of Prince Edward Island because she focuses on life on the land and refers to the sea infrequently. And Virginia Careless (1992), who has studied historical details in Montgomery's work in order to situate *Anne of Green Gables*, argues that the novel is so full of historical inaccuracies that coming up with a definitive timeline is impossible. Setting seems to function in Montgomery's work in the same way that it does in costume drama—as a nonspecific evocation of 'pastness.'

To say that Montgomery evokes a romantic 'pastness' to construct her nostalgic imaginings of childhood and growing up gives us only part of the picture. Literary scholars have turned to social history to illustrate the links between her stories and the PEI culture from which she came. They point out that her writing style mimics the island's oral traditions. For instance, Diane Tye (1993, pp. 130–1) argues that Montgomery makes use of the "women's talk" of rural islanders. The female characters exchange narratives of family and neighbours, of personal experience and past lore. On the island, as in Montgomery's books, this talk fashions a history for the community and forges its identity. Joyce-Ione Harrington Coldwell (1980) and Frances M. Frazer (1976) offer similar readings. Frazer shows that Montgomery uses actual episodes from her family's history and from local legend

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<sup>83</sup> Based on seasonal averages. Data for 1992-93 were unavailable. "Involving": 87%; "believable": 84 %; "trivial": 17% (measured first season only); "unrealistic": 16% (measured 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1993-94 only). Other indices used both consistently and inconsistently were the following: too slow paced, entertaining, boring, too sentimental, well written, confusing, amateurish, good family show, worth watching, heart-warming, charming, exciting, and thought provoking (CBC Research).

<sup>84</sup> See Åhmansson for a summary of this debate.

as the stuff of her romances. Likewise, Coldwell illustrates that Montgomery's preferences for an episodic narrative structure and conversation to develop character and plot demonstrate the influence that island folklore and storytelling had on her writing style. Mary Rubio (1999) adds to these observations and shows that Montgomery draws on the storytelling tradition of the island's Scottish cultural milieu and on the general ethos of Presbyterianism. She argues that Montgomery's thematic concerns regarding education and self-improvement, morality and social conduct, storytelling and community emerge from the island's Scots-Presbyterian legacy. Along these lines, T.D. MacLulich (1983, pp. 490-2) refers positively to Montgomery as a writer of the "regional idyll," with themes, settings, and "local colour" specific to the place where the PEI author grew up.<sup>85</sup> Delving into the island's social history helps to situate Montgomery's stories culturally, regionally, and historically. We are better able to appreciate her tales as speaking from and about a time and a place now lost to us.

However, Montgomery was also in the business of writing generic fiction and even referred to her stories as "pot-boilers" (Montgomery, 1985, p. 270). As Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (1995, p. 12, 34) report, early in her career Montgomery knew that she was "fitting her fiction to the market" and deliberately "settled for the production of less prestigious but more lucrative wares." With this industrious attitude toward writing, Montgomery strove to come up with "marketable ideas," as she herself put it (Montgomery, 1985, p. 270). She created what Rubio and Waterston describe as "light fiction, schoolday tales, love stories, courtship stories, [and] tales of gothic terror in dark and ghostly settings" (p. 44). In these stories, Montgomery would, as she says, "lug a moral into most of them" to satisfy her publishers (Montgomery, 1985, p. 263). According to Mary Vipond, formulaic domestic fiction, like the kind that Montgomery wrote, featuring uplifting, moral tales full of sentimentality and optimism, peaked in popularity between 1909 and 1918, appearing consistently on American and Canadian best-seller lists. Moreover, Montgomery's writing tapped into the popularity of orphans in literature at the time and into the change in Victorian attitudes toward children (Karr, 2000, p. 130; Wiggins, 1992, p. 35). As Rubio and Waterston report, this attitudinal change fostered a strong market for stories about spirited

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<sup>85</sup> MacLulich is reclaiming a term Desmond Pacey (1967, p. 106) coined to disparage Canadian literature of this sort for its refusal of modernism.

children that appealed alike to children and adults (p. 47). This period introduced not only Anne Shirley to popular culture but also *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1910) and *Pollyanna* (1913).

Moreover, Montgomery's first book publisher L.C. Page accepted *Anne of Green Gables* for publication on the condition that Montgomery wrote a sequel. According to Carole Gerson (1999, p. 53), "Series production peaked during the second decade of the twentieth century, the decade when Montgomery produced most of the *Anne* books." At this time, Gerson explains, girls' series that followed a main character's maturation were especially in demand. The market for serial fiction was lucrative and promising, so publishers commonly demanded a sequel even from an unproven writer. In effect, Gerson notes, the series represented a commodity, a speculative entrepreneurial activity, on which publishers were willing to gamble (pp. 53-54). Page's condition of a second *Anne* book as part of Montgomery's contract had everything to do with the state of commercial publishing at the time and little to do with the quality of *Anne of Green Gables*.

Market conditions and the state of publishing precipitated Anne Shirley's further adventures and influenced the direction of Montgomery's career. Additionally, as a female writer, Montgomery was likely limited to genres, themes and literary styles considered suitably feminine and safe for women (Rubio, 1992, p. 16). In her era, courtship and marriage, home and childhood were appropriate subject matter for women—authors and readers alike. Montgomery's domestic themes therefore owed a debt to the popular American literature of the late nineteenth-century. On the surface, this sentimental fiction dealt with domestic themes that, at a deeper level, revealed concerns with the exercise of power within the home and over the self (Tompkins, 1985, p. 160, 162, 176). This literature also negotiated the ideology of individualism, and offered visions of community, selflessness, connection and empathy as a countervailing tendency (Warren, 1993, p. 5, 10, 15). The sentimental language used to convey these visions bore a religious, even rapturous, quality. Sentiment transformed everyday reality into the source of spirituality and sensation and made the affective experience of day-to-day living transcendent. It elevated the everyday to the spiritual, the domestic to the sacred and offered home as the centre of ritual, intimacy, aesthetic pleasure and fulfillment (Tompkins, pp. 167-171). When Montgomery's Anne Shirley relishes life's seemingly trivial pleasures—whether eating ice cream, waxing poetic over apple blossoms, or wearing puffed sleeves—she is therefore not alone.



Popular literary conventions and societal gender norms, along with personal economic pressures and extraneous market forces, each intertwined and expressed themselves in Montgomery's work. On the personal front, Montgomery found herself the main breadwinner in a household that included her two sons and a mentally unstable husband, a poorly paid country parson. Professionally, Montgomery was contractually obligated to produce sequels on demand for Page and then later for McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart. Her stories though they draw from her own experiences and memories are also generic, borrowing heavily from literary conventions of her era and tied to a formula that she felt economically pressured to follow for both personal and professional reasons.

Given these influences, it is not surprising that Montgomery's fiction speaks to readers and critics on so many different levels—as both regional and transcultural, as both specific and generic. To try to situate her work as either one or the other is an unproductive exercise. What is productive is to consider how the regional and the transcultural, the specific and the generic, get articulated in subsequent interpretations of Montgomery's work, whether at the level of reader response or, for my purposes here, in the process of adaptation. What is emphasized or, conversely, minimized gives us a window to the process of making texts meaningful, of shaping them according to the needs and desires of a context—whether these are explicitly understood or implicitly expressed. *Road to Avonlea* aptly illustrates adaptation's role in shaping a source text to meet the needs and desires of a context. In the process of adaptation, the series opts more for the generic Montgomery than the island Montgomery—as my discussion of costume drama and domestic melodrama already suggests. But adaptation also contributes to making *Road to Avonlea* a generic, borderless romance.

### ***Missing the Boat to the Island***

*Road to Avonlea* centres on the King family, their friends, neighbours and relations in the rural and pastoral, turn-of-the-century community of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island. According to the credits, the series is adapted from two of Montgomery's novels, *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*, and two of her short-story collections, *Chronicles of Avonlea* and *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*. This claim, however, is misleading, as the series is more a loose borrowing from Montgomery rather than an adaptation. Often these borrowings come from

sources that are not credited such as the *Emily* trilogy<sup>86</sup> and the *Anne* books<sup>87</sup> making the series a pastiche of Montgomery material. In fact, Sullivan regarded the series a “montage of pieces” from Montgomery (quoted in Boone, 1996). On the one hand, characters, settings and situations created by Montgomery in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* serve as the basis for the series. On the other hand, the series’ creators display a high degree of poetic license with Montgomery’s entire oeuvre.

In some ways, this poetic license is unavoidable considering that the series covers a longer time period than the two novels that gave the series its foundation. In *Road to Avonlea*, for instance, we see Sara and the King children mature into adults unlike in the two novels. In the first season, *Road to Avonlea* was more of a children’s drama because stories revolve around young Montreal heiress Sara Stanley, and her adjustment to her new life in Avonlea with her spinster-schoolteacher aunt and her cousins, Felicity, Felix and Cecily, who also figure prominently in episodes. As early as the second season, however, the tone and the focus of the series changes from the light-hearted drama about childhood pranks and misadventures that it began as. More and more, the adults share the spotlight with the children in ensemble stories of grown-up joys and sorrows. Additionally, as the child actors grew up, so did their Avonlea characters and the series deals with painful coming-of-age issues. According to CBC audience research, *Road to Avonlea* appealed to adults and children alike, with adults consistently representing more than two thirds of viewers.<sup>88</sup>

Sullivan said he ran out of Montgomery plots halfway through the series’ second season, and began to develop episodes from an idea in Montgomery’s writings rather than depending on those texts to provide entire storylines. “The challenge has been to come up

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<sup>86</sup> Benjamin Lefebvre (1999) discusses the series’ similarity to the *Emily* books, *Emily of New Moon* (1923), *Emily Climbs* (1927) and *Emily’s Quest* (1929). Lefebvre notes Hetty King’s similarity to Elizabeth Murray, and Gus Pike’s to Perry Miller.

<sup>87</sup> These include *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), *Anne of the Island* (1915), *Anne’s House of Dreams* (1917), *Rainbow Valley* (1919), *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921), *Anne of Windy Poplars* (1936) and *Anne of Ingleside* (1939). Marilla Cuthbert, Rachel Lynde, Davey Keith, Dora Keith and Muriel Stacey are *Anne* characters who find a home in the series. Even Gilbert Blythe makes an appearance in the episode “Old Friends, Old Wounds.”

<sup>88</sup> Average audience, composition and share of viewing captured by CBC network programs, 1989 to 1996 television seasons, CBC Research (A.C. Nielsen). Also, Louise Brown (1995) reported in the *Toronto Star* that “a recent CBC survey showed 67 percent of viewers are adults.”

with material that feels like Montgomery,” Sullivan stated in interview (quoted in Boone, 1993). Storey said the goal was to “move forward in the spirit of the [original] stories.” Nathan, interestingly enough, had not read Montgomery when she joined the series’ writing team, but prepared for her new role by watching the 26 episodes that preceded her. So what does it mean to come up with material that feels like Montgomery?

Compared with its source texts, *Road to Avonlea* is even less specific to time and place. Trinna S. Frever (2000) argued this point in a conference paper, demonstrating how regional censorship occurred in the translation of Montgomery’s *The Story Girl* to the screen. Frever discussed an early episode of *Road to Avonlea* called “The Story Girl Earns Her Name.” Frever argued rightly that the series abandons local lore and family legend and that the result is a loss of island specificity. According to Frever,

... several plot/production choices were made in the creation of this series that sadly betray the oral dimension of Montgomery’s novel... One of the most obvious and grievous changes was the decision to make Sara Stanley ‘from away.’ This decision completely berefts Sara of all the rich association with the Island, its language and its oral process, that is such an integral part of the novel (p. 3).

In the television series, Sara comes from Montreal and is the daughter of a wealthy entrepreneur. Her island cousins, whom she meets for the first time, acquaint her with the maternal side of her family and its rural way of life. In the novel, Sara is from Prince Edward Island, and it is she who acquaints her two visiting mainland cousins, Bev and Felix, with the family and its island history. Sara does so by telling stories: she is a consummate storyteller and orator, and her repertoire is drawn largely from family history and local lore. Her knowledge of the island’s past depends on these stories, on this oral tradition. Yet her role as “storytelling ambassador” is “stolen” from her screen incarnation, said Frever, “by her removal from island culture and placement as a visiting relative from Montreal” (p. 4).

The specific chapter to which Frever refers involves a story Sara tells to raise funds for charity. Frever argues that in the novel, we understand her performance as historically and culturally specific: oration is a nineteenth-century entertainment, and the subject matter of Sara’s tale is island history and culture. Her choice of tale, Frever observes, is part of a shared body of island knowledge (p. 8). In the television version, however, the story is changed so that she performs Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Little Match Girl* as part of a

magic lantern show. The series' Sara is not a purveyor of islander tradition or the island's oral history. Rather, she performs a story well known from popular literature.

For Frever, the change from source to adaptation marks a rejection of the oral tradition and a loss of cultural and regional specificity: "The Sullivan adaptation, in its haste to embrace the mainland camera, misses the boat to the Island" (p. 10). To be sure, Frever made some important observations regarding the differences between the television episode and the chapter in the novel and their implications for meaning. However, she made no attempt to understand the conditions in which the Montgomery adaptation takes place. Although she did not situate adaptation within a political-economic framework, we can extrapolate from her work to provide that context and shed light on the complexities of adapting regionally and historically rooted literature for a geographically dispersed, contemporary television audience.

Transforming Sara into a girl from Montreal contemporizes the point of address in the series. In effect, Sara is 'us,' the contemporary urban viewer with little or no experience of rural agricultural life. Her voyage of discovery, both personal and familial, becomes our voyage. Through Sara, a city dweller, we become acquainted with the small farming community of Avonlea. Moreover, while the novel is constructed from Bev's point of view, the series (at least the first three years of it) centres on Sara, the lead character in a drama of growing up. This departure from the novel is significant since Bev the narrator is a boy. Constructing the series as a girl's rite of passage effectively secures the presumed female audience of *Road to Avonlea*<sup>89</sup> and capitalizes on the female audience for period pieces and costume dramas popular in the 1980s and 1990s, including the first two Sullivan *Anne* films. The CBC saw the *Anne* films, and likely by extension *Road to Avonlea*, as part of the corporation's goal of increasing women's visibility on the network (1985, pp. 67–70). Conkie also pointed out that, in adapting the stories for television, Sara was the obvious choice for the main character since she is a typical Montgomery heroine—"incredibly active" in the book—whereas Bev is "a very passive kid."

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<sup>89</sup> Season summaries for the series obtained from CBC Research indicate that the biggest segment of the viewing audience for *Road to Avonlea* is women over eighteen. They comprised forty percent of the viewers consistently over the seven-season run.

Gender is a factor in adaptation, perhaps not a deliberate one here but present nonetheless. Yet other factors influence the process of adaptation. The political-economic context of television production creates conditions that pressure a series such as *Road to Avonlea* to adapt source material to the expectations of both domestic and export audiences. The notion of “cultural discount” has a significant bearing on the process of adaptation and on the creation of the transnational television genre. Hoskins, McFadyen and Finn (1997, pp. 32-3) explain cultural discount as follows:

A particular television programme, film or video rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in the home market where viewers share a common knowledge and way of life, will have diminished appeal elsewhere, as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, history, myths, institutions, physical environment, and behavioural patterns.

Cultural discount can also apply to the diminished appeal of historically specific texts, regardless of the fact that book and reader may share national or regional origins. Adaptation emphasizes the generic aspects of Montgomery’s work and, in the process, de-regionalizes and de-historicizes *The Story Girl*, giving *Road to Avonlea* a flexible mode of address suited to an international market and accessible to present-day Canadian and American viewers. Along these lines, Lefebvre (2002, p. 183) argues for a kind of geographic discount, when he suggests that the filming of *Road to Avonlea* in southern Ontario rather than PEI further unmoors the series from a specific geographical setting. Actor Cedric Smith, who played Alec King, appears to echo this view, when he expressed that he’d “like to see [the series] reflect the Maritimes a bit more. I’d like to see more episodes about the sea, and dealing with the forces of nature.” Smith also wanted stories to reflect the pre-World War I era. Instead, he noted, “I think [*Road to Avonlea*] captures the look of the period really well, although I’m not always sure about its sensibilities... I’m not sure people were like that back then” (quoted in Johnston). All in all, *Road to Avonlea* exemplifies Fletcher’s contention, discussed earlier, that co-productions entail the sacrifice of nationally or culturally specific myths, symbols and sensibilities to enhance portability.

In the process, *Road to Avonlea* downplays aspects of Montgomery’s writing. For instance, the children in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* often discuss the purpose of prayer and other theological concerns, such as what God looks like and what Judgment Day may bring, and the boys have a competition over who can give the best sermon. Their

absence from the series is not surprising. According to Lucie Hall,<sup>90</sup> story editor for the first two seasons, the CBC specifically did not want *Road to Avonlea* to refer to prayer or superstition, which formed part of Montgomery's Presbyterian heritage and island lore, and figured strongly in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*. Moreover, Bernstein and Nathan each indicated that Montgomery's interest in spiritualism—a doctrine, vogue during Montgomery's adult years, and founded on the belief that spirits of the dead can communicate with the living through a medium—was not to be expressed in the series.<sup>91</sup> Hall said that these requests “imposed a revisionist view on the written material” and “had everything to do with being in a modern secular society, no matter what your religion.” For instance, the episode “Vows of Silence” takes a cue from *The Story Girl*'s “Judgment Sunday” chapter, but rather than giving the tale the overtly biblical tone found in the novel, the television characters refer to “the end of the world” instead of Judgment Day. Through the addition of Peg Bowen, the episode further confounds any Christian associations, as Peg concocts a fanciful doomsday prophecy, based on her knowledge of an upcoming lunar eclipse, as a means of fooling the gullible children. The overall result is an Avonlea that is more secular than the one found in Montgomery's books.

Indeed, Storey observed that prior to *Happy Christmas, Miss King*, the reunion movie he scripted, “Christmas had never crossed the consciousness of these characters,” and the church was treated as the modern-day equivalent of a “community centre”. With this treatment, *Road to Avonlea* emphasizes the church's social function over Presbyterianism's specifically religious aspects. *Road to Avonlea* characters rarely refer to God, except in figures of speech usually expressing frustration (e.g., “the sense God gave you”). When needing to reference a higher order in a more serious vein, characters most often refer to the vaguer-sounding “Providence” than God, making the show markedly different from the source novels and the American rural-historical romance *Little House on the Prairie* (1974–1982), to

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with the author, Aug. 20, 2001, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>91</sup> What Bernstein and Nathan might have meant is that spiritualism should not be legitimized, as there is one episode in which Sara attempts to communicate with her dead father in “Sara's Homecoming” from Season Two. But the whole thing turns out to be a hoax—a cruel attempt to wring money out of the bereaved girl.

which it is often compared.<sup>92</sup> As a writer, Conkie viewed the main purpose of the church as a setting in which characters could come together as a community to gossip and socialize. As Sara says to Peter, “Church is where everyone meets in Avonlea” (“Conversions”). By the time Nathan joined the series in Season Four, she said there was “no religion anywhere.” Indeed, the church as a setting does play a decreasing role in later seasons, in contrast to earlier ones. This use of setting explains why Pierre Lapierre, the sole French-Canadian character of note, participates comfortably in the social activities of a Presbyterian community even though, historically speaking, he would likely be Roman Catholic.<sup>93</sup>

Storey speculated that the point of treating religion in this way was to avoid having the CBC seen as “ramming Christianity down the throats of the general public” and alienating members of the Canadian audience. Arguably, the secular quality of the series makes it accessible to viewers of different beliefs—a point also made regarding the “secular ‘toonism’” of “the Disney gospel” (Pinsky, 1995). Florida journalist Mark Pinsky observes that in the Disney universe

... there is scarcely a mention of God, portrayal of prayer or appearance of any religious symbol from the Christian and Jewish faiths shared by most Americans... The Disney empire, by its own designation, is a kingdom of magic, almost totally without reference to any kingdom of heaven. There are no churches on Main Street at Disneyland or Walt Disney World...

On the one hand, this strategy has its positive attributes, for the reason that Storey stated. On the other hand, the downside is that differences within Canada’s population and history are never considered; instead, they are covered by a bland homogeneity (a Disneyfication?) that strips regions and communities of specificity, both cultural and historical. As Lefebvre (2002, p. 180) notes, “*Road to Avonlea* strives to eliminate any religious or cultural tension. The result is a monolithic community in which difference is erased.” Such a public broadcasting philosophy, though having socially progressive intentions around inclusiveness, corresponds to the market’s notion of appealing to as broad a market as possible to

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<sup>92</sup> *Hollywood Reporter*—“a Canadian version of *Little House*” (Sherwood, 1993). *New York Times*—“a rustic Canadian pioneer drama along the lines of *Little House on the Prairie*” (Conant, 1999). *USA Today*—“less apt to pull out the melodrama than its schmaltzy predecessor *Little House on the Prairie*” (Roush, 1992).

<sup>93</sup> Thank you to Benjamin Lefebvre for this observation.

maximize profits. As noted here and in the previous chapter, Disney appears to make use of a similar approach, creating secular morality tales (Ward, 2002).

As well, if Hall is correct, the CBC may have been oversensitive since Montgomery satirizes as much as she celebrates the church's role in the lives of Prince Edward Islanders. However, even such religious satire can be considered irrelevant to the lives of most contemporary viewers not accustomed to the niceties of rural Edwardian Canada and more interested in the homespun interactions of families and friends within a community. Ultimately, what is expunged is not really that central to her books. Her stories are not Christian in a dogmatic sense, though they usually do contain a humanist moral about how individuals ought to conduct themselves within a community and in their day-to-day relationships. Therefore, the late twentieth-century concerns over questionable content in Montgomery's work seem to have been based on clichés about Montgomery and her era rather than on a close subtextual reading of her work, which often acknowledges and then gleefully undermines those clichés through satire. What we see at play here and then in the series is the generic Montgomery. In this respect, the television series rarely achieves her cleverness with subtext, though it tries to retain some of her perversity in the eccentricities of Avonlea's residents. For example, Peg Bowen (a.k.a. "the Witch of Avonlea") is a secondary character retained from *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*. She eschews proper society because she has no patience for its hypocrisy, and instead, squats in the woods on the fringes of town—a good vantage point from which to provide wry commentary on the activities of Avonlea's respectable denizens.

In emphasizing the generic Montgomery, the series additionally downplays the more disturbing elements of her writing, such as references to suicide, wife abuse, and extreme forms of emotional repression that were a part of island life at the turn of the past century. As Hall said, while Montgomery's writings simultaneously portray "incredible warmth" and "incredible repression," the series deliberately "veered further and further" from the latter. Similarly, Johnson noted, "We decided that we wanted a lot of warmhearted material, to keep it light and to only use her darker material rarely." Conkie recalled that "We couldn't use the stories of anyone who was really horrifically abused," and Storey corroborated this view, offering that Montgomery's "early stories are quite romantic, but as the stories progress they get darker and darker... We didn't do that on [*Road to*] *Avonlea*." In the novels, for example, Montgomery foreshadows that Cecily will not reach adulthood because she is



not as strong in health as the other children are. On the television series, by contrast, Cecily has a bout with tuberculosis, but once that is overcome, develops into a robust farmer, handy with horses. Overall, the emphasis on lighter material contributes to the portability of the series, and keeps it within the conventions of family entertainment. For this reason, Fiona McHugh's bible<sup>94</sup> for the series was rewritten through a collaborative effort. McHugh, credited in the first three seasons as the developer of the series, but then dropped, "had a darker vision of the world," said Hall. "She's more a gothic kind of writer, [and] her personal style didn't work well with the series." Constituted as such, *Road to Avonlea* is indeed more akin to the generic Montgomery—whose bucolic Avonlea is peopled with characters of mainly sunny disposition—than to the island Montgomery—whose silver linings often come with burdensome clouds. Indeed, Storey observed that his purpose as a writer for the series was "to put out positive messages about empowerment because essentially [*Road to Avonlea*] is about encouraging people to embrace life and its possibilities. And so not too many people hang themselves in the barn."

### *From Magic Kingdom to Haunted House*

Existing popular cultural forms influence the kind of past constructed on *Road to Avonlea* and suggest why it is possible for the drama to be sold to over 150 countries. The content of the series is generic enough, thanks to the conventions of costume drama and domestic melodrama and the effects of adaptation, to facilitate the making of a portable past. The different names given to the series illustrate this point. For the CBC, the series was *Road to Avonlea*, implying a place that has a location somewhere. That Disney opted to call the series simply *Avonlea* is suggestive of a no place, a fantasyland without a location.<sup>95</sup> The status of 'Avonlea' as no place makes it possible for the series to interact with context, producing meanings suited to diversely located viewers. Through reception, 'Avonlea' becomes a place, familiar and comfortable because of theme yet removed enough because of period setting to function as an escapist fantasy. Such interpretive moments are referred to as instances of

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<sup>94</sup> "Bible" is a television industry term referring to the outline of a series, created in the development phase, that sketches out main and supporting characters, settings, and story arcs.

<sup>95</sup> I thank Lisa Codd for this astute observation.

hybridization, in which a source text from one culture engages with the reception context of another culture to produce a new, hybrid text carrying meanings perhaps unforeseen by the producing culture (Barker, 1999, pp. 70-71). The relationship of historical setting to hybridized reception suggests why the series can fit seamlessly within the Disney universe. Here 'Avonlea' is a place—it's called Main Street USA.

Visitors to Disney's theme parks will find that Main Street is one of several representations of the past available to them. Main Street's purpose is to transport visitors back to a small, turn-of-the-century American town and to entice them to purchase from ye olde shoppes that line the street. Historian Mike Wallace (1996, p. 136) describes Main Street as having a "toylike quality" because it is built five-eighths of true size and "is like playing in a walk-in doll's house." He additionally points out that Disney's approach to the past is "not to reproduce it, but to *improve* it" (p. 136). Disney's "retrospective tidying up," as Wallace terms it, omits "depressions, strikes on the railroads, warfare in the minefields, squalor in the immigrant communities, lynching, imperial wars, and the emergence of mass protests by populists and socialists" (p. 137). Imagineers—designers for the corporation—term this treatment of history "Disney Realism" and acknowledge its utopian nature: "we carefully program out all the negative, unwanted elements and program in the positive elements" to create "what the real Main Street should have been like" (p. 137).<sup>96</sup> Main Street presents an optimistic, prosperous, and secure past for America because it purges the differences and the disparities, the conflicts and the contradictions, that would suggest otherwise. With no workers, no blacks, no poor people, and no immigrants, Main Street puts a blandly conformist, white, middle-class face on American history.

It is not hard to see the *Avonlea* set substituting for Disney's Main Street. Sullivan Entertainment built Avonlea on 120 hectares of farmland near Uxbridge, Ontario. Although the church is a real one (circa 1878), and part of the King farm was in fact a real farm, the rest of the village was constructed for the exterior scenes. The opening credits contain establishing shots of the village with its cheerful, pastel-coloured pallet, gingerbread houses, and tidy town square. Extras, impeccably costumed, stroll or ride down a clean and orderly main street. The key buildings featured in the series—the King farm, Rose Cottage, the

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<sup>96</sup> Wallace is quoting from an official Disney history I was unable to obtain called *The Disney Theme Show: From Disneyland to Walt Disney World, a Pocket History of the First Twenty Years* (1976), vol. 1.

general store, the Pettibone and Dale residences, the schoolhouse, and the church—have a perfectionistic dollhouse quality that creates the impression of a true-to-scale, Edwardian Canadian theme park.<sup>97</sup> (Indeed, in the premiere episode, when Sara arrives at her new island lodgings, she excitedly remarks, “It’s so sweet and so small—just like a little dollhouse!”) The similarities between *Avonlea* and *Main Street USA* help to explain Disney’s openness to the Canadian-based series as well as its popularity on The Disney Channel (cf. Knelman). Schneider said that the image of the “rural, small-town, tightly knit community . . . speaks to our [Americans’] vision of the past.” She noted that few Americans actually have any experience of America’s rural history since most came to the country in the twentieth century. “But that’s our imagination of the past—we came from there.” In his introduction to *Hollywood’s Small Towns*, Kenneth MacKinnon (1984) documents the image of the small town in America culture from literature to film. Much like Schneider, he argues that “it is the image of the ideal, rather than its realization, which ensures the place of the small town in the American imagination” (p. 3). For MacKinnon, the small town persists, “not so much on the landscape of America as in the minds of Americans, as an ideal, the embodiment of a wish” (p. 5).

Embodied in this wish is the myth of home, and certainly *Avonlea* plays up to that myth. So what does it mean to come home to *Avonlea* or, for that matter, *Main Street USA*? Along these lines, British film theorist Pam Cook (1996) has written on the role of nostalgia in popular imaginings and in the formation of national identities. Cook states that nationalism can be seen to appeal “to a fundamental desire to find a ‘home’, an imagined place where unified, stable identities nurtured by common interests can flourish” (p. 2). She points out that the stabilization of identities and the search for common interests require homogenization and a covering over of past atrocities. Certainly, this case can be made for *Road to Avonlea*. Johnson suspected that one reason the Canadian setting did not present a problem to The Disney Channel or its American subscribers was because the series is “very Caucasian.” Indeed, the community’s sheer homogeneity makes social harmony easy to

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<sup>97</sup> Sullivan Entertainment’s “Site Plan of the Village” also includes a boarding house, blacksmith’s shop, combined post-and-newspaper office, ice house with pond, covered bridge, lighthouse, boathouse, and cannery (Heilbron, 1995-96, p. 13).

maintain, as does the suppression of histories for indigenous people, working-class people, and non-Anglo-Canadians. As Cook says, “‘Home’ is, in fact, a haunted house” (p. 39).

That the working classes live in another part of town—which we rarely see on the series—makes the fantasy of social cohesion possible. Maintaining this fantasy also involved turning down writers’ suggestions for incorporating characters of colour on various grounds. According to Nathan and Storey, their ideas were dismissed as “not what *Avonlea* is about”—as inorganic to the series— or they were rejected as token and contrived. But Schneider maintained that roles for characters of colour simply could not be created on *Avonlea* because that would mean running into the questions of that era: “You couldn’t really do them [people of colour] unless you put them in places where somebody of colour would want to be portrayed.” Bernstein suggested that the CBC also had its concerns: “We [at the CBC] didn’t want them [minority characters] introduced in a non-authentic way.”

The general implication, however, is that characters of colour would introduce politics and history into the series, which would not constitute family entertainment. Overall, *Avonlea* was a good fit for The Disney Channel because it tended to subscribe to the same historical amnesia propagated by the Disney Realism found in the theme parks and other Disney products, such as its period animation. The emphasis on non-controversial content went hand in hand with the series’ historical amnesia, and was essential to the escapist fantasy it constructed, while the avoidance of politics and history helped render white, middle-class privilege invisible. This invisibility enhanced the series’ capacity to travel well. In other words, it is not whiteness that travels well here, but the portrayal of a socially homogenous community, free of the racial, cultural and class conflicts that complicate the real world. Simply put, the series conveys ‘Disney innocence’.

Moreover, *Avonlea*’s historical amnesia additionally extended to its portrayal of women. The series’ selectivity about the past creates a fantasy world in which the female characters are full and equal participants in the public sphere, despite not having the vote or a host of other rights now common in liberal democracies. Storey was particularly concerned about this selective view, stating, “I didn’t want to tell stories set in 1908 where women had political power that they didn’t have. Personally, I didn’t see that that did a service to anybody because it denies the progress that the women’s movement has made.” Storey related that there was genuine heroism to be found in women of that era that was denied “by pretending women had a societal function that they didn’t have.” But Schneider offered an

alternative perspective, arguing that “there are always women who are busting the limits” of their era, so it was not a complete stretch to portray the Avonlea women as forward-thinkers. However, trying to do that with characters of colour “would just be more conspicuous,” Schneider stated, given all the historical questions it would raise. In fact, Schneider suggested that one of the reasons Sullivan had to stop the series was because “it started bumping into those kinds of places where you both needed to go but couldn’t go.” In other words and as I will show in Chapter 5, history was making its presence felt. As Storey put it, “The outside world was beginning to infiltrate the island. Canada and the world was gearing up for the confrontation that would become the Great War.”

Suspension of disbelief is implicit to the above discussion. The creators I interviewed struggled with suspension of disbelief as it related to the peculiarities of historical setting, and made use of, what I would term, “selective authenticity”—which is to say that the series was not *inauthentic* in capturing the era, but that some details were *selectively* omitted. In dealing with historical setting, the case of *Road to Avonlea* suggests that a degree of invention is permissible, even desirable, in the portrayal of (white, middle-class) women, and that disbelief can be successfully held in check to make the fantasy work. The series also shows the impact of liberal-feminist thought on historical representation, creating what I regard as a derivation of Disney Realism—one that improves upon the past for women, albeit an exclusive category of women. Yet when portraying people of colour, such invention is acknowledged as highly problematic and contentious, and best avoided to secure suspension of disbelief and ensure the fantasy of a non-specific ‘pastness’—one suited to The Disney Channel’s desires for the series. In other words, the inclusion of people of colour would

make the setting *historical*— locating it in a specific time and place— thereby disrupting the amnesiac’s fantasy.<sup>98</sup>

Montgomery’s own historical amnesia makes it not surprising that her work would be regarded suitable material for a Canada-U.S. co-production. Careless’ work on historical details in Montgomery’s fiction provides us with insights relevant to the concerns of this section. Careless argues that Montgomery’s writing is full of anachronisms since Montgomery seemed to be interested more in constructing a sense of ‘pastness’ than in authentic historical details. According to Careless, Montgomery’s evocation of the past is pure invention, a pastiche of the past. In fact, Montgomery herself was mainly writing period pieces, imagining her beloved island as it may have been, when she was a child in the 1880s, some twenty years before she published her first novel. The world that she was writing about, if not already gone, may never have actually existed, so that the PEI we see is the PEI she invented. In other words, her romantic landscape has become the ‘real’ PEI in the popular imagination. Even Parks Canada, steward of the Green Gables site at Cavendish, acknowledges that it is dealing with an imaginary rather than an authentic past (De Jonge, 2002). Montgomery evoked this imaginary past in her fictions as a nostalgic response to the anxieties of modernity in the same way that the Disney Realism does. She created an idealized past unmarred by a present that she saw as deformed by decay and change (Fiamengo, 2000), in the same way Disney sells an image of security “for people who feel bereft of such security” through its myth of a safe and happy past (Giroux, p. 126). My point here is not to lay the blame at Disney’s door for *Avonlea*’s ideological shortcomings. Instead, my purposes are to demonstrate how the series can successfully circulate in the Disney

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<sup>98</sup> Two episodes out of 91 include characters of colour. In the episode “Moving On”, First Nations actor August Schellenberg plays a supporting role as the manager of a Wild West show visiting Avonlea. In the episode “Return to Me”, Hetty and Felicity travel to South Carolina (really Port Hope, Ontario, in disguise) in search of the presumed-dead Gus Pike. The episode makes use of several Canadian actors of African heritage, who acted as extras or in supporting roles. Storey recalls that in that episode “There were no references to ‘darkies’ or anything that would have been period. We didn’t go there.” Although “going there” was not an option, Jackie Burroughs who played Hetty found a way of getting there. Storey relates that Burroughs opted to play one of the scenes for subtext, playing Hetty’s fear of black people. Instead of forthrightly marching forward, as she would normally do, explained Storey, Hetty “cringes a little and clings to Felicity’s arm... when there are people of colour around. Because Jackie just thought that’s what this woman would do...” Burroughs does indeed have her Hetty King pull back and cringe when interacting with the black characters.

universe and to suggest how it may be read within that context. What are the implications today of circulating such a past for Canada—a past that removes the taint of history and effortlessly constructs a whitewashed world? Should we be concerned with the responses of people in other countries to this image of Canada’s past?

### *Canadian Cultural Innocence*

*Road to Avonlea* does offer an image of Canada to American viewers; it is not just a reflection of Main Street USA. Storey said that Disney welcomed examples of Canadiana such as characters waving the Union Jack or referring to the British monarchy. While I could not corroborate Disney’s openness to such images, remarkably, the series is in fact very British when compared to its source texts—and to Montgomery’s own thematic concerns as a Canadian nationalist (cf. Robinson, 1999; Edwards & Litster, 1999). In fact, *Road to Avonlea* expresses cultural and historical allegiances to Britain that one is not likely to find in Montgomery’s writing, save for the material she wrote during World War I (cf. Edwards & Litster, p. 35). On the series, references to British monarchs (not Canadian leaders) and to Britain’s imperial past (not Canada’s history), although undeniable aspects of Canadian heritage nonetheless obscure Canadian specificity and foster a stereotypical image of Canada as an Anglophilic monarchist society.<sup>99</sup> This image is in stark contrast to the *Emily* television series, which makes use of PEI’s strong Scottish heritage.

To be sure, in Montgomery’s time, Canada *was* an Anglophilic monarchist society. What is significantly different in the translation of Montgomery’s era to the television screen, however, is the absence of the xenophobia that accompanied Anglophilic ideology, described by Devereux as “an ethnically separatist Anglo-colonialism.” Montgomery’s fiction expresses some of the oppressive and discriminatory sentiments that were hallmarks of Anglo-colonialism and that were aimed at French-Canadians, non-Anglo immigrants and First Nations. Writing about *Anne of Green Gables*, Wright correctly observes that Montgomery “was not immune to the prejudices of her community, particularly with the regard to the ‘French’, who appear only as ‘hired help’ and none too bright at that” (p. 179). These prejudices are also evidenced in Montgomery’s degrading treatment of Italians in

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<sup>99</sup> Appendix H lists references suggesting Canada’s ties with Britain.

*Kilmeny of the Orchard* (1910), the French in *Magic for Marigold* (1929), and the Métis in her short story “Tannis of the Flats”, found in *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*.

In other words, *Road to Avonlea* may be ‘period’ in its acknowledgement of the Anglophilic monarchism of early twentieth-century Canada, but the treatment of that era is selective since it excludes the unsavory aspects of an at-heart xenophobic worldview. For example, *Road to Avonlea* replaces Montgomery’s negative stereotypes of French Canadians with positive ones.<sup>100</sup> The supporting character Pierre Lapierre is a passionate and committed aficionado of the gastronomical arts. Formerly from Quebec, the proud and flamboyant Pierre comes to Avonlea to take his position as chef at the White Sands Hotel. He develops a friendship with Rachel Lynde, a character narrow-mindedly suspicious of strangers, who initially regards Pierre as a “foreigner” even though he is from the same country (“High Society”). In forming that unlikely friendship, the televisual Rachel departs from her novelistic incarnation, offering up a revisionist take on Montgomery, similar to the one Gittings identifies at work in the television series *Emily of New Moon*. The result of this revisionism, to borrow Hipsky’s phrasing, is “a guilt-free nostalgia”, unhampered by “historical bad conscience” (p. 106). Disconnected from history and protected from the taint of politics, empire emerges on the series as a pastoral utopia, decorated with the emblems of a fetishized Canada. Surely, such an invocation of the past is what ‘Disney innocence’ is all about.

As in Fletcher’s sense, *Road to Avonlea* avoids close associations with history and locale, so that a cliché Canada may emerge, bringing to mind Morris’ argument that non-dominant cultures sell stereotypical images of themselves to gain access to the dominant culture’s market. On *Road to Avonlea*, the invocation of empire, said Storey, had less to do with Montgomery and more to do with Disney and its ideas of Canada as a monarchist society. Whether or not these ideas were Disney’s alone, they do conform to often-American stereotypes of Canada as a dependent colony that maintains close cultural ties to Britain, and that still quaintly defers to a distant monarch as its head of state. This stereotype may have

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<sup>100</sup> I would also add PEI’s Acadian community, depicted in the episode “Enter Prince Charming”, as another positive stereotype, though a stereotype nonetheless. The episode contrasts the conventional, repressed and staid Anglophone community, singing church hymns at a benefit, to the robust and irrepressible Acadians, dancing and fiddling on their part of the island.



its appeals for contemporary American Anglophiles, who associate British culture with notions of quality and good taste, and their consumption of said culture as an affordable luxury and the highbrow expression of their cultural capital (cf. Hipsky). As mentioned earlier, Schneider identified the equation of period with quality as one of the factors that motivated The Disney Channel's involvement with the series.

Among the writers whom I interviewed, Storey was the most critical of Disney's involvement with the series and of the image of Canada's past that the series created, perhaps because he also writes historical dramas for the stage. Storey noted rightly that the view of the past the series took meant not acknowledging "the downside of empire. Anything that revealed essentially that the underbelly of the society was xenophobic and racist." Certainly, my discussion with executives and writers about incorporating minority characters supports this claim. Moreover, *Road to Avonlea* bolsters the concerns of cultural critics who document Disney's stereotyping of national identities, its sanitization of histories, and its concomitant production of an innocent past rife with clichés (e.g., Bell *et al*; Giroux; Smoodin; Wallace). The past invoked on the series may carry a feeling of non-specificity in that Canadian history and geography are irrelevant to meaning. However, it would be misleading to argue that this representation of the past carries no specificity whatsoever. When 'Avonlea' interacts with the Disney universe, it becomes a specific place that contributes to the Magic Kingdom's nostalgic construction of a mythical past, free of racial and class conflicts and peopled by comfortable, white, middle-class families.

To be sure, the CBC's ongoing investment in the Montgomery adaptations presents additional questions about the image of Canada's past that the public broadcaster is perpetuating. The Centre for Resource-Action on Race Relations (CRARR) has raised important concerns about the CBC's continuing involvement with the Montgomery adaptations and the vision of Canada's past they construct. At a 1998 CRTC hearing on television policy, Fo Niemi, CRARR executive director, issued the following statement:

The best example of under-representation of diversity in English programming can be provided by the CBC: while substantial resources are devoted to the series *Anne of Green Gables* and the *Road to Avonlea*, there is, to this day, no national production of comparable value and budget on more important aspects of Canadian heritage and culture such as those stories dealing with the Chinese who built the national railway system in the West, Black loyalists who left the U.S. to settle in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia, Jewish activists who fought for labour rights... or aboriginal soldiers

who had to fight both Nazism in Europe and racism inside their Canadian armed forces during the Second World War (CRTC Public Notice 1998-44: 3).

CRARR voices concern over the Montgomery adaptations for their perpetuation of a past for Canada that excludes the nation-building contributions of non-white, non-Anglo Canadians. With the screen Montgomery, we are contending with not only an adaptation of a novel, but perhaps more pressingly, an adaptation of Canada's past.

Although a television adaptation, *Road to Avonlea* exemplifies Fiamengo's assertion (2000, pp. 5-6) that Montgomery constructs an "effortless ownership" of place that is forgetful of empire and that "promotes abroad that most cherished of national ideals—that of Canadian cultural innocence." The period of time in which the series takes place—1903 to 1912<sup>101</sup>—certainly carries mythic significance in Canadian culture, where it is regarded as a last great period of innocence before knowledge of the violence that nationhood apparently entails necessarily made a sovereign country out of the fledgling dominion. My purpose is not to discount the real and bloody consequences of Canada's participation in World War I or to dismiss its undisputed significance to Canadian national identity.

Rather my purpose is to ponder the implications of the Great War's mythic status as demarcating the end of a golden age in Canada—the fall from the garden after knowledge.<sup>102</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 4, Montgomery herself participates in this national story. Such a narration of Canada's pre-war innocence must ignore unseemly aspects of Canadian history that do not conform to the Edenic scenario. After all, myths do not lie about the past—they are selective about it. According to the Edenic scenario, before the

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<sup>101</sup> On the series, specific references to time period are few and far between, but enough exist to sketch out a rough timeline. In "The Hope Chest of Arabella King" from Season One, a shot of the newspaper *The Avonlea Chronicle* indicates that the series starts in 1903. By tracing seasonal changes and other rare references to time (e.g., the 1911 Avonlea Fair in "Davey and the Mermaid"), we can determine that the series concludes in 1912, bringing us close to the Great War, and paving the way for the concerns of the reunion movie two years later. Even though the series ran for seven years, in screen time, it actually covers nine years.

Great War— before History in other words— Canada was an uncontested garden, somehow unbloodied by the subjugation of native people or the conquest of the French Canadians. Such historical erasures facilitate “innocent belonging” to the land, a point Fiamengo (2002, p. 236) argues regarding Montgomery’s fiction that also applies to *Road to Avonlea*. On the television series, the idea of Canada as cultural innocent is therefore owed in part to the cultural symbolism accorded to the pre-war era and the resulting Edenic narrative it upholds. In the end, the series draws from at the same time that it supports the myth of Canada as cultural innocent—a myth that is suitable for export, compatible with ‘Disney innocence’, and undeniably Canadian for the CBC.

### *Canada’s Answer to Disney*

The content of television co-production is in a precarious position. The goals of producing partners and the expectations of their respective national/regional audiences must be satisfied. Such arrangements require tailoring content to make it appealing and accessible to viewers in the producers’ originating countries. On the one hand, a collaborative discussion of content could result in an exploration of transnational values and cultural differences that then translates into thoughtful and innovative programs that aim to do more than make money for investors. On the other hand, the result could be homogenous programs that travel well but lack specificity, where financial concerns and market interests supplant cultural dialogue. While co-production holds the possibility that we are telling stories together in the effort to understand each better, the reality is we are telling stories together to compete with expensive-looking output from the United States.

The CBC’s move away from in-house production toward independent producers, such as Sullivan Entertainment, has meant that content will be affected by private sector concerns, particularly where there is an eye towards export sales. Sullivan Entertainment markets its library of ‘evergreens’ internationally, and is known for packaging the look and

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<sup>102</sup> The reunion movie that aired two years after the season finale explicitly references this mythic fall. At the beginning, an omniscient narrator announces over a montage of flashbacks from the series: “There once was a time in a place called Avonlea when life was simpler. Children grew and years went by and yet it always seemed that nothing would ever change. And Avonlea it remained, though some would go and others stayed. But we were to learn that all things change, for beyond our shores, the clouds of a distant war loomed, and soon nothing would ever be the same.”

the feel of the past for consumers of such programming in the same way that Disney does—and indeed, has been referred to as “Canada’s answer to Disney” in *Maclean’s* magazine (B. Johnson, 1996). The CBC’s involvement with private independent producers and its participation in co-productions, along with the diminution of regional production facilities, has the potential to bring the public broadcaster closer in line with a market philosophy. In combination, these circumstances could culminate in the address to the proverbial lowest common denominator, turning Canadian content into a Disneyland. Even public-broadcasting notions of inclusiveness, relevance and accessibility, though socially promising can translate into a monolithic mode of address that simply aims for non-controversial content—content that is not different from Disney’s or the private broadcasters except for those elusive markers of Canadianness.<sup>103</sup>

If borderless romance is a style of adaptation that speaks to the political-economic context of television co-production, then what happens to our stories? To the stories that reflect Canada, its regions, and its history? What are the gains and the sacrifices in our cultural production when we create points of address for an export market? Questions of cultural specificity are complicated and are not limited to Canada but have international significance. What is the effect of borderless ‘global’ programming on local, regional, or national identities? Can we measure the effects only in terms of losses, or are there possible gains, not just economic but also social gains in the apprehension of transcultural values? *Road to Avonlea* is a significant case study for exploring these questions because, paradoxically, Canadians recognized the series as distinctively Canadian, Americans made it the top-rated program on The Disney Channel, and over 150 countries purchased it for foreign distribution. Although from novel to screen Montgomery’s text is indeed made

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<sup>103</sup> Even a distinctively Canadian drama made exclusively for Canadians can make use of a similar mode of address. *Trudeau* (2002) was made in Canada for Canadians, and has little if no export potential. Indeed, the drama’s mode of address demands a Canadian viewer who can fill in the textual gaps with the requisite knowledge required to make meaning out of the disjointed text. Key moments in Pierre Trudeau’s career and in Canada’s recent history are glossed over, unfolding stylishly, even kitsch-like, before the viewer, and curiously avoiding the imposition of a potentially controversial reading on the former prime minister and his administration’s policies. Since pleasing every Canadian with a single interpretation of Trudeau is impossible, the drama is ultimately hamstrung by a mode of address that aims to offend no one—whether it succeeds in this respect is another matter. A better approach may have been to construct the biography *Citizen Kane*-style— from several points of view (e.g., Quebec separatist, First Nations, etc.).

nonspecific, *Road to Avonlea* appears to maintain some specificity for its Canadian viewers at the same time that it crosses the boundaries of nation and culture, defying the narrow logic of cultural discount.

My point in defining *Road to Avonlea* as a borderless romance is not to undermine its achievement but to consider how a series with a Canadian setting and Canadian characters and based on the works of a famous Canadian author can be perceived as not Canadian. What do we make of a Canadian-based series the *San Francisco Chronicle* regards as “vintage Disney” (Carman, 1990) and the *Hollywood Reporter* describes as “quintessential Disney” (Sherwood, 1993)? *Road to Avonlea* demonstrates that it is possible for a series set in Canada to not be specific to Canada. Such a contention poses challenges to the future development of Canadian content policy.

The series aptly illustrates that distinctively Canadian content can be just as industrially generic and culturally portable as American programming. What does the New York City setting matter to *Friends* (1994 – 2004) or the PEI locale to *Road to Avonlea*, when the character-driven stories focus on rudimentary themes of belonging, home, friendship and community? As the successful reconciliation of two Canadian production strategies— industrial generic and distinctively Canadian— *Road to Avonlea* presents small nations with a model for television drama that seems both economically and culturally viable. However, *Road to Avonlea* also illustrates that visibly Canadian content can prove to be an insubstantial goal without wider, specified cultural objectives that make space for controversial programming and perspectives that will differentiate the CBC from the private broadcasters and contribute to a diversified media environment for Canadians. For that to occur, mode of address must figure in reviews of television policy to ensure that Canadian content is more than just a Disneyland.

But attention to the political economy of *Road to Avonlea* and its implications for content should not preclude us from considering the utopian, wish-fulfilling role of popular culture. For along with creating a portable past, adaptation has an additional function, which is to draw out those themes in the source text that will resonate most closely with contemporary viewers. With this in mind, what meanings does the television series invest in Montgomery’s fictional world and how are those meanings relevant to the contemporary context of *Road to Avonlea*’s production and reception? In other words, what is the contemporary romance with Montgomery? The fact that the series represents a pastiche of

Montgomery's texts is significant, and makes the series of interest. The disjuncture between the original texts and their interpretation for television reveals desires, anxieties, and fears contemporary to our own times rather than Montgomery's. For this reason, Sullivan Entertainment's deployment of the Montgomery Imaginary conveys some of the cultural meanings circulating around this writer's romances at the end of our century.

## **CHAPTER FOUR/ THE ROMANCE WITH COMMUNITY IN AN AGE OF MODERNITY**

The previous chapters have considered *Road to Avonlea* as the outcome of an intricate network involving industry trends, organizational philosophies, generic conventions, policy mandates, and the process of adapting a written text for a television audience. Each contributes to shaping the text and to the meanings it accrues. This chapter analyzes those meanings qualitatively, in the effort to create experimental links between qualitative textual criticism and cultural policy studies. I use the word “experimental” because of the newness, to me, of this approach and the lack of existing models on which to base my efforts. There is no formula to the following qualitative analysis, though I am working from certain suppositions that have a bearing on my overarching purpose, which, in effect, is to make cultural policy studies romantic. Like Stuart Cunningham (1992, p. 70), I am coming from the supposition that cultural policy studies must engage with what he calls “social and cultural intangibles”, or in J. David Black’s romantic understanding (2002, pp. 58-62), the affective dimensions of culture that escape rational-analytical ways of making sense.

Black argues that the inattention to affect or the arational realm of experience and emotion reduces the interpretive moment to ideology, when there are other factors involved (pp. 58-59). Ideology is not the only function of the text; the text has a role to play in affective expression and engagement. Indeed, the very purpose of popular culture is to engage the affective realm through the public expression of wishes and daydreams constrained in our day-to-day lives (cf. Lovell). However, I am not advocating an ahistorical, acultural understanding of affect, as I understand feelings to be historically and culturally constituted—that is, grounded in a context and not floating as universal constants that define ‘the human condition’. As well, the manner in which the text symbolically resolves affective experience—the hopes and anxieties of the moment—is an ideological response (Black, pp. 68-69). For example, the desire to belong (to a community, a family or a place) falls within the realm of affect. But the type of community, family or place chosen to fulfil that desire will be ideologically embedded and value laden, as well as culturally and

historically specific. For this reason, film theorist Carl Plantinga (1997) maintains we would do well to pay attention to the ends to which emotions are appealed. “The relevant ideological issue then becomes not emotions *per se*,” states Plantinga, “but distinguishing those which are benign or beneficial from those which are manipulative or harmful” (p. 379). He further explains that “if we grant that sentiment is in itself ideologically neutral or even beneficial, sentiment can play a part in a questionable ideological project” (pp. 386-87).

I see my efforts here as *romancing* cultural policy studies by listening to the world of everyday sentiment and meaning. The ensuing experiment has involved listening to producers, writers and fans, and to the discourses of television policy and trade journalism. The purpose is to write qualitative criticism that engages the language of everyday life, and is therefore both *in* and *of* the world. Such a cultural criticism of “radical empathy”, to borrow a term from Black (p. 169), places qualitative analysis outside the rhetoric of conspiracy, containment and false consciousness, necessarily making criticism worldly. Being ‘worldly’ means adopting Denis McQuail’s proposal (1992 , pp. 16-17) that, in evaluating media performance, the language of evaluation must emerge from the subject of research rather than be imposed externally. In this respect, I have not always been a success, as the portrayal of women and girls on *Road to Avonlea* was an interest I had to which writers responded in interview. This interest was not the subject of press reviews or one which fans introduced in my survey, at least not consciously. Whether responses to gender were solicited or silent, they were nonetheless important in evaluating and explaining the series’ construction of the past and the mode of address it entailed.

So far this dissertation has mainly considered the problematic nature of *Road to Avonlea*—as an international co-production, a signifier of ‘Disney innocence’, and an image of Canada’s past. That discussion was with a view to explaining the workings of the series’ mode of address based on its success as a transnational television genre and a distinctively Canadian drama. But to me, being ‘worldly’ as a cultural critic must involve engaging with *what exactly is* the intensity of feeling *Road to Avonlea* inspires. Although here I am looking at the intersection of affect and narrative, the purpose still is the same: to further understand *Road to Avonlea*’s mode of address. To enhance that understanding, the next two chapters historically situate the series’ mode of address to suggest the affective responses encouraged and their potential for transnational as well as nationally specific identifications.



## *The Historical Career of a Popular Place*

*Road to Avonlea* is a nexus for the intersection of various competing, contradictory and contingent pressures. There is no true meaning of *Road to Avonlea* separate from the conditions in which the television drama was produced or from the interpretive horizons in which the series was originally located. My assumptions owe a debt to Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, and their groundbreaking theorization of the relations between texts, readers and contexts in *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (1987). In their book, Bennett and Woollacott argue that we should see texts *as* and *within* social relations; fictional forms are both *representative* and *part of* social relations (p. 267, 278). The goal is not to reduce the text to its context but rather to consider texts in history (p. 262). What are the historical conditions in which ‘Avonlea’ takes root at the turn of this century? Where Bennett and Woollacott historically trace the figure of James Bond and his popular cultural manifestations, I perform this task for ‘Avonlea’. I highlight the intertexts and the contexts that inform Montgomery’s fictional construction of place, and focus on its subsequent manifestation in the Sullivan Entertainment series to suggest the possible meanings of ‘Avonlea’ over time.

Indeed, an organizing concept for this chapter is that of Avonlea-in-history or of Avonlea as “nodal signifier”. Bennett and Woollacott define “nodal signifier” as “active in the relations between a series of ideologies, a point at which they have been criss-crossed and compacted into a unified formation in assuming a tangible, identifiable form” (p. 278). As previous chapters already indicate, ‘Avonlea’ is the compact, tangible condensation of economic relations, aesthetic conventions and professional practices. Moreover, the longevity of ‘Avonlea’ offers a fertile ground for considering the relationship of the popular to history. Along these lines, Bennett and Woollacott define the popular as “public property in the sense that images are reworked, inflected in different directions and for different ends” (p. 283). According to this definition, popularity entails that a text or figure be continuously modified and made responsive to the historical situation and to prevailing social sentiment. Indeed, when making culture for a mass audience of genre fiction, whether novelistic or televisual, it is in the market’s interests to capitalize on the sentiments of the day (p. 282). The meaning of ‘Avonlea’ shifts with the changing historical moment, inventing new meanings that are redolent of the day’s sentiments. What are the sentiments that make

the romance with 'Avonlea' possible in the early twentieth century and then again towards the close of that century?

My purpose is not to stabilize *Road to Avonlea* for a definitive reading but to suggest the web of historical conditions and social practices with which the text interacts and the range of possible though not unlimited readings these conditions and practices make available. To put it another way, historically situated reading formations serve as reference points for my analysis of meaning (Bennett & Woollacott, p. 92). The "reading formation", a term Bennett and Woollacott coin, includes the textual guideposts and available intertexts that create the parameters for communication between a reader and a text. Simply put, the reading formation organizes meaning (p. 64). While the reading formation is a dynamic and multi-layered entity, it is not infinite: we are not talking about an interpretive free-for-all since all meaning is conditional. In other words, the reading formation organizes only certain ways for *Road to Avonlea* to be read and not others (cf. Bennett & Woollacott, p. 248, 263-7). What are the textual and intertextual guideposts that organize *Road to Avonlea's* meanings, encouraging some affective responses and not others?

I began such an investigation in the previous chapters by considering broadcasting policy, industry demands, genre and adaptation as intertexts with a bearing on the meaning of the series. This chapter continues that investigation with a look at social history as an additional and substantial intertext constituting the series' reading formation. In this way, the fictional invocation of 'Avonlea' is contextually meaningful and "socially symbolic", in Fredric Jameson's sense (1981). He argues that narrative is a socially symbolic act in that it mediates, negotiates and emblematically resolves the tensions of an era—"the political unconscious" that differentiates one time and place from another. Narrative makes sense *within* a time and place, and it also makes sense *of* that time and place. Concomitant with narrative's sense-making is its role in wish-fulfillment, fictionally dramatizing and resolving real tensions and contradictions that absorb our day-to-day lives but are seemingly too insurmountable to reconcile except at a symbolic level. As symbolic wish-fulfillment, narrative engages the affective realm, drawing upon socially located dreams, fears and desires, and demonstrates culture's romantic-utopian function— something with which Black and Jameson would agree— picturing "new worlds for the making" (Black, p. 69). 'Avonlea', whether in Montgomery's time or our own, is the cultural and historical manifestation of a symbolically fulfilled wish, a utopian response to a dystopian present.

## *The Montgomery Imaginary*

In developing the notion of ‘Avonlea’ as late twentieth-century wish fulfillment, I found it useful to begin with Montgomery’s immense commodification in recent times. That is because the fictional characters and scenarios Montgomery created are no longer bound to the pages of her texts but exist independently. They have entered popular consciousness through mediated forms, whether dolls, musical plays, heritage sites, or loosely adapted series like *Road to Avonlea*. Just a visit to Sullivan Entertainment’s virtual boutique gives a sense of the merchandising involved. Commenting on the independent commercial existence of Montgomery’s creations during a conference, Holly Pike noted, “You don’t have to read the books to visit Green Gables.”<sup>104</sup> To put it another way, Montgomery’s fictional world now exists without her authorization. I use the term “Montgomery Imaginary” to refer to the autonomous life of the world she created. The Montgomery Imaginary as an intertext helps to constitute the contemporary interpretation of ‘Avonlea’, and informs the series’ narratives I have chosen to privilege in this case study.

The autonomous commercial existence of the Montgomery Imaginary has been of keen concern to the author’s heirs and the PEI government. In 1984, Montgomery’s descendants began to license Anne-related movies and merchandise both for the sake of the royalties and for preserving the integrity of their relative’s creation. A challenge came in 1992— when Montgomery’s published works entered the public domain. That year, the PEI government legally declared Anne an official trademark owned by the island province under Section 9 of the federal Trade-marks Act, which protects symbols used by public authorities. Since then, both parties have managed to negotiate a working relationship, acting as a joint licensing authority that controls the use of *Anne of Green Gables* in cultural spin-offs such as dolls and T-shirts. Sullivan Entertainment is contesting this arrangement in court, however, arguing that the heirs do not represent a public authority and should not be allowed to benefit from Section 9.<sup>105</sup> Sullivan Entertainment and the estate of Montgomery are also in legal disagreement over royalties from the *Anne of Green Gables* mini-series. The heirs allege

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<sup>104</sup> At the L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture conference, hosted by the L.M. Montgomery Institute and the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, 2000.

that Sullivan Entertainment has been withholding profits from them, thus renegeing on the original deal that gave the production company rights to Montgomery's creation (Ross, 1999; DeMont, 2001).<sup>106</sup>

This fight over Anne spin-offs marks the Montgomery boom of the 1980s and '90s, decades that witnessed the resurgent popularity of this author's works. To be sure, Montgomery's books have always enjoyed consistent popularity, never going out of print. Yet the latter part of the twentieth century saw a revival of interest in Montgomery's stories, as already discussed. In popular culture, Sullivan Entertainment's *Anne* adaptations helped to fuel Montgomery's popularity and introduce 'Avonlea' to a new generation. But the commodification of Montgomery and the fictional world she created is not new. L.C. Page, Montgomery's first publisher, initiated this phenomenon when he demanded and indeed pressured the author to write sequels to *Anne of Green Gables* as part of her contractual obligations. What is new, however, is the extension of that commodification into new arenas of consumption. What is also new is the historical context in which this boom has occurred: we need to understand the appeal of the Montgomery Imaginary, domestically and transnationally, at this time. What defines the contemporary cultural response to the Montgomery Imaginary? The answer lies in a particular invocation of the past, which must be understood as part of a wider cultural phenomenon. Popular culture's renewed fascination with the past, demonstrated in tourism and on television, provides an intertext for the production of the Montgomery adaptations and contributes to the reading formation available to viewers.

The '80s boom in the heritage industry is a response to the economic crisis of the '70s, characterized by Western de-industrialization. At this time, heritage emerges as an economic recovery strategy and as a leisure activity. During the '80s, Western nation-states become major players in the constitution and management of heritage as an economic

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<sup>105</sup> See *Sullivan Entertainment Inc. versus Anne of Green Gables Licensing Authority Inc.*, T-1634-99, Federal Court of Canada.

<sup>106</sup> Sullivan Entertainment also launched a libel suit against the Montgomery heirs, alleging that their comments forced the company to withdraw from an initial public offering in 1999. But the Ontario Supreme Court tossed out the suit early in 2004 in what is only the first round of a 15-year-old legal dispute (MacDonald, 2004). Sullivan Entertainment is appealing the court's decision (Stoffman, 2004).

enterprise, working to encourage and expand new forms of consumption (i.e., historical tourism) as a means to economic recovery. According to John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (1991, p. 49), commercial activity around the past increases to an “unprecedented degree of activity”, informing various cultural and economic practices from the restoration of buildings both public and private, to the reconstruction of historical scenes both on television and at the museum. Certain aesthetic and technological conditions that characterize modernity also contribute to the emergence of heritage as a booming industry. For instance, the last hundred years have seen unprecedented technological changes in the mechanical reproduction of images. As a result of these changes, the past emerges as a part of media culture in ways not seen before, circulating through films, television shows, magazines, and fashions, which transform history into consumable images.

Consequently, the Montgomery boom is not an isolated event, but must be situated within the context of cultural occurrences witnessed in the ‘80s and ‘90s, which include not only the heritage industry but the resuscitation of the period piece in both film and television. The Montgomery adaptations participate in popular culture’s renewed enchantment with the past, or rather, the past imagined from the point of view of the present. The period piece, particularly the costume drama, gains special currency at this time with television offerings such as *Doctor Quinn: Medicine Woman* (1993 – 1998), *Middlemarch* (1994) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), and screen successes from *A Room with a View* (1985) to *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). Television dramas, films, magazines, and fashions circulate and transform images of the past into profitable commodities, and contribute to the emergence of the past as a leisure-time pursuit. This growth of the past as a leisure-time activity is in keeping with Vincent Mosco’s contention (1996, pp. 153-4) that capitalism today is characterized by the extension of commodification into areas of life not seen before. Moreover, for Corner and Harvey, “heritage” develops a broader usage at this time, referring to all “popular mediations of history,” that insert “pastness into the popular by narrative representations which have drawn on, and then re-enhanced, the periods, events, characters, costumes and activities forming heritage’s intertextual grid” (p. 49). Literary heritage tourism is a particularly good example of “heritage’s intertextual grid” since it involves cross marketing between places and literatures. In literary heritage tourism as in postmodern culture, image and reality, fact and fiction converge to produce a pastiche of ‘pastness’, which in turn functions as a sellable commodity for service sector-based economies.

Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, the home Montgomery immortalized as the fictional Avonlea exemplifies this phenomenon. As Squire explains, “While Montgomery transferred elements of the Prince Edward Island landscape into her fiction, tourist development has inverted this process, giving that which was fictional a factual identity through a number of tourist attractions” (p. 143). The Green Gables site, maintained by Parks Canada since 1937 when the Prince Edward Island National Park was established, illustrates this inversion. The main attraction on the park’s grounds is the real-life farmhouse that was the inspiration for Montgomery’s fictional Green Gables. Parks Canada’s interpretive policy puts literary accuracy ahead of historical authenticity; the site’s interpretation is guided, first and foremost, by “details from the novels”, secondly, by “information about the actual farm”, and failing that, by “a comparable nineteenth-century farmstead” (Squire, p. 143). Furthermore, the province’s official tourism literature refers to the island’s northeastern coast, where the park is situated, as “Anne’s Land”, after Montgomery’s fictional heroine. The surrounding area includes restaurants and shops named after characters in Montgomery’s novels.

Within the shops, especially The Anne of Green Gables Store, the tourist can purchase an assortment of Avonlea merchandise from dolls to teapots. Jeanette Lynes (2002 [1998]) coins the term “consumable Avonlea” to describe the commodification of the Green Gables mythology via this merchandise. For Lynes, merchandizing has resulted in the production of a mythology that is “at once regional— grounded in a specific locale— yet highly mobile or portable” (pp. 269-270.) She refers to “dilution”— a marketing tool by which the more regionally grounded aspects of *Anne of Green Gables* are watered down— as a deliberate strategy whose purpose is to expand “the thematic range”, and therefore the profit range, of products (p. 270). As I have argued similarly with respect to adaptation, Lynes claims that marketing de-regionalizes Anne, makes PEI of minimal importance, and transforms Avonlea into a “floating signifier” (p. 270). Fiamengo (2002, p. 227) concurs, stating that tourists are just as happy to purchase Anne memorabilia from shops in Banff and Niagara Falls, as Cavendish or Charlottetown. This memorabilia, says Fiamengo, features the Green Gables house “disconnected from its particular environment and signifying an intense love of home not dependent on region or nation” (p. 233).

Fiamengo’s assertion gets at the affective aspects of the Montgomery Imaginary that a focus on commodification can sometimes neglect. As Lynes correctly points out, the

manifestation of Montgomery within contemporary consumer culture articulates “messages about desire” (p. 269). Those messages need to be situated within a reading formation. Indeed, Lynes points out that Avonlea products interface with the broader consumer trend of countrification or rural elitism, which sells a folkloric, rustic fantasy of the past in pseudo country stores such as Crabtree and Evelyn and in magazines such as *Country Living* and *Victoria*. In my view, the countrification phenomenon, of which “consumable Avonlea” is a part, forms an important intertext that presents the past in de-contextualized, de-politicized terms as lifestyle. As a whole, this consumer context contributes to the contemporary reading of ‘Avonlea’ as a borderless romance, and provides an intertextual field in which to interpret the Montgomery adaptations. The lifestyle on offer, removed as it is from the everyday urban world of the middle-class consumer, not only invokes but stokes desires that are incompatible with the realities of modern living, thus intimating both the affective pull and the transnational possibilities of the Montgomery Imaginary. The next section turns to theories of nostalgia to further support and expand this claim, which crucially forms the basis of my textual analysis.

### *Nostalgia as Romantic Affect*

*Road to Avonlea* is selective about the past. Such selectivity, I have argued, is mandated by the political economy of television production. As a co-production between the CBC and The Disney Channel, the Canadian Edwardian past of Montgomery’s novels is adapted to suit not only more than one national audience but the contemporary viewer. As a generic series, *Road to Avonlea* is expected to fulfil audience expectations of familiar and accessible themes explored in a pleasing and romantic historical setting. *Road to Avonlea* offers the look and the feel of the past for entertainment purposes and makes use of a selective view of history that, like the Disney Realism, programs out the messiness of history. In its place, *Road to Avonlea* substitutes an imagined past more ordered, more coherent, and more satisfying than the present. In effect, the series’ treatment of history is not only utopian but also decidedly nostalgic.

Most discussions of nostalgia are highly critical, arguing that history’s commodification in entertainment *smothers* and *others* the past. According to heritage critics such as David Hewison (1991) and Kevin Walsh (1992), the commodified past floats as an

object disconnected from history and unconnected to the present, generating a lapse in historical consciousness that serves ideologically regressive ends. As Hewison describes it,

[T]his pastiche and collaged past, once it has received the high gloss of presentation from the new breed of “heritage managers”, succeeds in presenting a curiously unified image, where change, conflict, clashes of interest, are neutralized within a single seamless and depthless surface, which merely reflects our contemporary anxieties (p. 175).

In effect, nostalgia’s forgetfulness naturalizes hierarchical relationships, obscures social relations of power, and favours homogeneous identities. Moreover, the critique of nostalgia is a general objection to the packaging of the past as a depthless product to be sold for leisure-time consumption. Commodification mechanically reproduces certain images of the past— of home, rootedness and social cohesion— only those that have an exchange value on the market. Like the Disney Realism, these safe pleasing images are standardized through an aesthetic and ideological filter that removes the taint of history, sifting out conflict and struggle, and expunging oppressive social relations. In the process of inventing the past as a pleasurable commodity, history is simplified and sanitized, made nostalgic and ideal. What consumer culture offers is a pleasurable, comforting vision of ‘pastness’—one that additionally produces a false consciousness of history in its emphasis on style (i.e., the look of the past) over substance (i.e., the meaning of the past). Nostalgia others the past, disconnecting it from the present, and fostering indifference to history. The mechanical reproduction of images of the past due to the advent of photography, film, and video makes us indifferent to the significance of the past since we are dealing with free-floating, contextless images of the past rather than the past to which they refer. The past becomes an autonomous object— de-contextualized, nonspecific, severed from time and place. As a result, critical dialogue about the past and between the past and the present about the future is foreclosed.

The focus on political-economic determinants belies a discomfort with the affective dimensions of popular culture. In reducing nostalgia to its economic origins, Walsh is able to conclude that the commodity consumption of the past is “an artificial desire imposed on society by capital” (p. 116). But the possibility that nostalgic representations satisfy certain needs, are responsive to the contemporary situation, and function as wish-fulfillment eludes critics such as Walsh. Throughout her book, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, film theorist Marcia



Landy (1996, p. 259) emphasizes these affective aspects, making the point that the emphasis on political economy and its effects on the past as a commodity does not provide an adequate explanation for the existence of these images. The focus on commodification, though important to be sure, nonetheless fails to adequately address the affective dimensions of nostalgia, which hold out utopian, and sometimes even radical, possibilities. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (1989) point out that the emergence of nostalgia as a modern cultural phenomenon is contemporaneous with the rise of modern utopian literature, and that this convergence is not coincidental but related. As they put it, “Nostalgia becomes possible at the same time as utopia. The counterpart to the imagined future is the imagined past” (p. 9).

Any critique of nostalgia and its manifestation in popular imaginings of the past must keep in mind its historical antecedent as a cultural response to the ills associated with modernity. Nostalgia is defined as a distinctly Western and modern cultural-phenomenon, and in actual fact, represents an *affective response* to Western modernity. Literally translated, “nostalgia” refers to a painful yearning for home. Though the word “nostalgia” pre-exists modernity, theorists point out its contemporary meaning does not emerge until modernity. Prior to that, nostalgia is medicalized, understood as a disease, a nervous disorder with physiological manifestations (Boym, 2001, pp. 3-32; Davis, 1977, pp. 414-415; Lowenthal, 1989, pp. 20-21; Ritivoti, 2002, pp. 16-22). But due to the effects of urbanization and industrialization, previously inexperienced forms of geographic movement and de-localization become a reality for more and more people. Once this happens, nostalgia loses its medical meaning, and transforms into how we understand it today— as a common, rather than pathological, emotional experience (Ritivoti, p. 24, 29).

As well, the displacement from traditional rural life and agricultural rhythms, and the loss of a cyclical relationship to time constituted necessary precursors to the cultural redefinition of nostalgia. Hence, the modern definition of nostalgia depends on a linear sense of time rather than a cyclical one— there must be a sense that something has been left behind, e.g., past times before the loss of community, before alienation, before fragmentation. As Andreea Decui Ritivoti (2002, p. 24) puts it, “homesickness is in an inverse relationship with cosmopolitanism: The more advanced Western civilization becomes, the less its people will belong to specific places or cultures.” Therefore, a nostalgic perspective assumes that social relations from the past provide a cohesion and plenitude lost

to contemporary society. Indeed, in nostalgia, there must be a sense that the present is somehow deficient (cf. Chase & Shaw, 1989; Lowenthal, 1989). This sense involves a concomitant romanticization of the past, which is viewed as a period of wholeness and certainty. Nostalgia enchants the past as a means of coping with the present, thereby acting unconsciously as a covert critique of the day and demonstrating its ties to Romantic thought, also a child of modernity. Romanticism is a modern phenomenon that arose in the eighteenth century as a critique of the excessive rationalism of Enlightenment thinking. This critique entailed enchanting the world— not retreating from it as is often assumed— and restoring some of its lost magic through an engagement with the sublime and the arational. The Romantics’ focus on nature, aesthetics, creativity and beauty went hand in hand with the process of re-enchanting the world.<sup>107</sup>

Nostalgia as romantic affect enchants the past, imagining a time when people did not feel estranged and when doubt was absent. It constructs a unified, comprehensible past in opposition to the perceived incoherent, divided present— regardless of whether or not people in the past experienced their reality as coherent and secure (Lowenthal, pp. 29-30). As such, nostalgia represents a reaction to the present and a displaced anxiety about the future. Nostalgia interprets the past through a present-day framework, and consequently, must be regarded as a subjective state— affective rather than rational. (By contrast, remembrance is less subjective about the past than nostalgia since it recalls both the good and the bad, and may evoke pain as well as pleasure.) Ultimately, nostalgia is a positive feeling infused with pleasure; though nostalgia may be tinged with sadness, it is still a “good” feeling (Davis, p. 418).

Ironically, the political-economy critique others nostalgia as an object disconnected from history. By contrast, Raymond Williams has argued in *The Country and the City* (1973) that feelings of nostalgia are historically situated, and the past carries meanings specific to the present day. In other words, ideas of the ‘good old days’ vary and change; they are dynamic not fixed. For instance, writes Williams, each invocation of a rural past “when they are looked at on their own terms... mean different things at different times, and quite different

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<sup>107</sup> My use of “magic” and “enchantment” to define the project of Romanticism comes from Black’s discussion in his book, *The Politics of Enchantment: Romanticism, Media and Cultural Studies* (2002), and also informs Chapters 5 and 6.

values are being brought to question” (p. 12). For this reason, nostalgia requires “precise analysis” (Williams, p. 12). Moreover, latent in nostalgia is a critique of contemporary values and, as such, marks a crisis of values (Williams, pp. 35-6). For Williams, this crisis carries the potential for “retrospective radicalism” that has the potential to slide into a “feudal” conservatism (Williams, p. 36). Williams’ cultural-historical view of nostalgia complicates critiques grounded in a political-economy perspective, and brings to the fore the affective dimensions of nostalgia and contributes to my reading of *Road to Avonlea*.

### *A Crisis of Values*

The last chapter argued that ‘Avonlea’ circulates as no place. As a series about no place, *Road to Avonlea* does have the appearance of being timeless and evergreen. Yet ‘Avonlea’ is also a place—imaginary but historically constituted nonetheless. ‘Avonlea’ exists in the popular imagination as symbolic wish fulfillment. What are the historical conditions that wish ‘Avonlea’ into being in our time and Montgomery’s? A reading of manifest content is not enough to provide the answers. Moreover, lamenting *Road to Avonlea*’s ahistorical, inauthentic appropriation of period setting is a pointless exercise. What is purposeful is to historically situate ‘Avonlea’ as a cultural-affective response to the historical moment. Indeed, ‘Avonlea’ demonstrates the capacity of romance to flourish in times of crisis and change, expressing attendant anxieties that cannot find release elsewhere. Therefore, rather than reading *Road to Avonlea*’s manifest content as a misrepresentation of the past, I propose reading the series’ latent content as a nostalgic negotiation of the present. ‘Avonlea’ is a fantasy-place that, rather than suffering from historical amnesia, symbolically speaks to, from and about its own contemporary historical moment.

The preceding section addressed modernity broadly, but to do an analysis of *Road to Avonlea*, a focus on the conditions specific to the late 1980s and early 1990s in Canada and globally is necessary to show how the series makes sense of and within that context. While the notion of ‘Canada’ has been perpetually debated since pre-Confederation, the latter part of the twentieth century gave the Canadian question some new inflections that challenged deeply held myths about the country that were grounded in the post-war boom era. Certainly, how one experienced those challenges depended on the point on the political spectrum one occupied. But generally, the times were marked by a sense of anxiety and a

crisis of values as a process of redefining Canada took hold. The Mulroney Tories reopened constitutional questions through the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords (1987 and 1992, respectively). In 1982, the Trudeau administration had repatriated the Canadian Constitution despite Quebec's refusal to sign on. The Accords sought to redress this failure and to bring Quebec more fully into Confederation through recognition of its "distinct society" status. The ensuing discussions revealed a country fragmented with divisions that surpassed the traditional English/French split as groups representing the First Nations, women, social-justice interests, ethnic associations, federalists, separatists and the regions all took issue for various and disparate reasons. When Canadians were invited to vote in a referendum, they rejected the Charlottetown Accord. Two fall-outs were the formation of the Bloc Québécois, a federal separatist party, and the impetus for a second referendum in Quebec on separation (1995). Moreover, the Oka crisis of 1990, brought national media attention to native land claims when Mohawks in Quebec protested the construction of a golf course on disputed territory.

Beyond constitutional concerns, a sharp philosophical shift to the right spurred the erosion of Canada's post-war welfare state, and inaugurated two sweeping continental trade deals with the United States—the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) of 1989 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994. The new economic agenda undermined the notion that all Canadians should be guaranteed a basic standard of living, and quality access to healthcare, education and other social services. In 1986, the Mulroney government began reducing federal transfer payments to the provinces in the effort to slash the deficit, and reduce corporate and personal taxes. When the Chrétien Liberals came to power in 1993, they reneged on their promise to stop the cuts and instead further reduced transfer payments, weakening the social safety net. Meanwhile, Canada's banks posted record-high profits, which average Canadians viewed with a mixture of resentment and dismay, given their own circumstances. Making matters worse was a high unemployment rate, partially the result of downsizing trends and of companies relocating to countries with lower labour and environmental standards—one consequence of 'freer' trade. Companies laid off workers, devastating communities for the whole nation to see on the nightly news. This pattern was repeated in post-industrial countries such as the United States and Great Britain.

As industrialization slowed down, resource-based industries also faced serious problems that highlighted the environmental costs of poor stewardship. The closing of the

Atlantic cod fishery in 1992 and a reduction in the annual allowable cut in British Columbia's forests were signs of ecological trouble. Canada's entry into continental trade arrangements additionally undermined social and environmental safety nets because these deals weakened the power of the state, specifically its ability to erect buffers against the market to protect citizens, communities and ecosystems. The increased dominance of capital curtailed the state's power to intervene in the market, and raised questions about Canada's ability to act as a sovereign state in the best interests of its people and on behalf of the environment.

The impact of globalization on democracy and local decision-making was not an exclusively Canadian concern but had wider significance. David Harvey (1990) characterizes globalization as the shift from a Fordist economy, with resource and manufacturing industries tied to a national base, to more flexible forms of accumulation. Trade liberalization as well as technological changes have provided the unfettered conditions facilitating transnational capital's ability to traverse the globe in seconds, seeking the lowest wages and the fewest environmental controls, in a race to the bottom. Consequently, "flexible accumulation" has made corporate allegiances to the nation-state obsolete, and has led to the de-industrialization of many Western economies including Canada's (Harvey, pp. 141-188; Mosco, 1996, p. 13).

These are the historical conditions in which *Avonlea*-as-nodal-signifier takes root in the popular imagination towards the end of the twentieth century, acting as the symbolic expression and negotiation of a crisis of values that had national as well as global resonance. For this reason, *Road to Avonlea's* mode of address has meanings specific to the Canadian context, but at the same time, also creates points of access not necessarily exclusive to Canada. Historical conditions adapt Montgomery's fantasy construction of 'Avonlea' to the needs of the late twentieth century, tapping into the sentiments of the day as a nostalgic-utopian response to contemporary anxieties over the erosion of collective responsibility and local sovereignty and the effects of this on community. Adaptation invokes Montgomery's imaginary community as a reflexive dialogue with the present, giving 'Avonlea' new meanings appropriate to these times not Montgomery's.

## *A Romantic-Communitarian Sensibility*

John Harp (1991) defines community as “a site of social differences and struggle” and the intersecting point between the individual as subject and institutions as structures: “The encounter between the local and particular experiences of actors/individuals/subjects and the universalizing institutional structures of society is mediated by community.” His definition is useful to exploring two significant thematic arcs in *Road to Avonlea*: first, the Gus Pike character’s integration into Avonlea, and second, the external threats posed to Avonlea’s survival. I have privileged these two arcs because they permit analysis of the contemporary meaning of Avonlea, and thus contribute to my efforts to participate in a cultural history of this popular place. Moreover, since both narrative arcs figure prominently in ending the series, they are significant to *Road to Avonlea*’s overall meaning. The series weaves together these two narratives to convey a sense of continuity even in the face of change. Furthermore, there are elements of my fan study that strongly encouraged examination of these themes. For one thing, I could not overlook the overwhelming popularity of Gus Pike among the fans I surveyed; as a result, his story garners a place in my analysis that I had not foreseen, but would be remiss if absent. Although Felicity King is almost equally popular among these fans, she does not negotiate community in the way Gus does, as she is already integrated within Avonlea. For this reason, aside from his popular appeal, Gus was a natural choice when it came to my desire to explore community as a thematic concern that speaks to the series’ late twentieth-century origins.

As well, the sense that fans seem to experience *Road to Avonlea* as an Edenic ‘before time’ that is both desirable yet removed directed me to concretely define what ‘Avonlea’ signifies for contemporary times. I chose the Avonlea-under-threat arc as a means by which to throw the contemporary meaning of ‘Avonlea’ into relief. To put it another way, only when we identify what is threatened, can we comprehend what we stand to lose. Finally, both narrative arcs involve themes very much in the spirit of Montgomery, though they take on meanings relevant to the historical moment. To be sure, the ability to compare and contrast between ‘then and now’ is invaluable to my efforts to historically situate *Road to Avonlea*’s mode of address. From *Anne of Green Gables* to *Emily of New Moon*, Montgomery’s fiction explores the complexities of belonging and home, and the interconnectedness of individual and community.

To bridge this chapter to the previous ones, my contention is that Gus' story has transnational appeal in the same way that Anne's does, and that the Avonlea-under-threat arc has the potential to speak more specifically—though not exclusively— to, from and about late twentieth-century Canada. In both cases, the notion of community figures strongly, and is the reason I began this section with Harp's definition. Moreover, I want to stake a claim that the series' meditation on community marks it as a Canadian costume drama, setting it apart from traditional American and British uses of period setting. The Western, as the quintessential American costume drama, takes rugged individualism as its basis,<sup>108</sup> while the British variant offers an often-scathing contemplation of class relations. But 'Avonlea' is neither wild frontier nor manor house. What sets *Road to Avonlea* apart from these uses of period setting is the emphasis on the individual within the community and the serious responsibilities and attendant rewards that come with belonging. With this emphasis, the series does not have the libertarian sensibility of a Western or the class-consciousness of a British drama. Instead, *Road to Avonlea* has a romantic-communitarian sensibility that requires deliberation.

First of all, communitarianism is necessarily romantic because of its historical antecedent as a critique of Enlightenment liberalism and its asocial enshrining of individual rights and freedoms. Contrary to the popular stereotype of the self-absorbed Romantic artist, the Romantics favoured communitarianism as an ideal because of their view that people could only realize their individuality by participating in a community (Black, p. 27). We only survive— and in the best of cases, thrive— as autonomous individuals because of our moral bonds with other people (Benhabib, 1992, p. 50). Peter Dahlgren (1995, p. 139) further explains communitarianism's critique of the liberal view of the fully realized individual abstracted from the social world:

Communitarians underscore the concept of the public good, and promote the idea of the socioculturally situated and constructed individual. Further, communitarians respond negatively to what they see as liberalism's

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<sup>108</sup> As their titles suggest, even 'female' Westerns like *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* and *Christy* (1994 – 1995 as series, and 2000 and 2001 as movies-of-the-week) offer the rugged individual as their focus. Both television dramas are structured around the first-person point of view of Dr. Michaela Quinn and Christy Huddleston, pioneering women carving out an existence for themselves on the frontiers of American society. Many of the *Road to Avonlea* fans I surveyed mentioned these two shows as favourites. See Chapter 6 for details.

compliance with the anomie and fragmentation of modernity, and they therefore privilege the idea of shared values, which help to constitute the identity of individuals. In short, citizenship in this view presupposes and promotes some sense of community.

Seyla Benhabib (1992, pp. 77-81) additionally differentiates between strains of communitarian thinking. Integrationist thought emphasizes particular traits for group belonging, and advocates a unitary and 'timeless' definition of the public good that can be repressive and authoritarian. Conversely, participatory communitarians assume social and cultural differences as a condition of modern life, and as such, do not prescribe to an overarching vision of the public good, but instead, value citizens' participation in the definition and constant re-definition of shared values. Similarly, Dalhgren concludes that "[t]he point of the political arena is not to merge all of these [different experiences and perspectives] into some artificial synthesis, but rather to enact as much communication as possible between them, acknowledging difference and striving for agreement" (p. 141).

Communitarianism also bears close correspondence to a cherished myth about Canada as a constitutional nation built on communication and compromise, on the negotiation of differences. American social scientist Seymour Martin Lipset (1990) maintains that the Canadian propensity for negotiation, particularly in foreign policy, differentiates Canada from the United States and that country's Manichaeism or preference for absolutes (i.e., good versus evil) rather than the gray area of compromise. Canadians see conflicts "as reflections of interest differences and, therefore, subject to negotiation and discussion" rather than in "nonnegotiable moralistic and ideological terms" like Americans (Lipset, 1990, p. 220).<sup>109</sup> Moreover, in the Canadian context, communitarianism has both conservative and radical implications, related to its preservationist tendencies, explained in more detail later. In any case, the series' romantic-communitarian sensibility demands reading in light of the two narrative arcs I have identified as central to *Road to Avonlea* and its romance with community in an age of modernity.

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<sup>109</sup> Michael Adams' 2003 research published in *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* shows that Lipset's thesis continues to hold.



## *Of Orphans and Outsiders*

Gus' story, as described below, helps set *Road to Avonlea* thematically apart from the other Montgomery television incarnations because of the focus on individuals within a community—the series is called *Road to Avonlea* after all, and not *The King Family*. Following the conventions of recent costume drama, the *Anne* adaptations downplay the original novels' thematic exploration of community in favour of the female protagonist's individualistic pursuit of career and heterosexual romance (Drain, 1992b).<sup>110</sup> Meanwhile, *Emily of New Moon* is by and large an intergenerational family melodrama. The ancestral home New Moon, in which much of the drama takes place, is physically and emotionally cut off from community, acting as a claustrophobic setting for family intrigue and emotional mayhem. But *Road to Avonlea* is different from the *Anne* miniseries and the *Emily* adaptation, as Gus' narrative trajectory illustrates.

Gus first appears in Avonlea in the second season as a young ship hand looking for work at the cannery (“How Kissing Was Discovered”). With his street-urchin appearance, he is familiar as a character type suited to a Dickens melodrama. He is slightly older than the principal Avonlea children, who are duly impressed by what they perceive as his adventurous independent lifestyle, free from parents and school. But when Felix asks what life is like on his own, Gus relays that it is in fact “lonely” (“How Kissing Was Discovered”), and so begins a narrative trajectory built around this character's struggle to overcome his rootlessness and to fulfil his dream to “settle down” (“Friends and Relations”). “I want what you got... you got people,” he explains to the Avonlea children (“Aunt Hetty's Ordeal”), and when asked what he would do if he finds a hidden treasure, his sole desire is to “get me a home, someplace I wouldn't get put outta” (“All that Glitters”).

As farmhand, cannery worker, lighthouse keeper and hotel worker, Gus takes several jobs to make ends meet and build a life for himself in Avonlea, garnering the respect of the King family who eventually welcome him as a son. As he says to Felicity, “Meeting you and your family is when my life started” (“The Return of Gus Pike”). He also goes to school, and

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<sup>110</sup> Theodore F. Sheckels (1999) draws the same conclusion regarding RKO's 1934-film adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables*. However, he pulls it into a slightly different interpretative framework. For Sheckels, de-emphasizing community in favour of the individual is one of the ways in which this Hollywood film “Americanizes” *Anne of Green Gables*.

with Hetty King's extra help when he cannot attend due to work, becomes literate ("Aunt Hetty's Ordeal", "When She Was Bad, She Was Horrid"). Having "never met a soul more determined", Hetty the prickly spinster-schoolmarm develops into Gus' most fervent ally and loyal supporter ("The Return of Gus Pike"). When he is wrongly accused of rum-running ("Sea Ghost") and of having dubious intentions towards her niece Felicity ("The Dinner"), Hetty refuses to doubt him, and after a shipboard accident blinds Gus, she refuses to let him wallow in self-pity ("Return to Me", "So Dear to My Heart").

On his journey to belonging, Gus encounters Avonlea's prejudices against someone of his background, even from Hetty at first, as I will shortly discuss. When the community suspects illegal smuggling on the island, stalwarts whipped into hysteria by Rachel Lynde are quick to scapegoat Gus. The same scenario unfolds in another episode, with Eulalie Bugle leading the charge this time, when Gus is wrongly accused of stealing an Avonlea heirloom ("The Disappearance"). In this respect, the series' construction of Avonlea is similar to Montgomery's in that belonging to community can come as both a blessing and a curse. Gus also deals with his insecurity that he is not a proper gentleman, a recurring theme that is introduced in the first episode in which the character appears, when Gus chaperones Felicity at a dance she does not have her parents' permission to attend. Later, some of this insecurity develops out of his desire to be a worthy mate for Felicity, with whom he falls in love ("High Society"). Obstacles to their union include Felicity's immature snobbishness ("High Society"); competition with the educated and well-off Arthur Pettibone for her affections ("Hearts and Flowers", "Felicity's Perfect Beau"); and Felicity's soul-searching questions about the kind of future she wants—whether that includes leaving Avonlea for school and delaying marriage, or staying to be with Gus ("Felicity's Perfect Beau", "Otherwise Engaged"). Although self-reliant to the core, Gus displays an innate sense of responsibility to others, demonstrated in his commitment to watch out for the best interests of those for whom he cares. Along these lines, he encourages Felicity in her desire to go away to medical school, even though it leaves him heartbroken. Fearing Felicity will grow to resent him if they marry and she does not pursue her passion for medicine, he decides to take a job aboard a ship to free her, but vows he will return ("Otherwise Engaged").

In the final two seasons, the writers had to accommodate the absences of Michael Mahonen and Gema Zamprogna, the actors who portray Gus and Felicity respectively, resulting in a series of melodramatic plot twists that bore the gothic stamp of senior story

editor Marlene Matthews. Back from sea, Gus discovers a mentally disturbed street woman in Halifax, who turns out to be his presumed dead mother, and also learns that Ezekial Crane is his biological father. Gus goes to sea with his mother to search for Captain Crane in Jamaica because, as he explains to Felicity, “Most of my life’s kind of like a big empty hole. Never knowing who I am, where I come from.” But tragedy ensues, and Gus is presumed dead after a shipwreck (“The Return of Gus Pike”). A year passes and the grief-stricken Felicity finds herself running an orphanage in Avonlea, while somewhat reluctantly engaged to the banker Stuart MacRae, when news is received that Gus did not perish (“Return to Me”). Hetty and Felicity travel to South Carolina and, after much persuading on their part, Gus agrees to come home to Avonlea. Blinded by an accident during the shipwreck and living in self-imposed isolation, Gus wanted to stay dead to Felicity because he feared for her future. Surgery back in Canada offers hope that Gus may eventually recover his sight. The series’ finale culminates in Gus and Felicity’s much-anticipated wedding, which acts as a kind of balm, providing a sense of continuity in the face of the changes we know are to come—something Hetty herself notes in her speech at the reception (“So Dear to My Heart”).

Gus Pike is the only main character who is both property-less and working class, and must perilously wend his way through Avonlea’s bourgeois milieu. One could argue that Gus’ appeal for the presumably middle-class audience comes from his exoticism, his otherness, though he is ultimately domesticated—turned into a gentleman through education and contained within a middle-class marriage. But such a reading neglects aspects of the character and the affective appeal of his story, in particular the desires that his character fundamentally addresses. In the nineteenth-century, social commentators such as Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo used the street urchin in their novels to draw attention to the ills of urbanization and industrialization, and to the moral bankruptcy of neglectful leaders. The urchin’s story acted as symbolic wish fulfillment, tapping into the anxious realities of the day, and resolving these via a series of melodramatic twists and turns. At the close of the twentieth century, the urchin still plays a role in symbolic wish fulfillment, acting as a fantasy response to an uncertain present, and taking on new meanings while evoking feelings appropriate to the historical moment.

Gus Pike is not a character Montgomery created, but an innovation of Sullivan Entertainment, who has now found a home in the Montgomery Imaginary.<sup>111</sup> Gus seems to be a composite character, bearing close resemblance to two Montgomery creations: Peter Craig in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* and Perry Miller in the *Emily* books. In terms of his background history, his relationships with Avonlea stalwarts, and his thematic significance, Gus also resembles Montgomery's Anne, though he lacks her wild imagination and self-conscious sense of romanticism. Nevertheless, both characters are poor and without parents;<sup>112</sup> both are diamonds in the rough and deeply lonely without a place to call home; and both have a profound effect on Avonlea's more curmudgeonly residents. Although Gus does change after coming to Avonlea, in turn, he changes Avonlea—a point made about the Anne character as well (Drain, 1992b). Gus changes as a result of his efforts to overcome his rootlessness not his class. Likewise, Avonlea changes when some of its more prominent residents confront their prejudices about people with Gus' beginnings.

Gus and Anne's status as underdogs and outsiders is arguably a large part of their cross-cultural appeal. Certainly, Japanese scholar Yoshiko Akamatsu (1990, p. 207) has made this claim about Anne arguing that "As long as there are people who consider themselves as outsiders, *Anne of Green Gables* will be read." Moreover, to account for the modern appeal of Anne in Japan immediately after World War II and then generally in post-war Canada, her story has been referred to as a narrative of displacement or immigration, eventually culminating in rootedness and belonging (Akamatsu, 1999; Clarkson, 1999; Katsura, 1984). Adrienne Clarkson (1999, pp. ix-x), Canada's Governor General and the L.M. Montgomery Institute's Patron, writes that *Anne of Green Gables* appealed to her as a girl newly emigrated to Canada from Hong Kong. With a protagonist who comes to Avonlea as an outsider and is then loved by its members as one of their own, the novel, for Clarkson, serves as "a

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<sup>111</sup> Thanks in part to Michael Mahonen's layered and soulful interpretation of Gus. Mahonen rescues Gus from becoming the Dickensian caricature he might have become in the hands of a less capable, less thoughtful performer. In fact, Mahonen's contributions extended his character's role on the series. According to Mahonen, "I began the series with the understanding that I would be used fairly infrequently. They [the series' creators] became very interested in the character and kept putting him in regularly" (quoted in Heilbron, 1993, p. 32).

<sup>112</sup> Gus grew up in a foundling home because his mother was assumed to have died (we learn otherwise in the sixth season) and his father was in jail for murder. "I'm near an orphan myself," he says in the episode "A Dark and Stormy Night."

metaphor for Canada as a country that receives immigrants.” In this respect, Gus’ story parallels Anne’s, and through comparison, suggests reasons for his story’s resonance, and perhaps even its ability to construct a transnational mode of address since large-scale migration and displacement are a prominent feature of life in modernity. The interpretation of Anne in merchandizing suggests such a metaphor of migration for Lynes:

One of the most pervasive symbolic images for sale depicts Anne waiting at Bright River Station in the [first] novel’s second chapter. This is the scene depicted on the posters, and on a postcard manufactured by Avonlea Traditions Inc. ... It depicts her as homeless, a migrant figure, someone on the margins of society who is not yet accepted. As a symbol, it delineates someone who has ‘no place’... (p. 278)

Lynes views this image as allowing “comfortable middle-class consumers to romanticize the margins” and perform “a symbolic act of rescue” via purchase. While this description may relay one possible reading, I am not convinced that it fully explains the fairly recent appearance of that image or its affective resonance.

Indeed, Nikos Papastergiadis (2000, p. 10) calls migration “a central force in the constitution of modernity,” and Howard Adelman (1998, p. 90, 101-102) concludes that “the twentieth century became the century of refugees” with numbers reaching a world peak in the 1990s. In Canada alone, the last century experienced an influx of nearly 13.7 million immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2003). In the modern world, whether by catastrophe or by choice, many people are ‘from away’ and if not ‘from away’ themselves, have been touched by migration second-hand through their kin. In generalizing migration, my purpose is not to deny the diversity of migrant positions and stories, but to ponder the ubiquity of migration narratives and experiences. That ubiquity has prompted theorists of nostalgia like Svetlana Boym and Andreea Decui Ritivoti to make explicit connections between immigrant experience and the pervasive cultural longing for home that characterizes twentieth-century nostalgia. Indeed, “the mourning of displacement”, for Boym, is at “the very core of the modern condition” (p. xvi).

Gus’ story displays nostalgia for an imagined past when alienation and displacement could be reconciled within a community where people care for each other, where individuals do not feel alone and adrift in an uncaring world, and where hard work is guaranteed to be rewarded with security. In the late-twentieth century, ‘Avonlea’ takes on meanings

appropriate to a historical moment characterized by widespread geographic dislocation and a crisis of values in the welfare state. When the migrant Gus first arrives in Avonlea in the second season (“How Kissing Was Discovered”), he is a young man without a place to call home. He embarks on making a home for himself in an unfamiliar place and with no relations to help him. “I ain’t got no people,” he wistfully explains (“Aunt Hetty’s Ordeal”). The affective urgency of Gus’ trajectory towards security and belonging—towards ‘home’, in other words— in combination with the non-specific use of period setting, contributes to a flexible mode of address suitable for a borderless romance. As J. Douglas Porteous and Sandre E. Smith (2001, p. 39) conjecture, “it seems just possible that home is currently vying with nature as the post-Romantic or postmodern replacement for God.”

### *Belonging and Difference*

Moreover, as a migrant worker Gus’ situation strikes at the heart of post-industrial fears over job loss, diminishing employment opportunities, and an eroding welfare state. *Road to Avonlea* enacts a fantasy resolution to this anxious situation: Gus encounters a community where members are willing to give him a chance. In this manner, the series elicits the viewer’s affective response to Gus’ narrative arc. Hetty sees Gus’ potential as “a boy with gumption”, and takes him under her wing (“Aunt Hetty’s Ordeal”). When Hetty goes to the cannery seeking to enlarge her school’s enrolment, she asks who would like to learn to read and write, and Gus comes forward, even though it will mean having to fit school in between shifts at the cannery. Gus shows up late for school, barefoot and smelling like fish because he has no other clothes. To Hetty’s further dismay, he lights a pipe in the classroom, and plays his fiddle at recess while the children dance.

The fiddle playing becomes a symbolic source of conflict—a sign of Gus’ difference and an offense to Hetty’s middle-class propriety. She sees it as “a bad habit” and “foolishness” that “stands in the way of learning,” and so, confiscates Gus’ instrument. “Do you want to read and write? Do you want to get somewhere in the world, or do you want to wreck your life and end up in the gutter?” Hetty demands. But music and dancing form a part of Gus’ life as a cannery worker, and gives him pleasure. Yet in his desire to please Hetty and out of his fear he may become like his axe-murdering ne’er-do-well father (particularly as the fiddle originally was his), Gus will not play any more and instead will

work on becoming a gentleman unlike his father who “weren’t no gentleman”, Gus confides. Additionally, however, Gus has to contend with some of the rougher workers at the cannery who make fun of him for going to school. Gus is not only different within Avonlea, but often from the other poor and working-class characters, including his mostly (thankfully) absent father. One of the ways the series evokes the viewer’s sympathy for Gus is by making him an all-around outsider. Such an emotional trajectory entails portraying his fellow workers as coarse and undisciplined—in a manner stereotypical of nineteenth-century melodrama. By contrast, Avonlea appears as a calm and ordered oasis. At the same time, Avonlea has its downside, represented by Hetty in this episode and her rigid preoccupation with order, propriety and discipline. Caught between two worlds and miserable in either, Gus takes up the fiddle defiantly. When a fire ensues at the cannery during the revelry, Gus quits school to earn more money to pay for the damages.

In the meantime, Muriel Stacey, the school superintendent and longtime friend of Hetty’s, asks Gus to perform at a public tribute to Miss King, honouring her teaching excellence, but Gus refuses to take up the fiddle. Muriel later chastises Hetty for making Gus fearful of playing and unhappy in the process. She also blames Hetty for his decision to leave school and for putting too much pressure on the boy. Contrite, Hetty softens her views, realizing the damage her prejudice has done. “I do believe I did do something wrong where you’re concerned,” she tells Gus apologetically, and asks him to return to school because she will miss him if he didn’t. The episode concludes symbolically with Gus playing his fiddle in tribute to a teary-eyed Hetty, thanking her for being “the first one who ever tried to help me in my life.”

Reading the story of Gus Pike as one of containment might be tempting. However, writing about *Anne of Green Gables*, Susan Drain (1992b, p. 120) explains that belonging is complicated, “a more complex relationship than one might initially expect— not one of subordination, possession, or conformity, but of interdependence and tension.” Along the way and importantly, *Road to Avonlea* resists submerging the character’s difference within a simple tale of conformity as a means to belonging. Gus takes up the fiddle again, and Hetty acknowledges the emotional damage her stifling attitudes have caused the boy. Given this reading, we cannot see Gus’ trajectory simply in terms of conformity, with resistance to belonging (orphaning oneself?) as the preferred alternative. Instead, Gus plays a role in the community’s attempts to negotiate difference, showing that the relationship between

individual and community is reciprocal and dynamic (cf. Drain, 1992b). This negotiation is best represented by his interactions with Hetty and Felicity, on whom he has the deepest emotional impact and who, as the most immovable of the main characters, learn to bend in order to meet Gus halfway.

That lesson requires the viewer to see that Gus is already a gentleman in word and deed,<sup>113</sup> and that in fact, some of Avonlea's residents are in need of an attitude change. The series accomplishes this by contrasting Felicity's decidedly ungentlemanly behaviour to Gus'. In the world of Avonlea, one's behaviour is judged according to one's treatment of other people, as series' fans note.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Gus' preoccupation with learning middle-class manners and grooming is the stuff of surface appearance (a point made early on in "Aunt Hetty's Ordeal", when Hetty gives him a silly book entitled *How to Be a Gentleman*). Certainly, Felicity has a keen preoccupation with appearance for all the wrong reasons, and part of her narrative trajectory is to overcome this preoccupation and develop some maturity. "Good breeding and polite manners are very important. How else can one improve one's position in life?" she remarks to Gus ("High Society"). When a prestigious, private ladies' college invites Felicity to apply for a scholarship, she lies during the interview, and says the Kings are not her real parents, but rural relations she went to live with after her rich father died. Ashamed of her farming background, Felicity pretends she is Sara ("High Society"). Later, she belittles Gus in front of her new ladies' college acquaintances, calling him a "country boy" with "a mad crush on me." Gus decides that "If that's what manners does to a person, I don't want them." For all her high-blown aspirations, Felicity behaves selfishly and often cruelly towards Gus.<sup>115</sup> In the end, she regrets her behaviour, withdraws her application to the school, and apologizes to her parents and Gus. In Gus' words, she has learnt "There ain't nothing wrong with common people."

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<sup>113</sup> The Internet fans participating in the survey are aware of this reading of Gus. See Chapter 6 for a discussion.

<sup>114</sup> This message was one among several that fans identified in the series. For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 6.

<sup>115</sup> In "A Dark and Stormy Night", Felicity vows to Sara that she will "set my sights higher than a dirt-covered lighthouse boy"; and in "Felicity's Perfect Beau", she spitefully tells Gus that "your fishing boots [are] the only thing you'll ever own."



Felicity further puts Gus through the wringer when she develops an attraction for the university-educated and middle-class Arthur Pettibone in the fourth season. Felicity's attraction to Arthur stems from her superficial ideas about romance, and from her middle-class prejudices. As a result, she concocts the notion that Gus is less romantic than Arthur is ("Felicity's Perfect Beau"). Contrasting her two beaus, she decides Gus is "very sweet and hard-working" ("Hearts and Flowers"), and knowledgeable about "common everyday things" ("Felicity's Perfect Beau"). Meanwhile, she declares Arthur is "handsome, mysterious and intense" ("Hearts and Flowers") and knowledgeable about "wonderful fantastical things" ("Felicity's Perfect Beau"). The irony of course is that Gus is the romantic hero *par excellence* what with his mysterious past, his sexy Celtic accent and his passionate devotion to Felicity despite her gargantuan flaws.

When Gus proposes to her, she reveals to her mother and later to Gus that she is fearful of growing up and making decisions about her life. But the young lovers agree to wait two years, and Felicity shuts out Arthur as a prospective mate, acknowledging her real bond with Gus. After this point, Felicity ceases to belittle Gus about his background. Their romance is much like Heathcliff and Cathy's in Emily Brontë's celebrated *Wuthering Heights* (1847), only with a much happier ending because Felicity, unlike Cathy, is able to confront her hurtful pretensions, and find her way to Gus, who meets her midpoint when he agrees to wait for her. However, the time Gus must spend working remains a source of tension, as Felicity wishes they could be together more often ("Heirs and Graces", "Incident at Vernon River" and "Modern Times"). Although Gus goes to school, develops better grooming habits, and wins the middle-class Felicity's heart, he remains, as he explains to Felicity, "a working lad" not "a gentry lad" ("Modern Times"), and that is something she must learn to accept.<sup>116</sup> The series tackles the differences between Gus and Felicity, and indeed between most of the characters, through compromise, arriving at resolutions that have to be continuously re-negotiated.

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<sup>116</sup> In "Modern Times", Gus is late for a picnic because of work, and tells the frustrated Felicity, "If I were a gentry lad instead of a working lad, I'd accommodate your every whim." In "Hearts and Flowers", Arthur accuses Gus of having unfair access to information, which enabled him to ask Felicity to the Valentine's Day dance before Arthur had the chance. The dance is to be held at the White Sands Hotel where Gus works. Gus replies, "We all have advantages—mine is that I have to work for a living."

Gus does not become middle class, but he does get the middle-class girl. This scenario is markedly different from other depictions of working-class men and their usually doomed love affairs with women above their station. From Leonard Bast in *Howard's End* (1992) to Jack Dawson in *Titanic* (1997), such representations use an affinity for art or music as a way to portray the working-class character as 'civilized', despite his lowly station, and therefore appropriate as a sympathetic if doomed love interest for a genteel lady. To put it another way, an interest in cockfighting or a flair for bare-fisted fighting would surely put him out of the running. On *Road to Avonlea*, however, Gus' fiddle playing is, first and foremost, a sign of his working-class difference, as already argued. And unlike his filmic companions Leonard and Jack, Gus' story culminates in a union to his middle-class love interest through marriage rather than separation through death. His characterization therefore diverges in crucial ways from Peter Craig and Perry Miller, the Montgomery characters from which Gus appears to be inspired. In the novels, Peter's crush on Felicity and Perry's on Emily remains unrequited. (As an aside, Emily, an aspiring writer from a respectable island family, ends up with Teddy Kent, who despite his poor background is suitably artistic and therefore worthy as a mate.)

Gus' integration into Avonlea does not mean a loss of identity or a rejection of difference, even though his contact with the community does change his life. Gus remains different at the same time that he forges his acceptance within the community.<sup>117</sup> The point of his narrative trajectory is not to overcome his class by ascending to the next level via marriage or by rejecting his difference via education, but to belong to a community thereby ending his rootlessness. In Avonlea, Gus fulfills his dreams of finding steady work, getting an education, and developing close bonds with members of a community. That is because in the end Gus is from Avonlea. Through involvement in a community, Gus realizes his individuality— as a working lad and as a gentleman— demonstrating the series' romantic-communitarian sensibility. As Benhabib reminds us, "When the story of a life can only be told from the standpoint of the individual, then such a self is a narcissist and a loner who

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<sup>117</sup> Storey was the only writer I interviewed who made note of this aspect of the series when he remarked on *Road to Avonlea's* gay-male fan following in Toronto. "In Avonlea," Storey explained, "boys played with girls, and they weren't called sissies. Nobody ever got beaten up because they were making cookies with their sister... It was, by and large, a world where the heroes were eccentric characters, who the community recognized as being outside the mainstream but embraced anyway."

may have attained autonomy without solidarity” (p. 198). Moreover, in the movement from alienation to identity, Gus’ narrative trajectory follows the quest structure of romance, as identified by Frye.

Coming back to Harp’s definition of community, *Road to Avonlea* dramatizes the intersection between individual agency and external demands, and refuses to valorize one at the expense of the other in what can best be summed up as an exercise in “responsible self-empowerment” to borrow Gerson’s phrase (1995, p. 32). Writing about *Anne of Green Gables*, Laura M. Robinson (1995, p. 42) argues that the best way to approach this novel productively is not to lament the heroine’s containment or to over-valorize her subversions but to locate her agency in her negotiation of the structures she inhabits. Such an interpretive strategy is also appropriate to *Road to Avonlea* and its romantic-communitarian sensibility. Moreover, the refusal to give either rugged individualism or social conformity preeminence significantly lends to the series’ cultural portability.

In an article on human communication and transculture theory, researcher Min-Sun Kim (2001, p. 3) explains that

... the powerful pulls between the experiences of relatedness and autonomy, connection and separateness... speaks to deeply rooted sensibilities regarding what it means to exist as a human. What it means to be a person is, of course, construed very differently in contemporary Western and Asian cultures.

Kim’s point that autonomy and relatedness are “two basic human needs” in all cultures (p. 23) is valuable to theorizing *Road to Avonlea*’s flexible mode of address. *Road to Avonlea* assumes a binocular perspective that explores the tensions in human experience that Kim describes. As a result, the series offers points of address for cultures that emphasize individualism and independence and those that value collectivism and interdependence, a situation that equally accounts for the cross-cultural appeal of *Anne of Green Gables*. Montgomery studies suggest that the reading of Anne as a proto-feminist figure, who rails against social convention in order to assert her identity, is a Western one, while research on Japanese reception indicates Anne is appreciated as a dutiful daughter, who recognizes her obligations to family and community. In other words, the degree of emphasis placed on one pole of experience or the other will vary according to the values (i.e., reception context) of the specific culture. *Road to Avonlea*’s mode of address similarly allows for such flexible

cultural expressions because, as the story of Gus Pike illustrates, the series constantly negotiates and re-negotiates these twin poles of human experience. In this way, the dialectic of individual and community proves to be a portable theme suited to a transnational television genre.

## CHAPTER FIVE/ THE END OF ENCHANTMENT

Throughout its seven seasons, *Road to Avonlea* contends with historical changes that will eventually culminate in the end of a way of life—the introduction of new technologies, increased mobility, workforce changes, greater concentrations of capital—factors not alien to the modern viewer. Each factor impacts on the ability of the community to survive in its existing form. In confronting the challenges of modernity, the Avonlea-under-threat arc comes to signify a narrative of cultural preservation. On the one hand, this narrative arc maintains enough flexibility of address to be meaningful to a transnational audience familiar with discussions about globalization or —depending on the cultural context— Westernization. On the other hand, specific knowledge is also at work in this narrative. That knowledge comes from historically accrued modes of sense making that would be familiar to a Canadian viewer.

With the benefit of historical hindsight, *Road to Avonlea* constructs a retrospective critique of modernity, culminating in a swan song that acknowledges the inevitable changes that will come to the island community. Such retrospectives are to be found in turn-of-the-century popular culture—whether at the turn of our century or another’s. *Fin-de-siècle* popular culture revisits the previous century to reflect on where we have come from, to review where we are at the moment, and to judge where we are headed. *Road to Avonlea* measures where we were, as a society, at the start of the twentieth century against where we are at the brink of the twenty-first century. In his book, *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode (1966) argues that modern secular literature creates the illusion of movement through time, establishing beginnings and endings, in an effort to make sense of the present. As Zygmunt Bauman (2000, p. 110, *his emphasis*) explains it, “The history of time began with modernity. Indeed, modernity is, apart from anything else, perhaps even more than anything else, *the history of time*: modernity is the time when time has a history.” According to Genevieve Lloyd (1993, p. 8), such “time consciousness” becomes a cultural expression of Western modernity at the point when the cyclical and predictable rhythm of agrarian living gives way to the speed and contingency of urban dwelling. This kind of “self-conscious historicism” marks an acute

anxiety located in the present (cf. Fulford, 2002, pp. 17-18). *Road to Avonlea's* brand of "time consciousness" manifests itself as an anxious dialogue on the concept of progress.

*Road to Avonlea's* "time consciousness" is made even more symbolic because the context in which the series was produced marked not only the turn of a century but of a millenium. While *Road to Avonlea* lacks the apocalyptic character of true millenarian expression, it is nonetheless epochal. That is, the series' swan-song quality comes from its sense that the characters are experiencing the ending of an era, the closing of an old order. Reflection and contemplation often accompany the millennial angst associated with epochal endings.<sup>118</sup> During such a time, the invocation of 'Avonlea' takes on special meanings that share some parallels with Montgomery's original incarnation, though there are key divergences located in the series' production context.

### *Reworking Cavendish*

MacLulich defines Montgomery's fictional setting of Avonlea as a "regional idyll"—a style of Canadian literature that displays a yearning for the childhood memories of the not-too-distant past and that is a nostalgic response to the historical moment. MacLulich explains that the emergence of the regional idyll just prior to World War I was contemporaneous with increasing urbanization and industrialization in Canada. Discussing popular fiction in Canada in the early twentieth century, Clarence Karr (2000) makes a similar point. He argues that the work of popular writers like Montgomery shows awareness of the stresses that modernity brought with it, and so offered images emphasizing "the importance of order, civility, family and community" (p. 25). These writers were not anti-modern: they considered the older Victorian virtues a means by which to negotiate not reject the turbulence of the new society (Karr, p. 25). At this time, Avonlea-as-nodal-signifier offers the timeless pleasures of simple rural living as a reassuring and escapist fantasy, countervailing the twentieth-century world of war, industry and technology. Here, 'Avonlea' circulates as both collective fantasy and as biographical displacement since Montgomery

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<sup>118</sup> My understanding of Western millenarian and apocalyptic expression is indebted to works by Fulford (2002), Kermode (1966), Seed (2000) and Wagar (1982).

drew heavily on her own childhood experiences and memories. As MacLulich (1983, p. 490) puts it, the regional idyll offers

a heightened version of the author's childhood environment. Readers could join the author on a sentimental journey into the immediate past of their own country. The resulting blend of sentiment and nostalgia offered readers a welcome temporary escape from a world grown increasingly urban and industrial.

Similarly, Fiamengo (2002, pp. 227-228) reminds us that while Cavendish may have provided the inspiration for Montgomery's creation, the resulting *Avonlea* was "deliberately crafted", "coloured by recollection... [and] the ambiguities of memory." *Avonlea*, an "imaginative reworking" of Cavendish (Fiamengo, 2002, p. 227), represented a consoling fantasy for Montgomery, one that offered compensation for both private and collective hurts.

Privately, Montgomery contended with a mentally unstable husband, who resented her literary success. She maintained her writing career at the same time that she ran a household (for her grandmother from 1898 to 1911, and then for her own family), held her husband's career together, kept up a public life as a minister's wife and celebrated 'authoress', and raised two boys. Montgomery experienced lifelong bouts with depression, was constantly embroiled in legal battles, and suffered devastating emotional losses—beloved friends, cousins and suitors—to influenza and the Great War. Writing about an imaginary past became a means for her spiritual survival. She once wrote in her journal: "For I dream still—I must or die—dream back into the past and live life as I might have lived it—had Fate been kinder"(quoted in Rubio, 2001, pp. 73-74). Rather than portraying the world as it was, as her realist Canadian contemporaries did, Montgomery portrayed the world as she thought it ought to be (MacLulich, 1985, p. 462). Choosing deliberately to "keep the shadows of my life out of my work" (Montgomery, 1985, p. 339), Fiamengo (2000, p. 8) contends that Montgomery constructed "a version of girlhood on PEI ... that she herself never lived."

Montgomery began creating *Avonlea* sometime in 1905, well before she left Cavendish as a newly married woman joining her husband in Ontario in 1911. While in Ontario, Montgomery longed for Prince Edward Island, but on her subsequent visits, she was bitterly distraught by the changes she found, exclaiming during a 1918 trip, "Oh

Cavendish, I think I had better not come back to you, evermore!” (Montgomery, 1987, p. 251). On each of her visits, she noted the “ruin and degradation” of the abandoned homestead she grew up in (Montgomery, 1992, p. 342), as well as beloved groves and woods now become a “desolation of stumps” (Montgomery, 1987, pp. 126-7, 251). These changes devastated Montgomery, who wrote in her journal, “never did my heart ache more bitterly with longing and a sense of loss... It was horrible—it was heartbreaking” (Montgomery, 1987, p. 127). She also witnessed the depopulation of her community, remarking that “[t]he old families have died out” (Montgomery, 1992, p. 344). A 1927 entry best summed things up: “Geographically the same. In all else changed. (Montgomery, 1992, p. 348).”

Montgomery wrote most of her novels following the First World War. The “shadow of 1914” left her and Canada psychologically scarred (Montgomery, 1992, p. 345). The imaginary places she created— Avonlea, Lantern Hill, New Moon and Silver Bush, to name a few— were a personal response to not only geographical displacement but historical circumstances that also had collective resonance, symbolizing Canada’s pre-war innocence, something of which Montgomery was conscious. Her visits to Cavendish were an opportunity to recollect lost comrades and a reminder of “how the world had changed” since the war (Montgomery, 1992, p. 345). During her 1927 visit to Cavendish, Montgomery “thought of friends who had walked in the moonlight with me and walk no more on earth (Montgomery, 1992, p. 340).”

With *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery had hoped that “will end Anne—and properly. For she belongs to the green untroubled pastures and still waters of the world before the war.” (Montgomery, 1987, p. 309). Although the story of Anne Shirley ends chronologically with the war in *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery returned to her famous heroine fifteen years later in *Anne of Windy Poplars*, and then three years after, in *Anne of Ingleside*, recapturing an imagined innocent time, forever lost to Canadians of Montgomery’s era. The settings for Montgomery’s heroines exist in a mythic prehistory, timeless and pastoral, and untouched by the coming evils of the modern world. “Oh, as long as the moonlit magic worked,” Montgomery mused, “the past was mine once more... Certainly all the pleasures and joys of my real life seemed to grow pale and fade into nothingness beside the strange enchantment of that shadowy tryst” (Montgomery, 1987, p. 169). For Montgomery, imagination was a means of recovering and reconstructing an idyllic past. Her use of the Romantic tradition was a creative response to the end of enchantment she felt she was witnessing in her era.



Montgomery's fictions participate in the mythmaking around pre-war Canada, and help reinforce the Edenic scenario considered in Chapter 3. In her stories, the celebration of community, the love of nature, and the pleasures of rustic simplicity were ideals set against the fear, anomie and despair associated with modernity. Avonlea, literally and figuratively, represented another time.

### *Country and City*

What do we make of the reemergence of Avonlea-as-nodal-signifier at the close of the twentieth century? One question Raymond Williams contends with is the persistence of "country" in the popular imagination even after urbanization (p. 2). For Williams, the answer lies in the celebration of a rural ideal against the pressures of a new age (pp. 27-29). One way in which this celebration is achieved, according to Williams, is through an "ethical contrast" in the portrayal of the city and its social world as corrupt—as country's other (p. 51). On *Road to Avonlea*, the premiere episode establishes an ethical contrast between Avonlea and Montreal— between island and mainland, country and city.

The way in which the series constructs Avonlea in opposition to these other spaces highlights some of the key thematic differences between *Road to Avonlea* and Montgomery's source texts. In *The Story Girl* and its sequel, *The Golden Road*, Sara's father Blair Stanley is an artist, a bohemian who leaves the motherless Sara with her PEI cousins while he travels and paints in Europe. In the books, he is an unconventional and emotive figure in contrast to the staid King family, who though good solid farmers are unimaginative. By contrast, the television series transforms Blair Stanley into a Montreal businessman, who deposits Sara with her maternal relations on the island to protect her from a financial scandal ("The Story Begins"). Set in opposition to the corrupt mainland world of money and shady deals, Avonlea symbolizes a safe haven, peopled by honest, hard-working folk.

At the beginning of the second season, Sara returns to her Montreal home, only to find her father is too busy with financial matters to have any time for her ("Sara's Homecoming"). In fact, Blair's behaviour makes good on Aunt Hetty's criticism that he is too preoccupied with his need to conquer the business world. In the books, however, Blair, even though he is for the most part absent, shares a close spiritual connection with his daughter, as they are both imaginative creatures and, therefore, somehow different from the

other people they encounter. Such a connection is absent in the series since it portrays not a bohemian Blair, but a business Blair who lacks Sara's romantic sensibility. Fortunately for the television Sara, Blair is killed in a warehouse accident, prompting her return to the island that has become her spiritual home. For Sara and presumably for the viewer, *Road to Avonlea's* island setting represents a nurturing and caring environment, a refuge protected from outside negative influences. In fact, conflicts on the series tend to emerge when strangers from the mainland disrupt Avonlea's harmony with their newfangled ideas and promises of progress, as episodes considered later illustrate.

Moreover, the series continuously challenges the values that Blair Stanley represents, and develops a keen antipathy towards businessmen, and anyone who puts financial interests ahead of community. This antipathy is not surprising considering that, during *Road to Avonlea's* run, Canada's major banks were reporting record-high profits at a time of devastating cuts to social services and general anxieties over job insecurity. *Road to Avonlea* seems to frown upon the classic American values of rugged individualism and the individualistic pursuit of personal gain, and in their place offers communitarian values often regarded as classically Canadian. In essence, the values of the frontier are set against the values of the settlement (cf. Lipset, 1990a, pp. 8-9), with several episodes portraying unfettered entrepreneurial practices in a negative light. For instance, Felix King learns (repeatedly) that there should be limits to self-interested entrepreneurial activities, especially when they hurt people— even a beloved horse. When Felix begins a delivery service using his horse, Blackie, he develops into a tyrannical boss ("Felix and Blackie"). He later experiences remorse when Blackie is injured because of Felix' competitiveness, and dies. In a later episode, Felix and his best friend, Izzy, hatch a fox-raising scheme; Felix squeezes Izzy out of the deal when a more promising business partner comes along ("A Fox Tale"). Once again, Felix is remorseful for his behaviour and begs Izzy's forgiveness. Later, Felix turns the King farm into a bed and breakfast in his parents' absence, and angers Izzy for being so focussed on making money and for lying to his employer, also a friend, in the process ("Total Eclipse"). The series (sometimes in albeit comic fashion) looks down on aggressive business practices, showing them to be self-interested, alienating, and ultimately destructive.

Often characters with close ties to banking or commerce are portrayed as operating with a questionable set of values different from true islanders. This way of demarcating outsiders marks a departure from Montgomery's fiction, where foreigners bring disruption

simply on the basis of their perceived ‘essential’ otherness (cf. Robinson, 1999, p. 23). For example, the politician John Hodgson, a guest character on *Road to Avonlea*, is willing to bow down to powerful railroad interests rather than promote positive change on the island (“Someone to Believe In”). Archie Gillis, an Avonlea resident and supporting character lacking in community spirit, is “strip-cutting” timber too close to the town, but only stops when he loses a wager (“Misfits and Miracles”). Later, with the help of fellow Avonlea resident Eulalie Bugle, also a supporting character, he tries to convince the town to amalgamate with Carmody, a deal that would directly benefit these two and mean the end of Avonlea (“The Last Hurrah”). At a town meeting, the community decides that the disadvantages of progress outweigh the advantages and reject amalgamation, prompting Archie to take his sawmill business somewhere else.

This suspicion of business values—the sense that they are in conflict with community—also found its way into the series’ romantic relationships. Naturally, Olivia King would choose the inventor and dreamer Jasper Dale, with his lack of business acumen, over her wealthy former flame, Edwin Clark (“May the Best Man Win”), described by Sara as “rich and boring, and he thinks he can buy you.” Meanwhile, Olivia considers Jasper “an artist” (“Tug of War”). Within the bohemian Dale clan, cousin Jeremiah (R.H. Thomson in a one-time dual role) is regarded the “black sheep” of the family expressly because “he became a businessman” (“Best Laid Plans”), Jasper informs us. It is no wonder then that Stuart MacRae, a banker described by other characters as “established” and “prosperous looking”, never really had a legitimate chance at wedding Felicity (“Out of the Ashes”; “Love May Be Blind...”). Indeed, in the CBC’s report on audience enjoyment of the final season, he is the only character identified by profession as “the banker Stuart MacRae” and emerges as the least enjoyable character, according to audience evaluations.<sup>119</sup> Lack of audience sympathy for Stuart may have something to do with the fact that characters portrayed in a favourable light on the series do not have values or professions defined by business interests. On *Road*

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<sup>119</sup> Stuart MacRae garnered 69 points—even less than Davey Keith did (72 points), who emerges as a highly unpopular character in my own survey. Felicity King, Stuart’s would-be love interest, garnered the highest score of all the characters on the enjoyment index at 83 points. This outcome is remarkable considering her portrayer, Gema Zamprogna, was considered a “special guest star” in the credits during this season. Zamprogna had reduced her commitment to the series in order to attend to her studies, and was no longer listed in the opening credits as a regular cast member (CBC Research, 1996).

to *Avonlea*, if you are not nurturing the land as a farmer, you find other opportunities for caregiving as a teacher or parent, as Clive and Hetty do. Even rich heiress Sara Stanley plans to use her vast inheritance to help people. Other characters, such as Jasper and Olivia, pursue creative outlets like writing or inventing that, for them, are unmotivated by business interests.<sup>120</sup> When they purchase the cannery, their desire to help the community motivates them more so than business acumen. The cannery venture is also a chance for Jasper to explore his creative side as an inventor. When business sense does prevail, the Dales realize they have no choice but to give up on the cannery, even though this will threaten the survival of Avonlea (“So Dear to My Heart”).

### *The Rush to Be Modern*

Marlene Matthews, who began writing episodes in the second season and graduated to senior story editor in the last two seasons, indicated that one of the ways *Road to Avonlea* was to deal with serious questions was through its engagement with modernity. Speaking at the start of the sixth season, Matthews said, “In the beginning it was cute to see Sara running around chasing a pig in the garden, but now Avonlea is on the verge of modern change” (quoted in Lee, 1995a). Sullivan echoed this point, indicating that “imminent change” was a focus of the final season (quoted in Ryan). Storey, who worked closely with Matthews in the last two seasons, explained that the series began to deal with modernity infiltrating the island specifically as a means by which to bring *Road to Avonlea* to a close. Although he was reluctant to see any “socialist subtext” at work in the series, Storey did acknowledge that “we introduced elements like capitalism and progress” to signal changes to Avonlea that would irrevocably alter life in the community.

Along these lines, some episodes link business values to notions of modernization to convey skepticism over the rhetoric of progress. For instance, when Roger, Alec’s successful geologist brother, visits Avonlea in the episode “Family Rivalry”, he is critical of the way the King farm is operated. Roger calls Alec “a slave to traditional methods,” who must be nudged “into the twentieth century” and “out of the dark ages” through “technology [that] is

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<sup>120</sup> Clive and Hetty also write and are in fact published authors. Using pseudonyms, they write pulp romances full of passion and intrigue. Hetty later turns to her island childhood as a source of inspiration, mimicking Montgomery’s own career and creative trajectories.

revolutionizing the life we lead both in the city and in the country.” Roger proposes adopting what he calls “more progressive” methods and running the farm as a business to make the operation more efficient and profitable. “If you fail to keep up,” he warns Alec, “you simply won’t survive.”

With Hetty’s backing, Roger buys a milking machine—“the most modern” one there is. But Alec is skeptical when he notes that these machines are “notorious for not working.” The brothers and sister argue when the purchase, made with funds from the King trust account, is threatened by Alec’s earlier offer of financial help to Amos Spry, a neighbouring farmer in difficult straits. Roger considers Alec’s offer of a loan to his neighbour a “lack of good business sense.” In the end, traditional methods get the upper hand, as the milking machine proves to be a bust—it cannot milk properly and, consequently, one of the cows develops a serious udder infection. But Roger ridicules Alec when the milking machine is repossessed due to lack of sufficient funds since Amos missed his payment. To Roger, Alec is a failure.

In melodramatic fashion, the rivalry between brothers is tied to childhood resentments that come to a head when Roger violently shoves Alec over a bridge into the rocky creek below, where he is struck unconscious, and saved from drowning by a remorseful Roger, who later begs and receives Alec’s forgiveness. Importantly, however, the episode concludes with Amos coming to King farm to deliver good news just as the family is gathered for dinner. Amos has brought in a good potato crop, we learn, and he begins paying back his debt to Alec, expressing gratitude to his neighbour and fellow farmer for helping him in his time of need. In this way, the episode reinforces that Alec is not a failure because he is successful as a human being— as a responsible and respected member of his community.

In a later episode (“Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life”), notions of progress threaten the livelihoods of Simon Tremayne and Hetty King. Simon contemplates selling the White Sands to a chain when a potential investor calls the hotel “a relic from the dark ages” and “a dinosaur” compared to the great hotels built today and “run by visionaries not by old fogies.” Simon questions “the frantic rush to be modern” and finds a kindred spirit in Hetty, who is herself contending with a school closure because the Deputy Minister of Education regards her teaching methods as outdated and the one-room schoolhouse “a thing of the past.” The Avonlea children are to go to the new and modern school in Carmody, which

offers “specialized courses in shorthand and business practice.” Explicitly equating the school’s closure with progress, the Deputy Minister enthuses to a dismayed Hetty, “Down with old, up with the new!” In turn, Hetty challenges the Carmody students to an academic showdown to prove that the Avonlea students are just as capable if not more so, thus demonstrating the efficacy of her teaching methods and the one-room schoolhouse. The Avonlea students win the challenge, and the Deputy Minister agrees to stay the school closure, but only as long as Hetty is there. Even Simon decides he loves the hotel the way it is, and declines selling it. In refusing to conform to the pressure to modernize, Simon and Hetty regard themselves, in their words, as “rebels” and “revolutionaries”. As in “Family Rivalry”, new is not necessarily better or progressive here; there is a sense in which progress does not always deliver on all of its resplendent promises, and that the headlong rush forward must be tempered with an exploration of motives and consequences before committing.

*Road to Avonlea*’s retrospective critique of modernity—the opposition it establishes between the old ways and the new ways—takes on a nationally specific character with the appearance of Harold B. Dunn, a guest character. Dunn is a rich American entrepreneur who wants to purchase Avonlea and transform it into what he calls “Dunnsville, the city of the future” (“Home Movie”). The episode emphasizes Dunn’s American nationality, establishing him as an other and an outsider with Rachel Lynde complaining that he wants “to buy up our property” in an eventual “invasion of Americans.” Dunn’s model of town planning has proven to be popular in the United States. His plan for Avonlea is to buy up all the land, build modern homes and stores, and then lease these to the town’s inhabitants. In exchange, “the Yankee millionaire”—as Hetty calls him—promises to bring Avonlea’s citizens “into the twentieth century”, in Dunn’s words, through modern amenities and prosperity for all. Dunn has already purchased the cannery to which he plans to introduce Fordism. Hetty and Alec question Dunn’s claim that his ideas are “beneficial to the local population” and “for the good of the majority” by asking who his plan actually benefits. Hetty sees a loss of local control, a diminishment of green space, and a plan that absents people: “You paint a rosy picture... Where are the people in it? Where are the open spaces, the orchards and wild flowers, the rows of farmers’ fields?” Hetty’s position is a Romantic one that emphasizes the connections between people, nature and community. Speaking to her neighbours, she warns them that “this man’ll control the very life of the town,” forcing

them to rent from him and buy from his stores. In a quintessentially Canadian move, she threatens to get an injunction from the Crown to stop Dunn and save Avonlea.

One of this episode's subplots is Hetty's superior attitude towards Jasper, whom she regards as a poor provider for her sister Olivia. His "tinkering", she complains, hasn't brought him "two dimes to rub together." As an inventor on the dreamy side, Jasper represents forward thinking on the series, anticipating and embracing technological innovation in the spirit of progress. "You cannot stop progress," he informs Hetty who by contrast thinks, "the world is changing too fast for its own good." Signifying tradition and the past, Hetty is always putting the breaks on change in knee-jerk fashion. Anxious about Dunn's plan, she confides to Sara that she is "afraid for all of us. Oh, Avonlea can't change. I won't let it!" This core conflict between Jasper and Hetty serves as the terrain upon which a resolution eventually takes shape. Before that can happen, the question over the town's fate develops into a familial conflict with Alec and Hetty on one side and Olivia and Janet on the other. However, the episode mediates between tradition and modernity paradoxically through technology, using it to safeguard Avonlea from the vagaries of progress.

The subplot involving Hetty and Jasper is key to this mediation. Jasper imagines making a motion picture about Avonlea with a newfangled invention Sara purchased. "I could make a real motion picture before it's all lost," he says to his infant son Montgomery. "A real recording, something to remember us by, the way we looked, the way we laughed, the way the whole town lived ... something that your children would treasure sometime when we're dead." Hetty sees the motion picture differently, as a chance "to save my Avonlea from the dreaded Dunnsville." She wants to show the motion picture at the next town meeting to change people's minds about acquiescing to Dunn. At the meeting, Hetty asks to state her case, and the family sets up the motion picture apparatus. Alec plays the piano, while Hetty narrates the moving images, comprising scenes of life in a rural community, of Avonlea's residents at work and play:

This is Avonlea. At least it's the Avonlea I know with all its many inhabitants of whom I'm fiercely proud to say I'm one... I like to think of us as one large family, and like true family members we don't always get along. We're not perfect, no, but we do care a great deal for one another. One day when we grow old... one does hope there'll be others to take our place who'll feel as passionately about Avonlea as we do. Why the images you see maybe all that's left of the town we love so dearly. A thousand years from now I suppose there'll be little left to tell of our simple existence. But then perhaps

this moving picture will speak to those who come after of how we P.E. Islanders grew up, lived, married and died, here at the beginning of the twentieth century. Which is why we have chosen this way to record for all time our response to Mr. Dunn's offer to buy up our town.

With that, the motion picture cuts to the closing image of Olivia, Hetty and Janet tearing up Dunn's offer and scattering the pieces of paper to the wind. At this point, there is not a dry eye at the meeting. Nonetheless, Hetty punctuates the end of her oration with the following words:

So when you look around you at the haunted hill, at the homestead lights, at the fields tilled by the dead and gone who loved the land, you'll say, why I've come home! To this life we're lucky enough to live each moment of every day. [And] in which Jasper Dale has been fortuitous enough and ingenious enough to capture, so that we and future generations might know it.<sup>121</sup>

Not only are Jasper and modern technology vindicated but also the stirring combination of images, music and words reminds the town of what it stands to lose, and the residents decide against selling Avonlea to Dunn. Significantly, Sullivan regarded this episode, one of his favourites, as a "paradigm of what Avonlea is all about" (quoted in Boone, 1996).

The episode unpacks the notion of progress to reveal conflicting values at work. The promises of the new century—Fordist efficiency, technological enhancements, the excitement of modern urban living, universal prosperity— either have not come to fruition or come with sacrifices— anomie and alienation, loss of community, environmental degradation, gaps between rich and poor. The episode is a fantasy that asks, "What if we could go back in time and change the choices we made, knowing what we know now?" *Road*

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<sup>121</sup> These words paraphrased from Montgomery come from an article called "Prince Edward Island", in which she described her beloved childhood home for a magazine called *The Spirit of Canada* (1939), a publication of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The passage in question appeared later in *Spirit of Place: Lucy Maud Montgomery and Prince Edward Island* (Bolger, Barrett & Mackay, 1982, p. 1). Here is the original passage as Montgomery wrote it: "Peace! You never know what peace is until you walk on the shores or in the fields along the winding red roads of Abegweit [the Micmac name for the island] on a summer twilight when the dew is falling and the old, old stars are peeping out and the sea keeps its mighty tryst with the little land it loves. You find your soul then . . . you realize that youth is not a vanished thing but something that dwells forever in the heart. And you look around on the dimming landscape of haunted hill and long white sand-beach and murmuring ocean, on homestead lights and old fields tilled by dead and gone generations who loved them. . . you will say, 'Why. . . I have come home!'" I would like to thank Jason Nolan and Yuka Kajihara-Nolan for tracking down the origins of this quotation.



*to Avonlea* functions as wish fulfillment for those in the audience who are living the life Avonlea's citizens were able to consciously reject. In that conscious rejection, the episode offers a critique of the present, one that is not exclusive to the Canadian context. As a whole, this narrative arc carries strong potential for hybridized meanings and cross-cultural appeal. For instance, the critique of modernity or the suspicion of business could very well be read as a criticism of Western values. And since this episode deliberately Americanizes progress, we might wonder what implications that Americanization has in different cultural contexts. It would have been just as easy to make Dunn a Canadian capitalist, but the decision to make him American gives the episode meanings that uniquely resonate, particularly in Canada, where anxieties over American expansionism constitute the historical bedrock of Canadian identity. Moreover, although Canadians are always reflecting on their relationship with the United States, the episode came at a time when questions of national sovereignty—and indeed, the Americanization of Canada— had special urgency in the public consciousness, given the free trade debates of that period. The two episodes involving Dunn's machinations therefore play a role in Canadian cultural recognition, an idea discussed in Chapter 2.

In a 1998 conference paper, I presented some of my ideas on *Road to Avonlea's* potential anti-Americanism— which I thought was an ironic and potentially alienating stance given The Disney Channel's considerable investment.<sup>122</sup> During the discussion, Theodore Sheckels, an American professor who has written on *Anne of Green Gables*, suggested that this story arc would not be necessarily alienating to American viewers because they could read it as an example of NIMBY—or “not in my backyard.” As an ideological position, NIMBY tends towards the regressive, as the main purpose is to maintain the status quo and resist change. In practice, this position often translates into keeping ‘undesirables’ such as the poor, the mentally ill, or the drug-addicted outside the neighbourhoods of the privileged. Therefore, the resistance to change, which plays out thematically over the course of the series' duration, could be interpreted as ideologically regressive. This aspect of the series spoke in a troubling manner to Schneider, one of the executive producers with Disney, who cited

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<sup>122</sup> “Interpreting L.M. Montgomery's Island for Television.” Literature of Small Islands Conference, L.M. Montgomery session, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, 1998.

... the extreme conservatism of the show... In all things, the element of change was bad and preserving the culture was good. This is why the show was so hamstrung that we couldn't continue it as we approached WWI. This life that we were extolling ceased to exist. This was, of course, supported by the structure of the show—and attempts to be progressive—sending Felicity to medical school, ended up being sort of ridiculous.<sup>123</sup>

Schneider also referred to the episode where Hetty staves off the closure of Avonlea's one-room schoolhouse rather than “[sending] all the kids to Carmody where there was a bigger and better school, and the girls could learn shorthand.” Schneider likened the episode's politics to depriving rural children today of computer skills, just to keep them from leaving the farm. “If you think about this in political terms... we are saying that it's better to deprive these kids of the future.”

Schneider's reading of the series, taken together with Scheckel's, highlight *Road to Avonlea's* status as a borderless romance, and help draw out the series' potential for hybridized interpretations and nationally specific meanings. Cultural preservation has an historical significance in Canada incomparable to the United States. While Canada is not the only country to engage in a critique of Americanization, our proximity to the United States geographically is more keenly felt here than anywhere else, as an uneasy friendship and an ever-present threat to the nation's survival. Canada's preservationist tendencies could be read as conservative and backward looking. However, they can also be read as radical, with left-wing cultural nationalism seeking to forge and protect a culture unique and independent from the United States. The series therefore taps into Canadian fears of Americanization in the wake of continental trade arrangements, as well as generalized anxieties about social and technological changes and a philosophical agenda that puts profits ahead of people and planet. 'Avonlea', as an affective-symbolic response to the issues of the day, becomes meaningful in the late twentieth century when it takes the shape of a narrative of cultural preservation. At the same time, however, comprehension is not constrained exclusively to the Canadian context. Mosco has written more broadly of an “oppositional nationalism” that is a critical response to globalization, and that uses “the levers of national power... to create a standpoint of popular democratic control and citizenship over the Western-controlled

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<sup>123</sup> Email to author, Oct. 15, 2001.

marketplace” (p. 207). In other words, in the series’ romance with the local and the collective, ‘Avonlea’ comes to articulate wider cultural anxieties particular to the closing of the twentieth century.

In a later episode (“Modern Times”), Dunn plans to transform the cannery into a distillery because his representative says, “There’s a good deal more profit in selling whiskey.” Fearing what “the peddling of whiskey” will do to the “fair name of Avonlea” and outraged by the representative’s assertion that “Mr. Dunn isn’t interested in what Avonlea wants,” Hetty purchases the cannery from Dunn, and with Jasper’s help, innovates it using Fordist principles. As with the previous episodes, technology and business are good only when community interests drive decision-making. When Jasper and Olivia purchase the cannery from Hetty, they become benevolent capitalists more concerned with the welfare of the town and their workers than with making a profit, though that is important, too, as they must meet loan payments or lose their home. Episodes like this one and “Home Movie”, discussed earlier, are not a rejection of modernity but a critique of its excesses, and make the series’ meditation on modernity “off-modern” rather than anti-modern. Boym uses the term “off-modern” to refer to

... a tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition that incorporates nostalgia... The adverb *off* confuses our sense of direction; it makes us explore sideshadows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress; it allows us to take a detour from the deterministic narrative of twentieth-century history (pp. xvi-xvii).

For Boym, the off-modern represents a zigzag with detours and asides that explore hybrids of the past and present. Neither backward-looking nor forward-looking, the off-modern simultaneously refuses the wholesale uncritical adoption of newness on the one hand and tradition on the other, and in its place, substitutes a nostalgia that non-prescriptively rethinks our relationship to the past in order to redefine the project of modernity (Boym, p. 31).

Boym’s concept was important to my efforts to view the series from the perspective of “radical empathy”, discussed in the previous chapter. Originally, I saw the Avonlea-under-threat arc as more anti-capitalist than was appropriate, thus prompting Storey’s remark that “there was very little socialist subtext to anything that came out of Sullivan.” At that time, my reading was just that—my reading. I also saw the series’ anti-capitalist stance as tied to its critique of progress—a view I had challenged by Conkie, who reminded me that Jasper was

open to progress provided that “it was positive... an ideal” and not strictly for money. The series’ off-modern stance, since it resists dichotomous thinking, contributes to *Road to Avonlea*’s flexible mode of address, opening the series to left-wing perspectives like mine and to the conservative meanings Schneider saw in it.

Moreover, as his above comment suggests, Storey was the most self-conscious of the writers I interviewed when it came to thinking about the wider implications of the series. Along these lines, he was the only one who thought that the number of women working on the series as writers and producers impacted on the series’ representation of gender. That is because, in general, my exchanges with the writers implied a lack of self-consciousness about the consequences of their storytelling. By this I mean that despite my attempts to inquire, no one expressed that they were intentionally writing subversive stories that were critical of the contemporary moment. By and large, the discourse kept to the language of the profession with writers expressing their interest in good storytelling. They defined good storytelling for the series as capturing the spirit of L.M. Montgomery, maintaining continuity, capitalizing on actors’ strengths and creating believable characters, all in the pursuit of portraying a community where people would set aside their differences to pull together in times of trouble.<sup>124</sup>

### *Thorns in the Garden*

Taking the series as a whole, including the reunion movie *Happy Christmas, Miss King*, we are left with the feeling that an epoch has ended, or perhaps, more accurately, that a fantasy has ended. Bringing an end to the fantasy necessitated that history make its presence increasingly felt, demarcating the border between a time past and the time to come. The coming of the Great War and its effects on Avonlea is the best example of this demarcation. More generally, we witness technological changes to the island that remind us of the march

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<sup>124</sup> This observation echoes Eleanor Hersey’s experience (2002) interviewing Sullivan about the updating of Anne’s character into a contemporary heroine. Hersey quotes Sullivan remarking, “I certainly didn’t go out of my way to say ‘Oh, I must update this character like she’s from the twentieth century.’ My intention was simply from a character point of view and from a dramatic point of view and from an emotional point of view” (p. 134). Unlike the English-language side of the Canadian television industry, Quebec writers are more self-conscious about the cultural role of their stories. My thanks go to Catherine Murray for this observation.

of history— for instance, motion pictures in Season Four, mechanization in Season Five, and the telephone in Season Six. But the technological changes are only superficial; imminent change to an entire way of life and the values inherent in that lifestyle are at the heart of the matter.

*Road to Avonlea* presents a way of life best described as a participatory utopia in Benhabib's communitarian sense. That is, the series offers a model of active citizenship, where differences are discussed until agreement is reached over what is in the interests of the community as a whole. This type of collective problem solving is markedly different from *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, where Michaela usually dishes out sage advice to members of the frontier community (Dow, 1996). Moreover, women and men participate equally in the Avonlea utopia, flying in the face of the historical realities of Edwardian Canada. It is not so much Avonlea that is under threat in this narrative arc, but local control and citizen agency. On *Road to Avonlea*, the main consequence of being brought into the twentieth century—a theme the series is clearly anxious about—is disenfranchisement. Indeed, Benhabib argues that the central problem of modernity is loss of political agency, the result of an increasingly private form of life (p. 77). As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, fans of the series establish an ethical contrast between urban life today and life in Avonlea to argue that the latter offers communal bonds that the former lacks. Avonlea-as-nodal-signifier offers a fantasy of citizen participation and local involvement, lacking in contemporary times, therefore giving Montgomery's creation new meanings relevant to the late twentieth century. To come back to Williams from earlier, this then is the ethical contrast the series establishes—between a more democratic, more participatory, more cohesive past, and a more alienating, more privatized, more fragmented present.

The *Road to Avonlea* writers I interviewed were conscious of the community values the series portrayed and the affective appeal of those values to contemporary viewers who may feel bereft of such values. As Conkie put it, "It all comes down to the value system." Speculating on the success of the series, she stated,

[P]eople were ready to look at a simpler time [when] family values and the values of a small town were the most important thing, and how people could bicker and fight, do the things that people do, but still ultimately support each other and love each other as a close community. Not only within the families— the Kings and Hetty and Olivia— but to create a larger feeling ...

From the beginning, one of the goals, Conkie related, was to show “family and village values ... that people would pull together in bad times.” Hall agreed that “the goal was to capture a period of time in history [when] the values that guided a community were clear-cut and simpler, and people seemed to have more cohesiveness between them... [T]his is a place where people were rooted and meant something to each other.” Sullivan made a similar observation, stating (quoted in Fraser, 1991), “A show like this is an antidote to the world around us. It’s the sense of community, too. Even though people are involved in each other’s business to a fault, they support each other through thick and thin.” In *Avonlea*, no one is evil or beyond reach— there are only people who are misunderstood or who misunderstand. Solutions are always found through pulling together as a community, and discussing problems. Fans in my survey were highly aware of *Road to Avonlea*’s community approach to problem solving, as shown in Chapter 6. In offering this imaginary and utopian vision of Canada’s past, the series also laments a crisis in values. The romantic-communitarian vision of collective responsibility and citizen agency found in the series is symbolic compensation for a weakened sense of community obligation and an increasing feeling of powerlessness in the face of uncontrollable and imminent change.

This sense of powerlessness against progress fuels the series’ drive toward closure and, ultimately, brings to demise the fantasy of local control, signaling the end of enchantment. The series demonstrates Boym’s notion of “reflective nostalgia”, defined as a brooding melancholy meditation on a time forever beyond our grasp (p. 41). The final two episodes illustrate. In “The Last Hurrah”, the railroad company invites Avonlea to amalgamate with the bigger, more modern, more competitive Carmody.<sup>125</sup> A brochure promises commerce, industry and progress in exchange for joining Carmody. But Alec notes that “Carmody’s blossoming garden of industry has more than a few thorns in it.” The “thorns” are in reference to the Carmody cannery, which has bought out and closed the one in a neighbouring town, displacing the female workers. Other thorns we later learn of include the proposed closing of the Avonlea school, along with the loss of farmland, the

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<sup>125</sup> Not long before this episode aired, Mike Harris’ Tory government began its second term in Ontario, and would begin introducing the idea of Toronto subsuming various municipalities into a so-called “mega-city” that would centralize decision-making. The issue would come to a head in 1996, the last year of the series. In any case, the problem of “mega-city” is not a concern expressed in Montgomery’s source texts.

town's commercial district and its rail stop. As in "Home Movie", Eulalie and Archie are in favour of the proposal to amalgamate because, as Archie says, "You cannot stop progress." These two stand to benefit the most because of the proximity of their land to the proposed railway. When Alec storms into the Carmody mayor's office, he accuses the railroad of "[clouding] people's minds with notions of progress and prosperity."

The community decides to hold a plebiscite on the amalgamation issue. In the village square Alec and Olivia campaign against the proposal, and question what the stakes are for Avonlea. Olivia wants to see a plan that includes "reliable sustainable growth"<sup>126</sup> and, Alec adds, "not profits for a relative few." But Jasper, an off-modernist in Boym's sense, offers the best meditation on progress that is perhaps the most meaningful, since his character expresses wonderment with modernity and an openness to innovation:

Progress has always excited me. I've always been a believer in the benefits of change. But this truly efficient model tells us— it would seem— about progress. But only in a material sense. It isn't a community. And community is more than a word. It's more than the place where you live in. Community is the people with whom you share your life, a community of caring people. And we refuse to stand idly by while someone is rundown— if you will. We lend our hand, and I'd like to believe we lend our hearts as well... Since this Carmody is such a single-minded view of progress, as a friend, I'd like to ask you to consider this. Will we be really having progress if we're railroaded into trading our community for promises of gadgets and electrical lights and material things?

Following Jasper's eloquent plea, the majority rejects amalgamation with Carmody. However, the decision is all for naught. Avonlea cannot be saved. After the Dale Cannery burns down at the end of the episode, Archie Gillis announces he is moving his mill from Avonlea to Carmody to get the support his business needs. "Without the cannery, Avonlea's finished," he says. In the next episode, "So Dear to My Heart," the Dales acknowledge their cannery was unable to compete with the modern one at Carmody, and decide against rebuilding. The town's economic welfare depends upon the cannery, which, as Hetty puts it, represents "Avonlea's bread and butter." The cannery crisis thematizes the series' concern with changes to Avonlea and with the threat these changes pose to community. Ironically,

without industry, the romance with community cannot be sustained. At this point, *Road to Avonlea's* ongoing critique of progress gives way to resignation. The theme of "So Dear to My Heart", the last episode in the series, is accepting the inexorability of change. The series' fantasy of local control and of individuals having a positive effect on their community gives way to loss of control and the demise of a way of life, masked under the guise of inevitable change.

Consistently, Hetty has represented stubborn opposition to change, that is, to the dissolution of the Avonlea community in the name of profit and modernization. The cannery crisis effectively crystallizes these issues, and points up the possible contradictions between a community's welfare and the aims of progress. Cannery owners Jasper and Olivia struggle with their sense of duty towards the community. As Olivia says to the banker Stuart MacRae, "These people are counting on us." But Stuart (who, significantly, is not an islander by origin) explains to the couple that "that kind of thinking doesn't hold up in the modern world." He points out that "the most up-to-date cannery money can buy is already up and running, right in the next town." This cannery, he says, is "competitive" and has cornered the Avonlea cannery's suppliers, markets, and even workers. Reluctantly, Jasper and Olivia accept Stuart's advice not to rebuild. Upon learning of this threat to the future of Avonlea, Hetty exclaims, "Here we have profiteers sneaking about our land, stealing away the very heart of Avonlea with their clever machinery and their roguish notions of progress, and you choose this moment to turn your back on us!"

Hetty's analysis of the situation veers the narrative towards risky ground where progress and business collide with responsibility to community, revealing them as incompatible. "Where is your sense of community?" she demands. At the same time, however, the narrative works to naturalize modern capitalism and its effects. Olivia's common-sensical understanding of dealing with change as an inevitable part of life effectively subdues any critique of capitalism that the narrative may be veering towards. In the process, Hetty's opposition to "profiteers" is gradually defused as the fuming of a woman unable to cope with change, defined in this episode as a basic aspect of human

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<sup>126</sup> To exemplify Olivia's modern forward-thinking views, the series often has her using phrases or ideas that are more contemporary than period. For instance, in the next episode, Olivia wants to have a nursery at the cannery so that the women can bring their children to work with them.



existence. In the end, even Hetty must acknowledge that “change is inevitable”, as she does in her wedding address to Gus and Felicity. The episode melodramatically transforms the clash of business, progress and community into a familial conflict between the generations.

Indeed, throughout the series, the acting styles of Jackie Burroughs and Mag Ruffman, who play Hetty and Olivia respectively, suggests this kind of generation gap. To emphasize Hetty’s connection to tradition and the past, Burroughs seems to have adopted a melodramatic, Victorian acting style that isolates Hetty from the other characters in her milieu, situating her in the nineteenth century. Unlike Ruffman, Burroughs delivers her dialogue in a prim, clipped staccato with rolling ‘R’s, and uses highly mannered gestures in an exceedingly stylized performance, which imparts Hetty with a veneer of formality that sometimes shatters to reveal repressed emotions. To illustrate Olivia’s link to modernity and forward-thinking, Ruffman uses a naturalistic acting style, delivers her dialogue informally, and wears her character’s heart on her sleeve. In contrast to Burroughs’ alien Hetty, Ruffman’s Olivia does not feel ‘period’. Instead, she is a modern-day creature any contemporary viewer would feel comfortable encountering.

These different performance styles add to the clash that episodes such as this one dramatize. The clash is between people like the spinster Hetty, who are stubbornly resistant to change, and younger people like her sister Olivia, who roll with the punches or make lemonade out of a lemon (to paraphrase this character’s words). For Olivia, ‘making lemonade’ involves moving to England, after Jasper accepts a job there. The narrative represents the loss of community, and the concomitant fragmentation of the extended family— Hetty’s main fears —as inevitable, natural and beyond control, not as the by-products of changes wrought on Avonlea by early twentieth-century modernity. Change is de-historicized and essentialized so that it becomes impossible to judge changes as good or bad— there is only the inevitability of change, to which individuals must resign themselves and make the best of. As Ritivoti states, “Disenchanted, reflective nostalgia does not wish for a cure; instead, it prefers to remind itself that a cure is unavailable” (p. 32).

### *Terminal Vision*

Typical of *fin-de-siècle* popular culture, *Road to Avonlea* possesses the elements of a retrospective critique, only to offer as its last gasp, the melancholy sense that Avonlea is

doomed, whether the characters act to save it or not because change will come, regardless. Avonlea is out of our reach. Certainly, there were practical reasons influencing the general tone of the last season. As Storey put it, “[W]e were mandated... Avonlea had to die.” Press accounts and my interviews suggest that a feeling of inertia settled onto the series, leading to that mandate early on in the fifth season, when Sullivan told Disney and the CBC he was only going to give them two more seasons of *Road to Avonlea* (Ryan; Boone, 1996). Sullivan felt that the series had maximized its potential in terms of character and format, and it was preferable to end on a high note, while the show was still popular. “It’s rare when a show lasts seven years, but there’s the danger of letting it fossilize,” Sullivan said in a *TV Guide* cover story that publicized the series’ finale (Ryan). “All the *Avonlea* characters had grown up, and everybody had already done their best work.” Storey says, too, that after seven years, many of the cast members and crew wanted to move onto other projects. Furthermore, Sullivan suggested that the chronology of the series was presenting itself as an issue, with the Great War looming on the horizon and marking the end of twentieth-century innocence (“New TV series”; Strachan).

As a result of these factors, Storey said, “the whole theme of the final season was that it was the end of an era, Camelot had come to an end. The golden Edwardian era closed... Progress was going to change Avonlea, and it just wouldn’t be there any more.” In privileging this narrative arc, the series offers what Warren W. Wagar (1982) would call a “terminal vision”, a view of the end of an order. There is a sense in which the characters (and presumably the viewers in the audience) are living in an “endtime”, leaving behind a way of life that demarcates one era from those before and those to come (Wagar, p. 11). Considering the figurative relationship of fictional endtimes to actuality, Wagar argues that, “Of all the symptoms of disenchantment in our culture, visions of the end are the bluntest and the most powerful” (p. 7). According to Wagar, “the imaginary end serves to sharpen the focus and heighten the importance of certain structures of values” (p. 132).

Indeed, the issues *Road to Avonlea* thematizes and the affective appeal the series has had for viewers is suggestive of a dissatisfaction with the way things are, and a longing for something other than what is. The meanings of job loss and the destruction of community as a result of company closure cannot be restricted to the series’ turn-of-the-century PEI setting or even be regarded as concerns of Montgomery’s. Instead, the cannery crisis operates allegorically. As Landy (1991, p. 55) explains, costume dramas “work in allegorical

fashion to dramatize contemporary reality by making an analogue with the remote past in the interests of continuity, or, conversely, the history may serve as an excuse to be critical where direct discourse may fail.”<sup>127</sup> Tapping into the sentiments of the day, the cannery crisis and the threat posed to the island community by “roguish notions of progress” articulate anxieties about social and economic circumstances in late twentieth-century Canada. The series enchants the past, offering up a public daydream to soothe anxious feelings about the perceived deficiencies of the present. Nostalgia on *Road to Avonlea* is for an imagined time when people could decide the fate of their communities, make choices about how they live, and actively participate in constructing their world. The series offers up a dialogue between the past and the present in its use of a “romantic terminal vision” that calls into question the promises of progress. Romantic terminal visions are also nostalgic because they imagine a bucolic rural past as a panacea for the ills associated with modernity (cf. Wagar, pp. 137-141).

Much of *Road to Avonlea* is suffused with nostalgia, but this is particularly the case in the final episode where nostalgia takes on double meanings. Not only does nostalgia refer to a yearning for a time past (imaginary though it may be), but to a longing for a *television series* that is also past. The character of Hetty best expresses the sense of nostalgia both *on* the series and *for* the series. Significantly, when all is said and done, Hetty still gets the last word on *Road to Avonlea* despite her characterization as a troublesome figure resistant to change. At the wedding reception of Gus and Felicity, Hetty makes a speech about her “fuming over changes happening to the town,” and over people leaving. She ends in a toast, which ends the series, with this: “Wherever you wander, whatever glorious adventures lie ahead of you, you can rest easy knowing you’ve have a place to come home to— the dearest spot on earth. Our Avonlea. To Avonlea.” Hetty’s toast is directed just as much at the viewers watching the show as it is to the characters on the series. Without making too much of the final episode’s self-reflexivity, it is fairly safe to assume that Avonlea is ‘home’ not only to the series’ characters, but to its viewers, too. So what does it mean to call Avonlea ‘home’?

Cook says that the critique of nostalgia found in left discussions of national identity follows the line of thinking, whereby

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<sup>127</sup> Landy’s hypothesis proves to be correct. For *Road to Avonlea* fans surveyed in Chapter 6, the series’ historical setting acts as an indirect criticism of contemporary urban life.

[t]he longing for an imaginary 'golden age' is often perceived to be embedded in regressive myths of community from which traditional group and national identities are constructed. Such longings are generally seen as culturally conservative, obstructing the way to the formation of modern, progressive identities (pp. 25-26).

But Cook proposes an alternative, which may lead us to rethink the image of the past found in *Road to Avonlea*. Cook says,

It is rarely considered that nostalgia might play a productive role in national identity, releasing the desire for social change or resistance.... Rather than a refusal of nostalgia, it seems more pertinent to investigate the powerful emotional appeal of reliving the past and the part this plays in popular imaginings of community and resistance at specific historical moments (p. 26).

Nostalgia does not have to be reactive and retrograde; it can be proactive and reflexive. Earlier I said that *Road to Avonlea* expresses dissatisfaction with the way things are, and a longing for something other than what is. With its themes of home, community and belonging, *Road to Avonlea* does indeed remain true to the spirit of Montgomery's original texts. While these themes remain the same, they nonetheless take on different meanings relevant to the late twentieth-century context of the series' production. As Ritivoti reminds us, "nostalgia encourages one to differentiate and contrast, and as such, it functions as a potent interpretive stance, a tool of comparison and analysis" (p. 32). Nostalgia for an imagined past engenders a critique of the present, even as it soothingly veils contemporary fears. *Road to Avonlea* draws upon several fears: the fear of diminishing local control due to the interests of capital; of job loss and the loss of community due to company closure; and of being powerless to do what is right for people due to economic forces beyond one's control. Significantly, each of these fears finds its corollary in a desire: the desire for local control, for community, for doing what is right by people. In expressing these desires, *Road to Avonlea* suggests the resistant, and even radical, possibilities of imagining community in an imaginary past.

### ***A Romance about Borders***

*Road to Avonlea* is both a romance without borders and a romance about borders. As a romance without borders, I argued that the series is a generic industrial drama, whose non-

specific period setting and use of conventional melodrama accounts for its cultural portability. But neither generic conventions nor industry trends can fully explain a story's affective hold or its ability to travel well. As a romance about borders, *Road to Avonlea* dramatizes the meaning of home—the meaning of belonging to a place, a family and a community. These informal borders make sense of our lives and elicit affective responses whatever the cultural context we inhabit.

The affective response that the Avonlea-under-threat arc elicits is shared with the series' foundational texts, *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*. Sheckels (1993, p. 527) remarks that Montgomery's work here "no longer conveys the impression of a living community but rather a lost one." The books are suffused with feelings of loss for a bygone time and a nostalgic yearning for the carefree days of childhood. While loss and yearning are common to both the source texts and the series, the historical reasons for them are different. Understanding that difference is key to defining *Road to Avonlea's* particular brand of nostalgia and its unique invocation of the Montgomery Imaginary. The series represents a romance about borders that is specific to its contemporary historical moment. As I have shown in this chapter and the preceding one, the meanings that the mythical Avonlea takes on and the type of nostalgia that it fosters would not be appropriate to Montgomery's context. While the actual yearning for the past may be common, the reasons for that yearning differ.

Along these lines, Boym and Papastergiadis link contemporary manifestations of nostalgia to globalization. Here, globalization is understood as a concrete phenomenon involving unforeseen levels of migration, and as a dominant cultural paradigm organizing current thinking about the world and its destiny. Boym observes that "there is a no less global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" (p. xiv). She argues that as a governing narrative, globalization—like progress in the nineteenth century—has exacerbated rather than cured nostalgia, engendering stronger local attachment (p. xiv). At this time, notes Papastergiadis, "the concept of community has been raised to sacral heights" (p. 198). *Road to Avonlea* accomplishes this exact feat with a symbolic response to form of life in the late twentieth century that carries immense transnational potential, given the context Boym and others describe. What sentiment did for home in American popular culture a hundred years ago, nostalgia does for community a hundred years later.

Still, I am making a claim that the series has special cultural meanings in the Canadian context. As a writer, Storey said, “You are influenced by everything that goes on around you.” The writers for the series inhabited a specific cultural context that informs the political unconscious of *Road to Avonlea*. There can be no meaning of ‘Avonlea’ separate from the conditions in which it is invoked. Moreover, ‘Avonlea’ can only be relevant as an imaginative enterprise as long as it remains responsive to the sentiments of the day. How the writers invoke ‘Avonlea’ in the television series and the meanings it takes on in the early 1990s has to do specifically with Canada’s recent past. *Road to Avonlea* maybe a generic industrial drama, but it nonetheless comes from a Canadian point of view. In differentiating *Road to Avonlea* from the American Western and the British period piece, I discussed concerns around community that mark the series as thematically different, in effect, as a Canadian costume drama. However, this difference does not make the series incapable of crossing national or cultural borders, as its export sales imply. On the contrary, the romance with community travels well in an age of modernity. As Canadian television policy increasingly becomes a foreign one meant to enhance international sales, we might do well to reflect on the cultural and social intangibles that come with exporting our stories.

## CHAPTER SIX/ GENDER, GENRE AND NOSTALGIA IN FAN RESPONSES

The story of *Road to Avonlea* is a story of romance and industry—whether the romance of community and the industry of export, or the romance of policy and the industry of television. Fans of *Road to Avonlea* tell this story. Rather than keeping romance and industry as dichotomous entities never to meet, the responses of fans to the series illustrate the interconnectedness of romance and industry. Indeed, any thorough analysis of mode of address must take these two entities together, and in doing so, makes an important connection between cultural studies and political economy perspectives, deepening the analysis of culture. Answering industry- and policy-related questions gives us a part of the picture but not all. Likewise, demonstrating *Road to Avonlea*'s success in quantitative or industry terms, as I have done, does little to explain the series' cultural resonance. For that, qualitative inquiry is necessary, and gives us insight as to how a domestic period drama can have cultural resonance at home and abroad, in an industrial context oftentimes dominated by American output.

In other words, to get the whole picture, we have to understand the romance with *Road to Avonlea*—the ways in which the series struck a chord with viewers through the themes and the values it portrayed during its seven-season run and beyond. Web sites dedicated to the memory of the series,<sup>128</sup> Internet discussion groups<sup>129</sup> and fan fiction<sup>130</sup> based on *Road to Avonlea* characters indicate that the series continues to have a remarkable affective pull on fans even though no new episodes have been produced since 1996. The exception is the 1998 movie-of-the-week *Happy Christmas, Miss King*, which aired on the

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<sup>128</sup> For a particularly lush and detailed example, visit [www.avonleamagiclantern.com](http://www.avonleamagiclantern.com). This site also includes a thorough listing of related links. Likewise, a Web ring at <http://w.webring.com/hub?ring=avonlea> is a portal to other *Road to Avonlea* web sites.

<sup>129</sup> As of November 2003, Yahoo was host to 75 *Road to Avonlea*-related groups.

<sup>130</sup> For examples, visit <http://avonlea0.tripod.com/harmonysroadtoavonleafanfiction/> or <http://www.fanfiction.net/list.php?categoryid=307>.

CBC. The series lives on in syndication, too. In 2001, *Road to Avonlea* aired on Canada's Vision TV and on America's Odyssey Channel (now known as the Hallmark Channel) throughout 2000, as part of its Hallmark Hall of Fame presentations. *Road to Avonlea* appeared in syndication on the CBC in 2002 during weekday afternoons, and can still be seen on Canada's Bravo.

In the analysis that follows, both romance and industry are implicated in fans' affective response to the setting of the series. Syndication, the Internet, high-production values, and generic conventions have as much a bearing on fans' attachment to the series as do the emotional familiarity of the situations dramatized, the strong appeal of the characters portrayed, and the utopian fantasy of community offered. The confluence of romance and industry also tells the story of a borderless romance that, paradoxically, features high awareness that it is a Canadian production.

### *Sample Profile, Attachment Level and Viewing Habits*

In September 2001, I posted a notice to *Road to Avonlea*- and Montgomery-related discussion groups, asking for series' fans who wanted to participate in a survey, to send me an email requesting a questionnaire. The purpose was to generate qualitative responses that would suggest interpretations of the series. Questions meant to encourage such interpretation were open-ended to avoid suggestion. Themes that were repeated in answers were subsequently clustered according to conceptual similarity, and revealed patterns in interpretation. The questionnaire invited participants to reflect on the series' special appeal for them, its moral or message, and its relationship to real life. I also included questions related to the series' production context as a means by which to test its success as a co-production and as a specifically Canadian romance. Participants were additionally asked to contribute personal information.

In the end, I received 54 completed questionnaires from self-selected participants.<sup>131</sup> Of those, only four respondents were male. Given the overwhelmingly female response, my analysis concerns *Road to Avonlea*'s female fans, as found on the Internet. From this universe, I acquired a fairly homogenous sample of 50 respondents— all heterosexual, mainly of white

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<sup>131</sup> Appendix C includes the questionnaire.



European heritage and overwhelmingly single at 68 percent.<sup>132</sup> Two-thirds were American in nationality and almost one-third Canadian, a bias of the lists to which I posted.<sup>133</sup> Half of the respondents were aged 15 to 24 with a median age of 25.<sup>134</sup> The youth of the sample was a surprise—most of these fans would have been children when *Road to Avonlea* originally aired. Consistent with this median age, a large proportion of respondents—40 percent—identified themselves as students.<sup>135</sup> Meanwhile, more than a third had jobs described as professional/managerial or office-related, and more than two-thirds had or were in the midst of a university or college degree.<sup>136</sup> Education level and type of work suggested the middle-class tenor of the sample.

Almost three-quarters of those who responded were aware of the series from its first season,<sup>137</sup> with nearly as many participants also reporting awareness when episodes were first run (Table 1). Still, syndication demonstrated an important role in generating series awareness and attachment. In fact, slightly more respondents reported watching *Road to Avonlea* most frequently in syndication at 45 percent than the 40 percent who watched more when episodes were first run.<sup>138</sup> A larger percentage of fans said they watched *Road to Avonlea* more now than when it first ran (42 percent) compared to those who reported watching it less (36 percent) or as much (22 percent). An impressive 84 percent reported watching some episodes several times. Along with repeated viewing and syndication, the Internet played a

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<sup>132</sup> Eighty-four percent chose “White European” to describe themselves, while eight percent chose “Asian” and another eight chose “Other”. Thirty percent indicated they were married, while two percent indicated they had a partner or were common law.

<sup>133</sup> Sixty-six percent—American; 30 percent—Canadian; four percent—other nationalities.

<sup>134</sup> Of the female respondents, 50 percent were ages 15 to 24, 32 percent were 25 to 39 and 18 percent were 40 to 59.

<sup>135</sup> Work situation: student—40 percent; professional/managerial—20 percent; office worker—14 percent; other—ten percent; homemaker—six percent; unemployed—six percent; freelancer—4 percent.

<sup>136</sup> Highest level of education achieved: university/college—62 percent; high school—26 percent; graduate school—six percent; public school—six percent.

<sup>137</sup> Of those 36 respondents who were aware of the series from its first run, 26 were able to indicate in what season. First season—73 percent; third season—15 percent; second season—eight percent; fourth season—four percent; sixth season—four percent.

<sup>138</sup> Fifteen percent also reported watching on video.

key function in maintaining awareness and attachment. Ninety percent indicated they had checked the web for related sites. Likewise, a majority reported reading fan fiction, participating in email chat groups, and belonging to fan clubs (Table 2). At the same time, however, the level of commitment required for series-related activities was low for half of the respondents, while only one third showed medium activity (Appendix D).

**Table 1. – When did you first become aware of *Road to Avonlea*?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
When episodes were first run	36	72
In reruns	12	24
On video	2	4
<i>Totals</i>	n=50	100

**Table 2. – Have you ever participated in the following *Road to Avonlea* activities?**

	<i>Totals</i>	<i>Percentage of n=50</i>
Surfed the net for websites	45	90
Collected memorabilia	31	62
Read fan fiction	31	62
Belonged to a fan club	30	60
Participated in an email chat group	30	60
Written fan fiction	17	34
Subscribed to a newsletter/fanzine	14	28
Written fan letters	12	24
Created a web site	12	24
Held social events	6	12
Produced a newsletter/fanzine	1	2

About two-thirds of the women (64 percent) said they watched *Road to Avonlea* alone. This finding is expected given the profile of the sample—mostly single women attending a post-secondary institution, but it does raise questions as to the series’ actual family appeal—that is, whether or not *Road to Avonlea* fulfilled producers’ objectives for quality entertainment the whole family would watch together. Instead, a story emerges about the relationship between gender and genre, about the appeals of period soap opera for female viewers. This story confirms *New York Times*’ reporter Dinitia Smith’s claim (1996) that costume dramas fill the void in adult entertainment for predominantly white, middle-class women. Indeed, when not solitary, the viewing of *Road to Avonlea* tended to be a gendered

family activity between mothers and daughters (73 percent) or sisters (39 percent).<sup>139</sup> These findings correspond with the CBC's audience research, which consistently found that the largest demographic for the series was women, and also with Johnson's assertion that Disney's audience for *Avonlea* comprised mostly women.<sup>140</sup>

The respondents indicated an attraction to a diverse array of programming, but those shows receiving the most mentions as favourites showed similarities to *Road to Avonlea* in mode of address, content and generic conventions (Table 3). Nearly a quarter of the women named *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003) closely followed by *Friends* as another favourite. Despite coming from wildly different genres—horror and situation comedy, respectively—both series are similar to *Road to Avonlea* in that they feature female characters in lead roles, and focus on their relationships to other characters (lovers, friends and family) and their efforts at self-actualization in a serialized format. Sullivan Entertainment's *Wind at My Back* tied with *Friends* and was followed by *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. These two, *Wind* and *Dr. Quinn*, along with the Christian-based drama *Christy*, showed fans' preference for period dramas featuring women as main characters. Looking at the top seven shows (to get on the list, a program had to receive more than five mentions), the crime drama—probably the most prolific genre on television at the time of the survey—is noticeably absent. Instead, we find situation comedies, horror-based soap operas, and period pieces—all with female-friendly points of view.

Often the assumption about series such as *Road to Avonlea* is that the period setting constructs a conservative mode of address that supports family values, in the sense in which the Christian Right has appropriated the term as referring to the nuclear family headed by the bread-winning patriarch. But the other shows that fans mentioned as favourites challenge this hypothesis since they feature liberal representations, such as non-traditional family arrangements involving the bonds of friendship over blood and female characters who are independent. Similar claims can be made for *Road to Avonlea* for including a range of

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<sup>139</sup>Others reported watching with friends (28 percent), family (22 percent), parents (11 percent) and children (11 percent). Respondents were allowed to offer more than one answer.

<sup>140</sup> Email to author, Jan. 24, 2002. In a later email dated Aug. 22, 2002, Johnson explained that Disney always knew that its audience was “weighted female”, but did not recall if “our [audience] research ever broke it down by gender.”

independent-minded female role models, as well as family situations that do not conform to the nuclear stereotype. In fact, only one family out of five households—Alec and Janet’s—can qualify as stereotypically nuclear. Moreover, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Will and Grace* (1998 – present) and *Friends* portray non-marital sex, gay and lesbian characters, and explicitly queer romances in arguably matter-of-fact ways. These fans’ other program preferences challenge the assumption that nostalgic representations of the past are necessarily regressive or conservative.

**Table 3. – What other television shows do you consider favourites?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=46</i>
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	11	24
<i>Friends</i>	10	22
<i>Wind at My Back</i>	10	22
<i>Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman</i>	9	19.5
<i>Will and Grace</i>	7	15
<i>Christy</i>	6	13

*N.B. Four respondents did not offer an answer making for a sample of n=46. Only shows receiving more than five mentions listed.*

### ***Adaptation and Canadian Awareness***

Familiarity with L.M. Montgomery was a significant factor both in respondents’ decision to watch *Road to Avonlea* and in their awareness of the series’ Canadian origins. Half of the sample had read Montgomery before *Road to Avonlea* (Table 4). Slightly more than a third read Montgomery because of the Sullivan adaptations (i.e., *Anne of Green Gables* and *Road to Avonlea*). Only a negligible percentage had never read the PEI author. Most respondents came to the series because they were readers of Montgomery, and if not already readers, then they read her after watching the television adaptations. Moreover, 40 percent of respondents named Montgomery as a reason for choosing to watch *Road to Avonlea* (Table 5). She was the second highest reason, after characters and setting/look, which tied for first place at 42 percent each. Significantly, the fans participating in this study did not choose *Road to Avonlea* solely on the basis that it represents family entertainment. Other factors were involved, emanating from the profile of sample, and related to the series’ use of period setting and its connection to Montgomery.

**Table 4. – When did you read L.M. Montgomery?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Before <i>Road to Avonlea</i>	25	50
Because of the <i>Anne</i> movies with Megan Follows	14	28
Because of <i>Road to Avonlea</i>	9	18
<u>Have not read L.M. Montgomery</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
<i>Totals</i>	n=50	100

**Table 5. – What were your reasons for choosing *Road to Avonlea*?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=50</i>
Characters*	21	42
Setting/look**	21	42
L.M. Montgomery	20	40
Morals/values***	18	36
Sullivan Entertainment's <i>Anne</i>	12	24
Family/kids'content****	11	22
Writing/stories	7	14
Different, special	5	10

\* Includes cast, individual actors, acting and character interrelationships.

\*\* Includes references to time period or era, place, detail (e.g., costumes), and production quality.

Clustering these concepts together comes from the way in which period pieces are generally discussed. References to the look of the program tend to be synonymous with notions of authenticity or period setting, and speak to audience expectations and industry definitions of this genre.

\*\*\* Includes references to wholesomeness, innocence, family values, and lack of swearing, violence or sex.

\*\*\*\* Includes references to family friendly content and stories oriented around family or children.

Slightly more than 42 percent said Montgomery was a reason for their awareness of the series' Canadian origins. In fact, Montgomery came in as the number one reason for this awareness, followed closely by references/dialogue (40 percent) and other reasons trailing behind (Table 6). Montgomery's cachet among American respondents challenges former Disney producer Jude Schneider's claim that there is no brand value to Montgomery in the United States. Of American respondents, 42 percent had read Montgomery before *Road to Avonlea*, 36 percent identified the PEI author as a reason for choosing *Road to Avonlea*, and 42 percent gave Montgomery as the reason for their awareness of the series' Canadian origins. The first two figures were higher among the Canadian sample—73 percent and 53 percent—while the last one was slightly lower at 40 percent, perhaps because more than half of the Canadians reported that as Canadians, they took it for granted that *Road to Avonlea* was a Canadian production. Indicating the high cross-marketing potential of adaptation, these

findings suggest that Montgomery’s name did carry cachet and that there is a close identification of her works with Canada. This observation requires qualification, however. Since participants are self-selected, the results may be skewed towards those who are capable of distinction. Nevertheless, the result demonstrates Hjort’s contention regarding the “international dimension” of widely familiar works, adapted with an eye towards both domestic and export audiences. American fans in my study were drawn to *Road to Avonlea* as a result of its connection to the Canadian author L.M. Montgomery.

**Table 6. – What were reasons given for Canadian awareness?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=47</i>
L.M. Montgomery	20	42.5
References/dialogue	19	40
Red soil/scenery/setting	15	32
Credits	13	28
Media/press/advertising	11	23
Sullivan’s <i>Anne</i>	10	21
Canadian accents	9	19
Respondent is Canadian*	8	17
Actors/cast members**	8	17
Internet	5	11
CBC***	4	8.5
No answer	3	---
Canadian flags****	2	4
British royals	1	2

\* Includes lives near where filmed, and as a Canadian, took for granted.

\*\* Includes awareness of Canadian actors and difference from American actors.

\*\*\* Includes watched it on CBC or aware a co-production with CBC.

\*\*\*\* No Canadian flags appear on the series since the Union Jack was the flag during the time *Road to Avonlea* is set, and appears as such on the series.

Indeed, the results show not only high Montgomery awareness among respondents but high Canadian awareness for the series, thanks to Montgomery’s name though there were other factors as well. When watching, 84 percent stated they were completely aware that the show was set in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Only 14 percent said they were somewhat aware, while a negligible two percent claimed not at all. Most respondents at 94 percent were aware the series was produced in Canada with a mainly Canadian cast and crew. Reasons given for Canadian awareness can be divided into two categories—information contained within the drama itself, and information derived about the series from external sources. As for the former, the use of Montgomery’s stories (42.5 percent), references to

PEI or Canada within the dialogue (40 percent), and the setting and scenery featuring red soil (32 percent) were given as top reasons for Canadian awareness. Clichés about Canada were referenced negligibly— that is, if one doesn't count Montgomery as a cliché and it is impossible not to do so.

Other reasons scoring high were outside the content of the series, and included the credits (28 percent), publicity and marketing (23 percent), and Sullivan Entertainment's *Anne of Green Gables* (21 percent). Information about the series and its production, as well as its connection to Montgomery made significant contributions to Canadian awareness, suggesting that such awareness is just as much a function of intertextuality as it is of the text itself. This finding is reinforced when considering that in later seasons the series virtually abandoned the use of second-unit location shots, which for the first two seasons, featured the PEI landscape as a character, lending some regional authenticity to the setting, however fabricated that was. Moreover, in the series, the lack of specific references to Canada as a country with a history would also imply that intertextual factors would indeed have significance in determining the series' setting and place of origin. This contention supports my claim that the series' content is best understood as a borderless romance, whose cultural portability depends upon a nonspecific mode of address. Perspective, theme or subject matter do not appear as markers of Canadianness; instead, geographical and intertextual references provide these markers, which in no way interfere with the text's ability to travel well. In a way, these markers reinforce stereotypes of Canadian culture, borne out by Montgomery's international dimension and by the series' idyllic construction of PEI. *Road to Avonlea* would appear to satisfy Morris' thesis regarding export-drive allegory.

Moreover, knowledge of the CBC's involvement with *Road to Avonlea* also contributed to Canadian awareness. Of respondents, 44 percent identified the series as a co-production between the CBC and The Disney Channel, while almost the same amount at 42 percent considered *Road to Avonlea* solely a CBC effort. Only a negligible four percent thought the series was strictly a Disney offering, suggesting again the importance of intertextual factors in highlighting *Road to Avonlea's* Canadian origins. Moreover, Canadians were much more likely to call *Road to Avonlea* a CBC show than Americans: for every American who said the show belonged to the CBC, there were three Canadians making the same claim (Table 7). A large majority of Canadians surveyed (73 percent) defined the series as a CBC show, while a smaller majority of Americans (58 percent) identified it as a co-

production between the CBC and The Disney Channel. Claims made about the series' production context strongly demonstrate recognition of the CBC's symbolic role as a Canadian cultural institution. *Road to Avonlea* bolstered the public broadcaster's image as a purveyor of Canadian stories, satisfying cultural criteria key to the CBC's mandate and objectives for the series.

**Table 7. – What is the relationship between nationality and co-production awareness?**

	Canadian		American	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
CBC show	11	73	9	27
Both CBC and Disney	3	20	19	27
Disney show	1	7	1	3
Don't know	--	--	2	6
<u>Sullivan show</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
<i>Totals</i>	n=15	100	n=33	100

### *Genre Expectations and Character-driven Attachment*

One story that emerges in the results is the subtle awareness of Sullivan Entertainment as a producer of particular types of programs. That some fans show an awareness of a production company speaks to Sullivan Entertainment's reputation as a creator of family-oriented period dramas. About a quarter of respondents noted Sullivan Entertainment's *Anne of Green Gables* as a reason for choosing to read Montgomery and to watch *Road to Avonlea* (Table 4), while just over a fifth noted Sullivan's *Anne* as a reason for Canadian awareness around *Road to Avonlea* (Table 6). The placement of *Wind at My Back* on the list of other favourite shows is another indicator of production-company awareness. As well, when asked if *Road to Avonlea* was a CBC show, a Disney show or both, a small percentage indicated that the series was in fact a Sullivan show, even though this was not given as a survey option (Table 7). Had it been listed as an option, more respondents may have claimed *Road to Avonlea* as Sullivan Entertainment's rather than the CBC's or Disney's.

In any case, Sullivan Entertainment's ability to satisfy the expectations of the genre with which it is most closely associated appears as a factor in survey results. Along these lines, setting/look scored high among respondents as a reason for choosing *Road to Avonlea*, tying with characters and slightly edging out Montgomery for top spot. Setting/look included references to the time period, era or place, and mentions of detail (e.g., costumes)



or production quality. Clustering these concepts under setting/look speaks to the conventions of costume drama, particularly the expectation of visual pleasure and authenticity. Indeed, respondents who said *Road to Avonlea* was different from other series—these were in a majority at 62 percent<sup>141</sup> (Table 8)— named the period setting, detail and look as the number-one reason for its uniqueness at 32 percent (Table 13a). As mentioned in a previous chapter, the CBC’s audience research also tested viewers on their appreciation of the series’ production values, indicating visual and aesthetic qualities were of notable concern. In satisfying visual and aesthetic criteria, *Road to Avonlea* also met with The Disney Channel’s commercial goal, which was to use the look of the series to attract subscribers.

**Table 8. – How is *Road to Avonlea* different from other television programs?**

	Number	Percentage of n=47
Period setting/detail/look	15	32
Family show	15	32
Morals, values portrayed	10	21
Not overdone/preachy/sappy	6	13
No sex, drugs, violence, swearing	6	13

*NB n=47 comes from adding n=31 (those who responded different from) and n=16 (those who responded both different from and similar to). Respondents more certain of Road to Avonlea’s difference from other series were more likely to mention its portrayal of values as what made it different than those respondents who saw the series as having similarities to others. Respondents who thought Road to Avonlea was both different from and similar to other shows largely identified the period setting as what made it different.*

*Road to Avonlea* met expectations not only as a period piece but also as a family drama. Indeed, 22 percent of respondents stated that they chose the series because it had family-friendly content with stories oriented around families and children, while 36 percent picked it for portraying values that were wholesome and innocent (Table 5). Of 62 percent of respondents who said the series was unique, 32 percent cited *Road to Avonlea*’s family focus, 21 percent its wholesome values, and 13 percent its lack of sex, violence and swearing (Table 8). The series seemed to satisfy desires for content other genres did not.

Paradoxically, what made the series unique for some fans made it familiar for others. More than half of those respondents (53 percent) who said *Road to Avonlea* was similar to other television programs cited its status as a family show, while just over a quarter (26

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<sup>141</sup> Thirty percent indicated the series was both similar to and different from other television programs, while only six percent stated that the series was similar.

percent) regarded the themes, stories and plots as similar to other shows (Table 9). Taken together, respondents' comments suggest that *Road to Avonlea* was both different from and similar to other series, as a consequence of its unique period setting and its use of familiar themes and family-friendly content (Tables 8 and 9). For instance, one respondent noted that the series is “a family drama, like many other shows, but deals with a different era.” Another remarked that the series “shows us the life growing up in a beautiful, yet country setting. However, the characters on *Avonlea* go through the same problems of growing up as do characters in other shows.” A different fan observed that “all stories have similar underlying themes just different times and places.” All in all, these results support my contention that the series is a borderless romance, offering stories and situations common to domestic melodrama and therefore familiar to many television viewers. The transposition of these familiar situations into a period setting makes the borderless romance both accessible and exotic, satisfying viewers' expectations of emotional familiarity and visual pleasure. The resulting mode of address carries enough flexibility to make the series amenable to hybridized interpretations, as I will discuss shortly.

**Table 9. – How is *Road to Avonlea* similar to other television programs?**

	Number	Percentage of n=19
Family show	10	53
Themes/stories/plots	5	26
Period setting/look/detail	3	16
Morals, values	2	11

*N.B. n=19 comes from adding n=16 (those who responded both different from and similar to) and n=3 (those who responded similar to). Looking at 13a and 13b together, respondents who did not think the series was entirely different found the series similar to others in theme, story and family friendly content, and only different when it came to period setting.*

For surveyed fans part of the series' emotional familiarity came from their strong attachment to the characters and the trials and tribulations they experienced. Audience research shows that the CBC was keenly aware of the significance of character-driven attachment to the overall success of *Road to Avonlea*, measuring viewers' appreciation of not only individual characters (seasonally) but their relationships with other characters (final season). In my open-ended survey, the characters— including the ensemble cast, individual actors, quality of performances and character interrelationships— was one of the most popular reasons fans cited for choosing to tune into *Road to Avonlea* at 42 percent (Table 5).

Respondents found two types of episodes most appealing: those featuring main characters dealing with personal challenges, interacting with each other, or exploring their histories (48 percent); and those featuring the romantic couples (41 percent) with Gus and Felicity garnering the most mentions of any couple (72 percent) (Table 10).

**Table 10. – What kind of episodes did you find most appealing?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=44</i>
Main characters' development/interactions*	21	48
Romantic couples**	18	41
Earlier episodes***	9	20.5
No answer	6	---
Humorous episodes	3	7
Emotional episodes	3	7
Adventure/mystery	3	7

*N.B. Only references receiving three or more mentions included.*

*\*Includes references to specific main characters, interest in their personal challenges, and preferences for ensemble episodes highlighting characters' interactions and histories with each other.*

*\*\* Most popular couple is Felicity and Gus (13 mentions), followed by Jasper and Olivia, and Felix and Izzy (tied at four mentions each).*

*\*\*\* Includes preferences for episodes when the kids were younger or when episodes were closer to Montgomery's source texts.*

The concession to include famous guest stars did not appear to detract from fans' enjoyment of the series, contrary to Sullivan's concerns. In this respect, there were no differences between Canadian and American respondents. The majority (61 percent) said the guest stars added to the series.<sup>142</sup> At the same time, however, a contradiction emerges when 44 percent of respondents cited episodes not driven by the main characters (i.e., guest star episodes or episodes focusing on secondary characters) as least appealing. Next in line for least favourite were episodes starring Davey, a secondary character presumably there to make up for the lack of children on the show once the original cast of children had grown up (38.5 percent).<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, of respondents who indicated which seasons they found

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<sup>142</sup> Twenty-seven percent indicated that the guest stars took away from the series. Meanwhile 12 percent volunteered an option, stating they both added to and took away from the series.

<sup>143</sup> I could have clustered the Davey mentions with the other responses that indicated episodes about secondary characters as least appealing for a total of 82.5 percent, but it was unusual to have one character singled out. Other unappealing episodes included episodes featuring Hetty King—eight percent; episodes considered not Avonlea/not Montgomery—eight percent; and too dark/depressing episodes—five percent.

least appealing all cited the later seasons, and more than half of these specifically mentioned the lack of focus on the main characters. The ambivalence displayed in these responses would suggest that Sullivan Entertainment’s co-production compromise with The Disney Channel inhibited the quality of the storytelling by drawing attention away from the main characters to which viewers had become attached.

When asked who their favourite female character was, fans exhibited the strongest attachment to Felicity. Forty-seven percent of respondents chose her, and of those, 43 percent said she was a favourite because they identified with her (Table 11). (The second favourite Hetty was a distant 14 percent.) Given the profile of the sample, this finding was expected, as Felicity would be roughly around the same age as the highest age demographic represented in the sample— the 50 percent who said they were between the ages of 15 and 24. Indeed, as a young heterosexual woman from an Anglo-Celtic, middle-class household struggling with life-choices around education, career and romance, Felicity nicely fits the sample’s profile. Fans reported being the same age as Felicity when they started watching the show, identifying with her dilemmas, and seeing them represented in her.

**Table 11. – What are the reasons given for choosing Felicity as favourite female character?**

	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Percentage of n=23</i>
Identification with her	10	43
Watching her character grow and mature	10	43
Her strength of character*	5	22
She has flaws that make her real	4	17
Watching her find a place in the world	2	9

\* Includes Felicity’s sense of independence, honesty, willfulness, and ability to speak her mind.

Like Sullivan’s *Anne* adaptations, *Road to Avonlea* incorporates late twentieth century, Western notions of womanhood in the construction of Felicity, and indeed all of the central female characters, even the most traditionally domestic example of womanhood, Janet King. Her life as a farmer’s wife is constructed as a deliberate choice on her part rather than as an inevitable or natural role for a woman of her era and background. Similarly, from novel to screen, Felicity’s character undergoes an ideological makeover: where her novelistic predecessor is keen on growing up to be a good housekeeper skilled in the domestic arts, her television incarnation becomes concerned with satisfying her heart’s desire in a fulfilling career and heterosexual romance. Felicity’s attempt to balance career ambitions with a love

relationship invokes contemporary sensibilities. She is updated in other words; by Western liberal-feminist standards, she becomes a modern-day role model appropriate for girls of today. Felicity's career choices involve the desire to help people, whether as a doctor, a foundling-home operator, or a teacher of sign language. Arguably, the care-giving side to these choices makes Felicity's narrative arc palatable to viewers who may be more conservative in their views about appropriate roles for women. In any case, Felicity's popularity within this sample of female fans attests to their ability to connect with her and her struggles, despite the Edwardian Canadian setting. As costume drama, the specifics of time and place recede into the background (Landy, 1994, p. 135), making Felicity's storyline transhistorical yet contemporary. The female fans' experience of the series as a liberal feminist romance did not emerge in press reviews, and therefore, speaks to the sample's profile and the way in which context interacts with text producing relevant interpretations.

Moreover, fans' strong identification with Felicity supports the claims feminist critics such as Stella Bruzzi and Barbara Lupack make about costume drama. As the response to Felicity suggests, costume dramas create an affinity between women's past and present struggles. To be sure, these struggles are those of white, middle-class women, seeking expression outside the traditional confines of domesticity, and therefore, firmly situate these representations within a liberal feminist framework. Along these lines, Bruzzi discusses what she terms the "liberal method" of costume drama, which "concentrates on finding a political and ideological affinity between the struggles of women in the present and figures from the past" (p. 233). The heroine of such a film, writes Bruzzi, is "both historical and contemporary, her struggle (with herself, her family and men) both parochial and perennial" (p. 234).

Certainly, Felicity's story can be characterized in the same way. Of respondents who named her, 43 percent said she was their favourite because they enjoyed watching her grow up and mature (Table 11). Felicity is the oldest daughter of Alec and Janet King, middle-class landowning farmers. Through the course of the series, viewers watch Felicity grow from a vain and haughty schoolgirl to a mature and responsible woman. She works hard at her studies and makes decisions about her education; she develops an interest in boys that is fraught with both heartache and joy. As she searches for a fulfilling career, she learns about herself and about what's important to her in a life-partner. In other words, Felicity encounters the challenges, the dreams and the fears that would be exceedingly familiar to the

majority of respondents since they have in common her youth, her class background, and her sexual orientation. As one respondent put it, “I was going through career dilemmas about the same time she did ... so I was able to identify with her.” Another one noted Felicity is “an intelligent young woman trying to find her place in the world, which I can relate to.” Such comments confirm Higson’s contention that costume dramas construct a “modern past”, dramatizing contemporary dilemmas against a period backdrop.

Given the series’ ability to travel well, one might wonder just how *Road to Avonlea’s* liberal portrayal of womanhood is received in more conservative contexts where a fulfilling career may not be regarded as a gender-appropriate goal. As I indicated in Chapter 3, the central female characters each exhibit maternal, care-giving qualities, oftentimes even in their choice of career, which may offset the cultural discount of liberal feminism. However, a second possibility also exists. Thinking about the female characters on the series, Nathan noted,

I always find when you work in period, you can say a lot more [and] more effectively a lot of times than you can when you work in contemporary time. I think because people look at things that are in the past and they place them in a different context in their brains... I think when you see it placed in the context of the past, it’s almost like you can distance yourself maybe from your own beliefs and mores of your time to look at it more rationally and go, oh well, that’s not a bad idea.

Nathan suggests that the displacement of the story into another historical period provides distance from the contemporary situation—otherwise, the story may be too close for comfort. The period setting allows for the safe expression of ideas about gender that may be potentially alienating or threatening.

In merging liberal feminist values with a rural romantic past, Felicity’s story, as it is intertwined with Gus Pike’s, also portrays the essence of modern-day heterosexual romance. Certainly, Gus plays a big part in Felicity’s struggles to find her place in the world. As such, it is no wonder that more than half of respondents (56 percent) chose Gus as their favourite male character. (Felix was second in line at 23 percent.) The appeal of Gus is sample-specific, focussed around a romantic fantasy of heterosexual courtship. Along these lines, many fans favoured Gus because of his behaviour towards other people, and characterized him as gentlemanly, honourable and respectful, as well as loyal, caring and devoted.

Moreover, of respondents who chose Gus, 37 percent said it was because they enjoyed

watching his character transform (Table 12). Here, fans were referring to Gus’ humble origins as “an uneducated orphan” and his transformation into “an upstanding member of the community”, as one person explained it. According to another respondent, “Even though he grew up under challenging circumstances, he became a man of honour. Not many who faced what he did would have turned out as well.” For another, Gus represented an “Ellis Island type of character... someone who finds himself alone in a new country, and must make his way by himself by his pluck, hard work and core values.” Part of this narrative arc’s appeal was seeing a beloved character— someone who, as fans describe him, is down-to-earth, genuine and honest— finally rewarded for his perseverance with true love and a place in the community.

**Table 12. – What are the reasons given for choosing Gus as favourite male character?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=27</i>
Watching his character transform*	10	37
Gentlemanly, honourable, respectful**	9	33
Loyal, caring, devoted	8	30
Down to earth, genuine, honest	8	30
Good-looking	8	30
Hard-working	5	19

\* Respondents referred specifically to Gus’s humble origins and his transformation into an accepted member of Avonlea.

\*\* Includes comments regarding his pursuit of love interest Felicity.

A surprising result was the implicit parallels some respondents drew between Gus’ story and Horatio Alger’s tale of rags to riches, of the American Dream achieved. Of those respondents who chose Gus, 53 percent of the Americans described Gus in this way—as a resourceful, independent, pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps guy—while the figure was 20 percent for the Canadians, indicating the influence of national mythologies on the interpretive moment.<sup>144</sup> This interpretation of Gus can also be understood in terms of Classic Disney. According to Wasko (2001, p. 114), Classic Disney stands for mainstream American values such as individualism, optimism and the work ethic. Being able to read Gus as embodying these classically American virtues suggests another reason for the series’

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<sup>144</sup> Of American respondents who chose Gus as favourite male character, slightly more than half identified his appeal in these terms. Unlike Gus, there were no noticeable national differences in fans’ reading of Felicity.

successful integration within the Disney universe and points to the role hybridization can play in enhancing portability.

Overall, the characteristics that fans identified in open-ended questions as salient to their decision to watch matches the closed criteria the CBC used to measure viewer enjoyment of *Road to Avonlea*. A 1993-94 season report listed criteria to measure genre appeal (i.e., stories about family life, stories set in that time period, stories that take place in a rural setting) and character-driven attachment (i.e., enjoyment of characters, the actors who appear, getting to know characters from week to week). Each scored considerably higher than promotions, channel surfing or scheduling as key factors in deciding to watch (CBC Research, 1994).

### *Attitudes toward Era and Place*

Part of the reason for including fan responses in this case study is to redress the lack of audience research related to the reception of period pieces.<sup>145</sup> With that in mind, questions 16 to 18 on the survey foreground issues pertaining to the use of period setting within popular culture—specifically, the attendant implications for historical consciousness, wish fulfillment and nostalgia. How do fans understand the setting of *Road to Avonlea* and its relationship to real life? What does ‘Avonlea’ mean to them as a place? What desires does ‘Avonlea’ satisfy? If the period setting can be said to produce nostalgia, then what are fans nostalgic for?

Responses showed ambivalence regarding Avonlea’s relationship to reality. Some fans—28.5 percent of them—thought Avonlea was an accurate depiction of a community in that era but bore no resemblance to today (Table 13). Almost as many believed Avonlea was like real life and not like real life at 26.5 percent each, while 18 percent claimed Avonlea resembled real life in some ways but not in others. These responses show that costume drama furnishes a paradoxical viewing experience that is at once relevant and escapist, as discussed in Chapter 3. Looking at the results together, the idea that Avonlea does not bear a relationship to real life today garners a majority of the sample at 55 percent, suggesting that

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<sup>145</sup> Helen Taylor’s book *Scarlett’s Women: Gone With The Wind and Its Female Fans* (1989) is the only such study with which I am familiar.



fans experience the setting as a fantasy removed from their day-to-day reality. The fact that these fans experience Avonlea as remote from their lives may account for why two-thirds would choose to live there if they could. Comments here illustrate the new meanings Avonlea assumes as a fantasy response to concerns about form of life in the late twentieth century.

**Table 13. – How would you compare the community of Avonlea to real life?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=49</i>
Like that era but not like today	14	28.5
Not like real life	13	26.5
Like real life	13	26.5
Both	9	18
No answer	1	---
<i>Totals</i>	50	100

Of those respondents who said Avonlea was not like real life, 58 percent cited its sense of community and close-knit ties as what made it alien from reality (Table 14). These fans described Avonlea as a community where everyone knows their neighbour, looks out for and helps each other, puts the needs of the community ahead of the individual, and pulls together when needed, especially in a crisis. One respondent expressed it particularly well:

Avonlea seems an ideal. Although the community fights among themselves, each member seems important. Each member does its [sic] part to help... For example, when the Dale Cannery burned, all the community members came to help with clothing, food, etc., even though they were on opposite sides of the amalgamation issue. They care about each other at heart, and among its best members, the community of Avonlea is more important than self. In real life, although people might have good intentions, it never seems to work as well as it did in Avonlea. Self is emphasized over community. We often don't worry as much about others.

Thirty-nine percent said that the depiction of Avonlea was specific to that era but not like today because life in the city means neighbours do not know each other, and life is fast-paced, busy and competitive. As one fan put it, “These days, neighbours come home from work and hide inside till they have to go fight traffic again.” Another lamented that “nowadays, people are too busy to have the same time to share with their neighbours,” while one respondent remarked that “you have to look much harder for [community] in these complex modern times. The characters on the show were born into Avonlea, but real people nowadays have to create it for themselves if they want it.” Nineteen percent thought that the

depiction was an idealized view of both the era and the community and, therefore, not like real life. “Avonlea is very much an idealized community,” offered one participant, “more because we don’t see the ugliness of turn-of-the-century life than because it is inauthentic.”

**Table 14. – What are the reasons given for why Avonlea is not like real life?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=36</i>
Close-knit community*	21	58
Like era but not like today**	14	39
Idealized/idealistic***	7	19

*\* Includes sense of community, everyone knows everyone, importance of community over self, looking out for each other and helping each other out, or pulling together as a community.*

*“Close-knit” is a term that respondents often used to describe Avonlea.*

*\*\* Includes not like today because we don’t know our own neighbours, our lives are too fast-paced, busy and competitive, and we live in cities and are not born into communities.*

*\*\*\* Includes ideal of what a town should be like, or idealized view of the era.*

*N.B. n=36 comes from combining n=13 (not like real life), n=9 (both) and n=14 (like that era but not like today) in Table 13.*

Fans who considered the series like real life did so for two reasons: first, the characters were like real people one might encounter in daily life and were portrayed realistically with flaws (59 percent); and second, the series aptly dramatized life in a typical small town (54.5 percent). Overall, the results suggest that fans found the characters recognizable and the small-town setting familiar. However, there were aspects of the lifestyle—that is, the slower pace and cohesiveness of the community—that did not parallel respondents’ experiences but formed a large part of Avonlea’s attraction. To put it another way, what made Avonlea different from respondents’ lives is also what made Avonlea attractive to them. As one fan noted, “I don’t think we really have communities like that, at least in my world, but we could learn something from it.” When asked if given a choice, would you choose to live in Avonlea, two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) replied they would, citing simplicity of lifestyle (37.5 percent) and the sense of community (25 percent) as the top reasons (Table 15). In other words, if desire is the absence of fulfillment, then Avonlea exists as a fantasy because of an apparent lack. This finding echoes Janice A. Radway’s groundbreaking work in *Reading the Romance* (1984) about female readers and popular fiction. Radway might have been writing about romance generally not just the Harlequin kind, when she concluded that the readers’ response “to the romantic form can be characterized by the expression of repressed emotions deriving from dissatisfaction with the status quo and a utopian longing for a better life” (p. 221).

**Table 15. – What are the reasons given for living in Avonlea if it were possible?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=32</i>
Simplicity/lifestyle	12	37.5
Sense of community	8	25
Like to or lives in small town	4	12.5
Christian/old-fashioned ways	3	9
The people	3	9
Beauty of setting/PEI	3	9
Family ties	3	9

*N.B. Eight said they would miss modern conveniences—25%, where n=32.*

Along these lines, fan responses establish an ethical contrast between life in Avonlea and life in urban-contemporary Canada and the U.S., demonstrating the romance with community in an age of modernity and suggesting a crisis of values. Imagining a life in Avonlea, one respondent said,

I would have to be a tomboy or recluse, but yes. It's a wonderful place, and a far cry from how I have lived my life. It would be both a comfort and challenge. I could learn so much daily. There is a more natural way there, lots of land, no cars ... Food is made at home... They have fairs and festivals, and no one laughs at you when you go. People actually have to talk to each other... It would force me to find a place for myself and be part of the community.

Another fan noted that the reason for choosing to live in Avonlea if she could was “the absence of a sense of community in my real life.” Sharing this sentiment, one respondent remarked that “as the cities grew bigger, people as a community grew apart, and the closeness we see in *Road to Avonlea* does not really exist any more.” These fans establish an ethical contrast between the past they see depicted on the series and their experiences of the contemporary world, pointing to nostalgia's potential as a beneficial sentiment and a critical stance— or the “retrospective radicalism” Williams had in mind in *The Country and The City*. Significantly, the affective appeal of the Avonlea fantasy does not have to do with the depiction of family life, but with the portrayal of an attractive lifestyle involving a sense of community. This finding encouraged me to pursue community as the key theme in my textual analysis (Chapters 4 and 5).

However, one quarter of respondents who said they would live in Avonlea expressed concerns over the lack of modern conveniences. “I think I'm a very modern person,” wrote one fan. “But I'd love to live in a beautiful place and have a simple little cottage surrounded

by roses. I would just want to have a computer, television, bathroom and telephone inside that cottage.” Apparently, *Road to Avonlea* constructs a world that, save for the absence of such modern conveniences, is easily inhabitable by any contemporary white woman coming from a middle-class background and living in a Canadian or American city. Of the third that would not live in Avonlea given the choice, 69 percent cited the lack of modern conveniences as the top reason (Table 16). Other reasons indicated some understanding of the realities of the period. Nineteen percent of fans cite the lack of privacy found in small rural communities, the situation for women at the time—including the absence of suffrage—and the harshness of the era, naming concerns about disease and sanitation.

**Table 16. – What are the reasons given for not living in Avonlea?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=16</i>
Lack of modern conveniences	10	69
Lack of privacy	3	19
Harsh realities of era	3	19
Women’s issues*	3	19

*\* Includes concerns about cumbersome clothing, and less freedoms, less opportunities for women.*

Taken together, the responses suggest not so much a lack of historical consciousness, but rather an appreciation of the fantasy offered. This claim raises questions regarding the degree to which *Road to Avonlea* and programs like it contribute to historical amnesia. What’s more likely is that the amnesia is temporary, wedded to suspension of disbelief, rather than a long-term state of affairs. The overall ambivalence about setting also suggests a reading strategy best described as “off-modern”, to borrow Boym’s concept. For female fans here, Avonlea’s appeal is not the product of a regressive nostalgia that rejects modernity in favour of tradition (as should already be evident in their reception of Felicity). Rather, that appeal is based on critical engagement with form of life, on comparing and contrasting what was better ‘back then’ versus what is better right now. While the text of *Road to Avonlea* is selective about the past and does not promote historical understanding, this does not negate the possibility of critical reflection in the interpretive moment.

In further defining the Avonlea community, respondents were asked to identify the kinds of problems or conflicts that arise, and to discuss in what manner these are resolved (Table 17). Just over a quarter cited problems of a personal/interpersonal nature, while 17 percent named threats to the community’s way of life including the march of progress,

amalgamation with Carmody, and businesses such as the cannery going under. Another 17 percent identified the problems as appropriate to the setting, while 15 percent said Avonlea’s residents encountered situations one might find today. These results again show a degree of ambivalence regarding the series’ relationship to reality with problems specific to the particular setting versus problems that could be contemporary. By and large, respondents explained that conflicts are resolved in cooperation with other people. Cooperation involved discussion and negotiation, eventually arriving at a compromise (30 percent), or community and family members setting aside differences to help out—pulling together in other words (45 percent). This type of conflict-resolution likely contributed to creating the sense of community that fans identified as a chief attraction of the setting. Additionally, the emphasis on talk versus action illustrates the series’ strong connection to domestic melodrama.

**Table 17. – What kinds of problems/conflicts arise in Avonlea?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=47</i>
Personal/interpersonal	12	25.5
Threats to way of life	8	17
Problems appropriate to era or small town	8	17
Problems like today	7	15

*N.B. Only items receiving more than five responses listed. Three respondents gave no answers.*

When asked in an open-ended question, what is *Road to Avonlea*’s moral, lesson or message, fans’ overwhelming sense was that the series portrayed the importance of relationships to other people, whether family, community or friends (Table 18). Over half named the importance of family, while 25.5 percent identified the importance of community, and 23 percent discussed issues pertaining to the treatment of other people, including working together despite differences, supporting loved ones, treating others with respect, and generally helping people. Just over one-fifth thought that the series had something to say about finding a better lifestyle—slowing down, appreciating beauty, and living more simply. These findings correspond to those articulating fans’ keen appreciation of the characters’ interrelationships and their descriptions of Avonlea as a community in general, and as one they would enjoy inhabiting. Overall, fans’ discussion and description of the social bonds found on the series indicate that its romantic-communitarian sensibility, as defined in Chapter 4, garnered a considerable level of approval and attachment.

Consequently, for many fans, *Road to Avonlea* catalyzes an ethical contrast in their own minds between the lives they lead and the lives of the characters, signifying a crisis in

values. To sum up using a comment from one respondent, “Most of us live in a much bigger, noisier world, where people, relationships, and a sense of community are lost in the busy rush of deadlines, mounting costs of life and ‘me’ attitudes.” In other words, the romantic longing for simplicity, greater social bonds, a sense of collective responsibility and agency, as well as a closer connection to the natural world points out the deficiencies of the present, making form of life the central issue. ‘Avonlea’ symbolizes all that is apparently missing from contemporary, urban, middle-class life, and demonstrates the continuing presence— and indeed relevance— of the Romantic imagination at the turn of our century. The Romantic critique of the atomized individual alienated from nature and community, and caught up in the social machine is abundantly evident in fans’ responses: their enchantment with Avonlea is proportionate to their disenchantment with the contemporary world. This situation mirrors Montgomery’s and her thematic concerns. Still, the findings demonstrate that interpretations of Avonlea, whether in our time or another’s, are acutely attuned to the needs of the moment.

The responses also suggest that nostalgia is never as simple as a yearning for the ‘good old days’ because desire and its fulfillment within popular culture is complicated, involving a process of displacement and substitution. *Road to Avonlea* displaces disenchantment with the present into an enchantment with the past, substituting an idealized romantic ‘back then’ for a less-than-ideal now. Therefore, the critique of the present is a latent one that happens via a process of displacement and substitution rather than being available manifestly through the text. In other words, making the critique evident requires work on the part of viewers, as responses to the survey suggest. The period setting provides respondents with the opportunity to be critical about the present in ways only indirectly expressed within the text itself. Along these lines, nostalgia serves the purpose of clarifying personal and collective values, setting up an ethical contrast between the imagined past and the lived present.

### *Message Identification and Hybridized Readings*

With the overwhelming majority of respondents representing Canada and the United States, I had concerns that the bias of the lists to which I posted would inhibit my fan study’s test of portability. Yet despite the apparent homogeneity of the sample, important

differences in political leaning and religious background ended up providing that test of portability. These differences are located in values and belief systems rather than in potentially essentialist categories of ‘race’ or gender. For example, although 84 percent of the sample identified their faiths as Christian-based, significant divergences exist. Forty-two percent said organized religion played a big role in their lives, while 38 percent said somewhat of a role, and 20 percent claimed no role. The practice of faith ranged in description with 22 percent identifying as mainstream, another 22 percent as liberal, and 18 percent as conservative. Moreover, those who said religion played a big role described the practice of their faith as conservative to mainstream (72 percent), and those who identified somewhat of a role for religion in their lives described their practice as liberal to mainstream (78 percent). Politically, 45 percent of fans identified themselves as conservative/right of centre and 32 percent as liberal/left of centre. Nearly one quarter (23 percent) did not identify their political leaning either way. Organized religion played less of a role for respondents who identified on the left with 80 percent giving religion somewhat of or no role in their lives. On the right side of the political spectrum, slightly more than two-thirds of fans (67 percent) said organized religion played a big role for them.

Analyzing the results around *Road to Avonlea*’s moral/lesson (Table 18) makes a case for the openness of the series to hybridized readings, based on religion, political leaning, and nationality, which gives insights regarding the show’s apparent cultural portability. *Road to Avonlea* was able to travel well because it could appeal to people of varying values at the same time that it portrayed values neutral enough to cross barriers of culture or ideology. While respondents who said religion played no role in their lives did not cite family values as a moral, a quarter of these did name friendship as a message (Table 19).

Conversely, fans indicating that organized religion played a big role in their lives did not specify the importance of friends as a lesson, perhaps suggesting the significance of more traditional ties in their lives (Table 20). Fans with no ties to organized religion were also more likely to specify the importance of community as a moral, while those with closer ties to organized religion were more likely to cite the treatment of other people as lessons. However, the importance of family scores higher as a lesson among respondents who said religion played no or somewhat of a role than among fans for whom religion was significant (Tables 19 and 21). The lesser the role that organized religion played in their personal lives, the more emphasis respondents put on kin- and friendship ties in the series. Perhaps these

fans generally emphasize such bonds more so in their own lives than those who develop such ties based around the organized practice of a faith.

**Table 18. – What is *Road to Avonlea*'s moral/lesson/message?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=47</i>
Importance of family	17	36
Importance of community	12	25.5
Responsibility to/treatment of other people*	11	23
Better lifestyle **	10	21
Family values***	9	19
Importance of friends	8	17
Responsibility to self/conduct of self****	8	17
A message but not preachy*****	6	12
No answer/no message	3	--
Life has its trials	2	4

\* Includes helping/ doing good things for people, working together/getting along despite differences, treating people with respect/consideration, standing by/supporting loved ones.

\*\* Includes innocence, simplicity, slowing down, appreciating beauty, way we should live.

\*\*\* Due to the specifically conservative rhetoric around "family values", I have designated this a separate category from "importance of family" to test relationship to political leaning or organized religion.

\*\*\*\* Includes being true to yourself, being honest, taking responsibility for decisions.

\*\*\*\*\* Includes references to messages being subtle, not explicit or not preachy.

**Table 19. – What is the relationship between organized religion playing no role and *Road to Avonlea*'s moral/lesson/message?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=8</i>
Importance of family	4	50
Family values	nil	nil
Importance of community	3	37.5
Responsibility to/treatment of other people	1	12.5
Importance of friends	2	25
No answer	2	---

**Table 20. – What is the relationship between organized religion playing a big role and *Road to Avonlea*'s moral/lesson/message?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=21</i>
Importance of family	6	29
Responsibility to/treatment of other people	6	29
Importance of community	5	24
Family values	4	19
Importance of friends	nil	nil



**Table 21. – What is the relationship between organized religion playing somewhat of a role and *Road to Avonlea*'s moral/lesson/message?**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage of n=18</i>
Importance of family	7	39
Importance of friends	6	33
Family values	5	28
Importance of community	4	22
Responsibility to/treatment of other people	4	22
No answer	1	---

In total, 55 percent identified family as a message: 36 percent simply referred to the importance of family, while 19 percent specifically named family values (Table 18). American fans were three times more likely than Canadian ones to use this term— 25 percent of American respondents compared to eight percent of Canadian ones (Table 22). Moreover, Canadians were over three times more likely than Americans to cite the importance of friends as a lesson—31 percent of Canadians compared to nine percent of Americans. Other national differences emerge in that Canadians were somewhat more likely to name the importance of community and responsibility to other people as messages. Conversely, Americans were almost three times more likely than Canadians were to highlight responsibility to self or conduct of self as a lesson in the series—22 percent of Americans compared to eight percent of Canadians. Both Canadians and Americans were about equal on the significance of family at 54 percent and 56 percent respectively. However, the political and religious make-up of the American and Canadian fans, as well as external cultural and historical factors, help to explain the national differences in these results.

**Table 22. – What is the relationship between nationality and *Road to Avonlea*'s moral/lesson/message?**

	<b>Canada</b>		<b>United States</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>% n=13</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% n=32</i>
Importance of family	6	46	10	31
Family values	1	8	8	25
Importance of community	4	31	8	25
Responsibility to other people	4	31	9	28
Importance of friends	4	31	3	9
Conduct of self	1	8	7	22
No answer	2	---	1	---

For example, while more than half of Americans (55 percent) said organized religion played a big role in their lives, only 20 percent of Canadians made the same claim. While the same proportion of respondents from either nationality were likely to identify as liberal/left of centre at one third, Americans were three times (60 percent) more likely than Canadians (20 percent) to call themselves conservative/right of centre. As well, nearly half of the Canadian sample (47 percent) did not know how to categorize their political leaning, in contrast to seven percent of the Americans. These findings support general assumptions about the more conservative political climate found in the United States compared to Canada, and the greater emphasis American culture puts on organized religion, specifically on the practice of Christianity in all its manifestations (Adams, 2003). The fact American respondents would be much more likely to note family values as a message is therefore not surprising.

Similarly, in identifying messages in *Road to Avonlea*, American respondents were more likely to show an individualist orientation, while Canadians were more inclined to demonstrate a collectivist one. Both these orientations tap into cherished national myths that inform the worldviews of both nations, as supported by Lipset's research into cultural differences between Canada and the United States. In a more recent study, researchers Jon Alston, Theresa Morris and Arnold Vedlitz (1996) found that "Lipset's thesis continues to be valid" with Canadians showing a "continued collectivist orientation" and Americans reflecting "a more individualist attitude" toward civil and political institutions. These larger studies confirm the generalization that American fans are more likely than Canadian ones to see *Road to Avonlea* as offering messages on conduct of self. Additionally, that Americans are more likely than Canadians to characterize the story of Gus Pike as a lesson in rugged individualism supports the claim for hybridized readings based on cultural differences, as do Canadian fans' greater emphasis on friendship, community and responsibility to other people. Therefore, varied readings of message and the degree of emphasis placed on conduct of self versus social bonds returns us to my contention in Chapter 4 that the dialectic of individual and community is culturally portable and thematically suited to the needs of a transnational television genre.

While differences are noteworthy, a word on shared values is also important because both divergences and similarities in interpretation explain *Road to Avonlea's* existence as a borderless romance. In other words, hybridized readings are only one way to understand the

series' cultural portability; some tentative claims can be made for the presence of transcultural values. Indeed, whatever their national, religious or political stripe, the fans noted the importance of family as the preeminent message of the series. While variations in interpretation did occur according to the degree to which other social bonds were weighted, family was the one invariable, regardless of national origins, religious background, or political leaning. This finding is likely the result of the series' status as family entertainment—that is, the use of non-controversial content in combination with emotionally familiar stories about kinship make *Road to Avonlea* available to as broad an audience as possible. Moreover, variations in meaning appear to be the result of hybridization, with the content of the text interacting with the values of the specific group, producing context-appropriate meanings. As with the establishment of Canadian awareness, the reading formation affects the apprehension of values. In this way, *Road to Avonlea* demonstrates the borderless romance's capacity to simultaneously accommodate polysemic readings and encompass transcultural values.

In summary, fan responses confirm the definition of *Road to Avonlea* as a borderless romance offering generic family-oriented content, enhanced by high production-values and a detailed period look, as well as situations and characters that are familiar and accessible. These elements contribute to the flexibility of the series' mode of address and its openness to hybridized readings. At the same time, *Road to Avonlea* taps into shared values and ubiquitous experiences around social bonds, further facilitating a mode of address with strong transnational potential. To say that *Road to Avonlea* is industrially generic cannot fully explain its export potential. Only the notion of borderless romance can do that. Analyzing fan responses here and key narrative arcs in previous chapters demonstrate that *Avonlea* endures in the popular imagination due to its cultural malleability and its historical responsiveness. These characteristics make it possible for *Avonlea* to continue to function as symbolic wish fulfillment, providing an ethical contrast between realities lived and realities desired. As long as there is disenchantment in the world, *Avonlea* will continue to enchant.

## CONCLUSION

The theoretical concerns of this project have been with a view to addressing comments made in 1999 by National Film Board chairperson Sandra Macdonald, now head of the Canadian Television Fund. Reporting to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage on the problems of Canadian content rules based on the passports of the creators involved, Macdonald proposed that the time may have come to shift the attention of Canadian cultural policy away from “who says it” to “what it says” (Canada, 1999). Similarly, in a presentation to the Audio Visual Observatory at the University of Florence, Simon Fraser University professor Catherine Murray (1999a, p. 1, 9) noted that in Canada “content development is not a priority in policy circles” nor is qualitative “information on affect, that is pleasure or intensity of attachment.” My contribution to Canadian policy studies through this case study has been to envision the shift in attention Macdonald and Murray call for, to assess the cultural value of television drama. Participating in this shift is what I mean by *romancing* cultural policy studies, i.e., giving the affective and cultural dimensions of narrative their due in policy discourse. That envisioning has entailed bridging the gap between policy studies and cultural studies, between industry and romance, to forge new ways of thinking about Canadian television drama. The main concern has been to generate ideas for evaluating policy-supported content in terms of affective and cultural concerns, and not only industrial outputs that stimulate domestic economic activity.

The industrial emphasis in policy stems from the predominance of market reasoning in the cultural arena since the neo-liberal shift of the 1980s. To address the affective dimensions of television content and to thereby introduce qualitative questions into the policy arena “represents a departure”, according to Jim McGuigan (1996, p. 28),

... from the usual treatment of the public sphere in communications policy research where the politics of information tends to be privileged over the more *affective* aspects of culture... What tends to get lost, though, is the specifically cultural, culture as communication and meaning, practices and experiences that are too complex and affective to be treated adequately in the *affective* terms of economic and bureaucratic models of policy (*bis emphasis*).

Market and bureaucratic discourses have suppressed discussions of the affective value and qualitative nature of Canadian television drama. Output measurements do not evaluate beneficial or detrimental cultural externalities related to audience reception and the uses of culture in everyday life. Moreover, the policy rhetoric of Canadianization tends to support commercial or economic goals not cultural or affective ones so that industry supersedes romance.

In effecting the departure McGuigan describes, I approached *Road to Avonlea* from several angles, using a mixed method of qualitative case study that interpreted and evaluated content as the outcome of both romance and industry. Such evaluation involved examining the series' co-production context to ascertain its qualitative effect on content, and to define the series' mode of address. Borrowing concepts from Hjort and Willemsen on national cinemas, I developed mode of address as a key concept in the qualitative textual analysis of Canadian yet exportable television drama. Mode of address enables the qualitative textual critic to flag the distinctive and the transnational in television drama, and fuses together the concerns of culture and policy, of romance and industry. The purpose was to understand what made *Road to Avonlea's* content suitable for co-production—for the CBC and The Disney Channel—and by extension, export. I assessed content as the product of co-production and as the confluence of two approaches to Canadian television production—industrial generic and distinctively Canadian. Adaptation and genre furnished important means of investigating how Montgomery's source texts were transformed, creating a series that was at once a Canadian romance yet a borderless romance. Most importantly, theorizing adaptation as a form of interpretation that is responsive to context in ways that met the needs of the co-production partners involved, enabled apprehension of the series' meaning as simultaneously Canadian and transnational, as local and borderless. Finally, a survey of Internet fans generated both qualitative assessments of the series as the product of co-production and as an historical romance able to travel well. The meaning of *Road to Avonlea* is therefore the result of an interlacing network involving industry trends, organizational philosophies, generic conventions, policy mandates, television adaptation and cultural reception.

The case study is uniquely suited to thinking through the gains and the losses in the transnationalization of television drama. Lauded for its distinctively Canadian content at home and yet able to travel well, the series represents a singular opportunity for investigating

the implications for content of reconciling two strategies of Canadian television production: placeless drama that is made in Canada versus place-specific drama that is made for Canada. Through familiar themes and conventions and a euphemistic construction of the island, *Road to Avonlea* appears generic enough to travel well, meeting industrial objectives normally associated with placeless Canadian drama. But the use of a Canadian setting, as well as the stories of a well-known Canadian author, do *locate* the series, helping the CBC to meet its cultural objectives.

In this successful reconciliation, the case offers new ground from which to theorize the meaning of distinctively Canadian content, particularly since the CBC and The Disney Channel were co-production partners and the series was adapted from stories by L.M. Montgomery. Due to the uniqueness of the two partners and their divergent organizational cultures, the case is significant for studying the effects of negotiation on content. *Road to Avonlea's* production history reveals that divergent organizational philosophies and even cultural states of mind affected negotiations. Competing definitions of family entertainment—with the CBC rooted in a liberal perspective open to the ambiguities of kin- and communal- relations and Disney preferring to stay within the realm of childhood innocence, thereby opting for a conservative view—meant for different expectations that muddied the waters of content. Moreover, The Disney Channel's commercial objectives sometimes countered the CBC's cultural mandate, as evidenced in the pressure to use American and international stars in guest episodes. The Disney Channel regarded these episodes and the series itself as a high-quality marketing strategy to attract subscribers. But the guest episodes sometimes meant weaker stories with visiting characters that disrupted continuity and drew attention away from the main characters played by the Canadian cast. The history for the series therefore highlights the need to probe the ways in which mode of address is negotiated in the production process. From a policy perspective, research on the role of negotiation in production would enhance understanding of the impact of political-economic factors on the development of Canadian content.

The case suggests that international and domestic success demands the use of non-controversial content combined with a mode of address that is not nationally specific but flexible enough to serve diverse markets. For instance, the fan study indicates that national myths play a role in identifying messages in *Road to Avonlea*, with American participants typically reading an individualist orientation and Canadians, a collectivist one. The potential

for such hybridized readings depends partly on the series' use of genre. Thanks to the conventions of costume drama and domestic melodrama, as well as the effects of adaptation, the content of the series is generic, facilitating flexibility and the apprehension of a portable past. Similarly, the end result of creating material that *feels like Montgomery* is a generic Montgomery that downplays the specifics of time, place and culture. The ensuing historical amnesia or sanitization of the past is also the outcome of a desire to contemporize Montgomery—that is, make the series' mode of address accessible and appealing to a late twentieth-century television audience. Consequently, distinctively Canadian content emerges as a Disneyland, a fantasy afloat as long as the island is inviolate to and autonomous from the forces of History.

The series' treatment of the past poses special challenges in the public broadcasting context, where encouraging historical amnesia might be considered a harmful sentiment. Along these lines, the CBC's concerns that *Road to Avonlea* be relevant, accessible and inclusive coalesce with private sector objectives—that is, widening the terms of address to appeal to as broad a market as possible. The danger from a public broadcasting perspective is that differences within Canada and its history are not examined; instead, they are disguised by a banal harmony that suppresses conflicts and contradictions in Canadian society. Furthermore, the CBC's move away from in-house production toward independent producers, such as Sullivan Entertainment, means that additional private-sector concerns may influence content, particularly where export sales are favoured. In unison, these circumstances may align the CBC's television drama with a market philosophy, translating into a monolithic mode of address that strives for non-controversial content—in other words, content that is not different from Disney's or the private broadcasters save for those desired markers of Canadianness. This situation raises questions regarding the impact of public-private partnerships on content, specifically the under-theorized relationship between commercialism, popularity and the goals of public broadcasting in a mixed system such as the CBC's. What mode of address does this context encourage? To be sure, in an unstable funding environment, there is strategic value for the CBC to offering popular, as well as commercially viable, Canadian dramas like *Road to Avonlea* when faced with the court of public opinion.

This case raises significant philosophical challenges to the notion of distinctively Canadian content—a notion that gained currency in the 1990s as a response to both the

predominance of American programming on Canadian broadcasters and the growing number of Canadian television productions geared towards industrial generic dramas with ambiguous settings. This dissertation argues that Canadian place-specificity, rather than acting as a hindrance to portability as conventional wisdom holds, can easily function as an appealing and attractive setting able to travel well. *Road to Avonlea* exemplifies the portability of Canadian-set drama when familiar situations and characters to which audiences can become attached drive the storytelling, and when the stories themselves are tied to a Canadian author of proven international appeal. High production values associated with the quality look of a period setting, as well as the portrayal of themes governed by the concerns of melodrama, a genre international in scope, also contribute to the conditions for portability. A predominant melodramatic theme—the dramatization of moral choice—helps to enact the dialectic of individual and community as a continuum of human experience that cuts across cultures. Therefore, the call for non-specific locales as the only means to export success is disingenuous, often substituting as an excuse for inferior storytelling. More damagingly, the maintenance of a two-tiered system of storytelling keeps the industry and the culture from maturing and innovating and from enhancing its creative potential. The by-product is a notorious cultural inferiority complex—the view that Canadian stories are not good enough to tell and that no one wants to hear them.

Yet *Road to Avonlea* also reveals that markers of Canadianness in television drama can be just as stereotypical as any example of Disneyfication. The series' production history illustrates that the concerns of transnationalization can dilute content in certain circumstances. Differences over the definition of family entertainment and the particular affective experience to be provided encouraged distance from the historical and cultural particularities of setting. Meanwhile, the need for non-controversial content offered a romanticized image of Canada's past. The implication is that only Canadian-set dramas that fulfil widely circulated myths and stereotypical images of Canada are able to win a place in the transnational television arena. As an hypothesis, this implication warrants further research into the markers of Canadianness found in Canadian programs that are export successes or products of international co-production.

At the same time, however, this dissertation maintains that distinctively Canadian content is not simply a matter of setting. Rather, *Road to Avonlea* illustrates that Canadian content is reflected in our cultural production as a way of being in the world. The British



production for *Red Dwarf* (1988 – 1999) matters to its perspective, as does the American one for *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001 – present), and the dual Canadian-and-German one for *Lexx* (1998 – 2002). Although working within the mould of science fiction, each of these series inflects its content with a context and a perspective unique to its moment of production. Like these series, *Road to Avonlea* is as generic as it is unique. As a borderless romance, the series incorporates ubiquitous themes around family and friendship, using the look of rural Edwardian Canada as a visually pleasing backdrop for accessible stories about social bonds familiar to most people. But as a Canadian costume drama, *Road to Avonlea* inflects the generic conventions it makes use of with meanings and perspectives that are historically located, that is, grounded in the fantasies and realities of late twentieth-century Canada. This was a period marked by a crisis of values in the liberal welfare state that, though common to de-industrializing Western nations at the time, was exacerbated in Canada by constitutional debates and continental trade talks that challenged the country's literal and figurative boundaries.

Like costume drama in general, *Road to Avonlea* functions allegorically, symbolically enacting themes displaced from, and therefore deeply resonant with, its contemporary moment. Connecting the past and the present in this emblematic manner, the series evokes a sense of continuity, and at the same time, uses the historical setting as a way to be critical of the present from a safe distance (cf. Landy, 1991, p. 55). The series proves Cook's point that, in some cases, nostalgia can perform a positive role in national identity, when it liberates the desire for resistance and social change (p. 26). *Road to Avonlea*'s powerful affective appeal comes from reliving an imagined past when local autonomy and citizen agency could be championed. In its romance with the past, the series confirms Lovell's contention that popular culture expresses utopian longings (pp. 47-52).

Along these lines, and what differentiates *Road to Avonlea* from other uses of period setting, is its stress on the individual within the community and the sober responsibilities and accompanying rewards attached to belonging. This distinctively Canadian emphasis gives the series a romantic-communitarian sensibility that is unlike the libertarian consciousness of classic American Westerns or the class-consciousness of British period pieces. The story of Gus Pike's integration into the Avonlea community exemplifies such a sensibility. In romantic-communitarian thought, people only attain their individuality by participating in a community. Through moral bonds with other people, we endure and also, hopefully, flourish

as autonomous individuals (Benhabib, p. 50). Moreover, the relationship between individual and community is understood as dialectical— as reciprocal and dynamic, and constantly in tension. Gus' life transforms after coming to Avonlea, but he also transforms the community when he comes into contact with its various members. Gus creates a home for himself in Avonlea through work, education, friendship and romance. He forges his acceptance within the community, but at the same time, maintains his individuality as a working lad and a gentleman. Importantly, Gus' tackles his sense of displacement rather than his class. As a result, the series participates in myths about Canada as a land that respects differences, while seeking to integrate individuals within the wider community through negotiation and compromise—an argument also made about *Anne of Green Gables* (Clarkson; Robinson). While the case proves Morris' notion of export-drive allegory, it also demonstrates that national clichés are not always socially harmful, as typically assumed, but can convey beneficial sentiments.

Like Anne, Gus' affective appeal is not limited to Canada or to a Canadian reading strategy because migration, displacement, and the negotiation of belonging are themes suited to a transnational mode of address. At the same time, the series draws from Canadian anxieties about Americanization as a potential consequence of 'freer' trade, as well as prevailing worries about social and technological transformations and a worldview that places accumulation ahead of community. The Avonlea-under-threat arc has the potential for Canadian-specific readings, symptomatic of the way in which threats to Avonlea are Americanized within the fourth season. But the threats to Avonlea are ongoing and not always American. They gain momentum in the seventh and final season when the Avonlea-under-threat arc is explicitly involved in ending the series. Here, the pressure to modernize in the name of progress threatens the survival of the community and its way of life. The situation comes to a head when the Dales are forced to give up on their lobster cannery, one of Avonlea's economic mainstays. In general, the series' preservationist tendencies come from and speak to a Canadian experience. Even though Canada is not the only nation to express apprehension about Americanization, our proximity to the United States is more sharply felt here as a threat to identity and sovereignty. On the one hand, Canada's preservationist tendencies could be read as regressive and backward. On the other hand, the struggle to build and preserve a unique and independent existence can also be read as resistant. In relation to *Road to Avonlea*, the contradictory impulses associated with cultural

preservation lend the series to both conservative and resistant readings. Paradoxically, the desire to *conserve* Avonlea means *resisting* the excesses of modernity— not in total rejection of progress, but in recognition that the price to pay is a *form of life* that values local control and citizen agency. In bringing up form of life issues, the series taps into its contemporary historical moment, giving Avonlea new meanings Montgomery could not have envisioned. These new meanings, though rooted in Canadian historical reality, are not limited to it.

‘Avonlea’ declares broader cultural anxieties specific to the closing of the twentieth century, and demonstrates the costume drama’s capacity to function as allegory. In fact, the community overtaken by modernity is symbolic of a globally resonant dilemma. That is, the island works as a euphemistic space before globalization—attachment to the local emerges as a fantasy response to the perceived threat of outside globalizing forces. Contradicting the assumption that the local poses the problem of cultural discount, *Road to Avonlea* suggests that nostalgia for the local is a sentiment having transnational potential. Nostalgia, as a modern cultural-phenomenon, signifies an *affective response* to Western modernity and in literal terms, refers to the aching longing for home—the local at its most intimate. Invoking nostalgic longing, the series offers a fantasy of citizen participation and local autonomy that goes against the anomic and alienation associated with modernity and an increasingly private form of life—a point articulated in the fan study as well. This dissertation therefore argues that form of life—the romance with community in an age of modernity— offers the best cross-cultural explanation of Avonlea’s endurance as a popular place. Earlier, I said that Montgomery speaks to readers and critics on many levels, as specific and generic, as Canadian and transnational. An essential paradox makes these divergent interpretations possible— *the universality of the local*—which Montgomery seemed to instinctively understand, and which *Road to Avonlea* subsequently conveys. Moreover, the universality of the local is something with which the Canadian television industry must grapple if it is to stop dichotomizing modes of production. As Catherine Murray, Roger de la Garde and Claude Martin (2000, p. 24) rightly suggest “the challenge” for English Canada “will be to transform [the export sector] from ‘mimetic’ placeless fantasy to grounded fictional landscapes, which will be equally attractive to foreign financiers.”

Exemplifying one of the defining traits of popular culture, ‘Avonlea’ persists in the popular imagination symbolically as wish fulfillment, and in Lovell’s words, as the “simple refusals of the dominated” (p. 47). Historical conditions adapt Montgomery’s Avonlea to the

concerns of the late twentieth century, drawing upon the day's sentiments as a nostalgic-utopian response to the perceived erosion of collective responsibility and local sovereignty, and the implications of this for community. Avonlea's persistence within popular culture communicates desires that must be historically situated in order to understand the affective pull of the Montgomery Imaginary over time. The desire for home and belonging, for local autonomy and citizen agency, articulate general anxieties stemming from the experience of late twentieth-century modernity. Adaptation summons up Montgomery's imaginary community as a self-conscious dialogue with the present, bestowing 'Avonlea' with meanings relevant to these times not Montgomery's.

On the one hand, *Road to Avonlea* satisfies Ralph Negrine and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos' claim (1990, pp. 100-101) that only certain genres like costume drama and action adventure—which eschew references to contemporary political or social reality—are transnational and therefore amenable to co-production. Fan responses substantiate the interpretation of *Road to Avonlea* as a borderless romance offering generic family-oriented content, enhanced by high production-values and a detailed period look, as well as situations and characters that are familiar and accessible and, therefore, not grounded in the historical realities of Edwardian Canada. On the other hand, *Road to Avonlea* also shows that costume drama is not necessarily divorced from contemporary reality but allegorical to it. The series' lack of historical consciousness is not anti-social but a function of the fantasy it offers. *Road to Avonlea*'s status as an allegory for the contemporary experience of modernity challenges common assumptions about the transnational television genre—that it is so detached from the specifics of any nation or culture that it is virtually irrelevant to anyone's experience of the social world. Instead, the Romantic critique of the atomized individual estranged from nature and community, and trapped within the social machine is profusely apparent in fans' responses: their enchantment with Avonlea is equal to their disenchantment with the contemporary world. The series displaces contemporary longings into a historical setting so that Avonlea substitutes for all things deficient in the present. In this way, the fan responses propose that nostalgia is more complicated than a simple yearning for the 'good old days' because desire and its fulfilment within popular culture demands a process of displacement and substitution. The fans' experience of the series also points to the revolutionary function of romance within modern popular culture, as theorized by literary critics Beer and Frye.

As a negative term, cultural discount casts immediate suspicion on texts that travel well. But the cultural history of Avonlea as a popular place suggests that shared orientation can be another way to account for portability. This dissertation therefore argues that cultural discount is not the only theory to explain portability. Another is the borderless romance—television drama with the potential to carry transcultural sentiments. Sentiments around home, belonging, family and community account equally for Montgomery’s longevity and international popularity as they do for *Road to Avonlea*’s domestic popularity and export success. In this respect, Montgomery studies proved essential to this dissertation as a terrain from which to theorize the thematics of the transnational. In turn, this dissertation contributes to Montgomery studies by situating ‘Avonlea’ within the broader context of modernity, and analyzing it as a symbolic response to collective ills associated with the twentieth century.

While the Cancon concerns of this dissertation have been framed around the question of “what it says”, I have found that “who says it” remains important as a factor in meaning making, no matter how generic the content may appear. *Road to Avonlea* still comes from a Canadian point of view and that perspective helps to constitute its mode of address. *Road to Avonlea* participates in “the minor culture’s politics of recognition” through locale, the stories of Montgomery, place names, and other Canadian references. However, the sentiments that the drama conveys also play a part in its distinctively Canadian content beyond these cultural markers alone. In other words, the citizenship-based model of Cancon, one that rewards productions making use of the creative contributions of Canadians, while fulfilling economic or industrial objectives, additionally can have significant qualitative impact on the sentiments conveyed. But more stories told by more Canadians, though important to be sure, are *not* guarantees of beneficial affective experiences or positive cultural outcomes.

Therefore, with that in mind, the overriding question we need to ask of our publicly subsidized Canadian content is *who is the Canadian in the text?* As Michael Warner (2002, p. 51) notes, a public “exists by virtue of being addressed.” Canadian television dramas address a public that is both hypothetical and real. Mainly, however, that public has been treated in hypothetical terms. That is because in policy circles, little is known about what happens in the intersection between mode of address (i.e., *the Canadian in the text*) and viewer (i.e., *the empirical Canadian*). Consequently, while “what it says” and “who says it” must retain their

importance, the time has come for a renewed focus on the cultural effects of Cancon in Canadian television policy: *what is it saying to whom*. In *Dramatic Choices*, a study of English-language Canadian television drama commissioned by the CRTC and Telefilm, the report's author Trina McQueen (2003) comes to a similar conclusion. McQueen advocates "an audience strategy" towards building the presence of English-language Canadian television drama. As McQueen explains it, the Broadcasting Act <sup>146</sup> "enjoins us to provide programs that appeal to the 'interests' and 'tastes' of Canadians, and the only real measure of that is audiences" (p. 17).

Stories give meaning to our lives and they make sense of our experiences. They also create a sense of shared orientation, and in the best of all possible worlds, feelings of empathy, cooperation and solidarity between people of diverse backgrounds and interests. As a medium for storytelling, television is not all business. The stories we tell and the sentiments they convey have the tremendous potential to contribute to cross-cultural understanding in a world that may sometimes seem bereft of such understanding. Certainly, the power of sentiment was something Montgomery well understood, in spite of attacks from literary critics who chastised her for writing sentimental stories. In her response to her critics some eighty years ago, Montgomery said it best: "... civilization is founded on and held together by sentiment ... Sentiment remains and binds." <sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The Broadcasting Act (1991) is the premiere policy document regulating radio and television in Canada. The Act outlines public and cultural objectives for Canadian broadcasting, and was originally passed in 1932, but subsequently revised in 1958 and 1991 (CRTC, 1991).

<sup>147</sup> A journal entry dated January 27, 1922 (Montgomery, 1992, p. 37).

## APPENDIX A\*

# SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS



BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CANADA V5A 1S6  
Telephone: 604-291-3447  
FAX: 604-268-6785

October 31, 2003

Ms. Patsy Kotsopoulos  
Graduate Student  
Department of Communication  
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Kotsopoulos:

**Re: Romance and Industry on the Road to Avonlea**

The above-titled ethics application has been granted approval by the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board, in accordance with Policy R 20.01, "Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Subjects".

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director  
Office of Research Ethics

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\* For inclusion in thesis/dissertation/extended essays/research project report, as submitted to the university library in fulfillment of final requirements for graduation. Note: correct page number required.

## APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Questions for the CBC*

#### *Your Work Experience*

What were your responsibilities on the series?

What was it like for you working on behalf of CBC with The Disney Channel and Sullivan Entertainment?

Did you notice whether working for a public Canadian broadcaster with a private American corporation ever affected your work or your interactions on *Road to Avonlea*?

In other words, did you notice any differences in goals or approach that you can ascribe to a private/public split?

#### *CBC's Role*

How did *Road to Avonlea* 'fit' with CBC? Why was CBC interested in the series? What did

CBC pay for when it bought *Road to Avonlea*?

How did CBC ensure that it received what it paid for?

How did CBC promote the series? Was it a priority show?

#### *Adaptation and Audience*

What can you tell me about early creative discussions on the development of the series? Did you discuss what you wanted to retain from Montgomery, and what you wanted to discard?

Was there discussion of making Montgomery more suitable for or relevant to today's viewer?

Was there discussion of having to adapt Montgomery for both Americans and Canadians?

Did the Canadian geographic setting or historical past ever present itself as an issue?

Why or why not?

#### *Theme/Content*

Can you describe CBC's creative input on the series? What were your aims for the series in terms of theme, content or tone? What values did you see the series as representing?

Where did you overlap with Disney and Sullivan regarding theme/content? Was there disagreement at times?

Was there a set of standards and practices at CBC regarding programming content (e.g., rules on characters' moral conduct) that would have impacted on *Avonlea*?

### *Questions for The Disney Channel*

#### *Your Work Experience*

What were your responsibilities on the series?



What was it like for you working on behalf of Disney Channel, with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and with Sullivan Entertainment?

Did you notice whether working for a private American corporation with a public Canadian broadcaster ever affected your work or your interactions on *Avonlea*? In other words, did you notice any differences in goals or approach that you can ascribe to a private/public split?

#### *Disney's Role*

How did *Avonlea* 'fit' with Disney? Why was Disney interested in the series? What did Disney pay for when it bought *Avonlea*?

How did Disney ensure that it received what it paid for?

How did Disney promote the series? Was it a priority show?

#### *Adaptation and Audience*

What can you tell me about early creative discussions on the development of the series? Did you discuss what you wanted to retain from Montgomery, and what you wanted to discard?

Was there discussion of making Montgomery more suitable for or relevant to today's viewer?

Was there discussion of having to adapt Montgomery for both Americans and Canadians? Did the Canadian geographic setting or historical past ever present itself as an issue? Why or why not?

#### *Theme/Content*

Can you describe Disney's creative input on the series? What were your aims for the series in terms of theme, content or tone? What values did you see the series as representing?

Where did you overlap with CBC and Sullivan regarding theme/content? Was there disagreement at times?

Was there a set of standards and practices at Disney regarding programming content (e.g., rules on characters' moral conduct) that would have impacted on *Avonlea*?

## *Questions for Writers*

#### *Themes/Content*

What were your goals for the seasons of *Road to Avonlea* you worked on? What did you see as being the major themes? Were these different from other seasons, both previous and subsequent? What values did you see yourself as incorporating into the series? Along these lines, what were the similarities between the series and L.M. Montgomery's writings? What did you borrow from Montgomery? What elements of Montgomery did you ignore because they would not be relevant to or suitable for a contemporary audience?

#### *Audience*

When writing, what kind of audience did you have in mind for *Road to Avonlea*? What impact did the audience for whom you were writing have on the content of the series? Did you think of *Road to Avonlea* as 'distinctively Canadian' with a domestic audience in view, or as industrial/generic with an export market in mind? What was the impact on content?

*Production History*

How would you describe your role on *Road to Avonlea*? What can you tell me about the development/origins of the series? What would you say were the conditions in place (culturally, economically, policy-wise) that made *Road to Avonlea* not only possible but successful? How much creative control did the CBC have over the series? How much creative control did Disney have? What impact did CBC and Disney have on the content or direction of the series? What was it like working with the CBC versus Disney?

*Significance*

Thinking about the series in a Canadian context, what do you see as its significance or contribution in industry terms and in cultural/social terms? How would you situate and assess *Road to Avonlea* within the history of Canadian television?

## APPENDIX C INTERNET QUESTIONNAIRE

Are you a fan of the television series *Road to Avonlea*— or *Avonlea*, as it is known in the U.S.? I am doing research at Simon Fraser University (British Columbia, Canada) into the television audience for this series. I am interested in your experiences of the series. I would be very grateful if you would volunteer the time to fill in the questionnaire below and send it to my email address by November 30, 2001. This information will remain confidential. For those of you who do take the time to respond, I will put your email address in a hat for a draw. The winner will receive a lovely six-page glossy insert that was included in Sullivan Entertainment's press kit for *Road to Avonlea*'s final season, and that celebrates the entire seven-season run with beautiful photographs and synopses. I very much appreciate your time in volunteering a contribution to this research project. I look forward to hearing from you and anyone else to whom you would like to pass on this questionnaire.

Sincerely, Patsy Kotsopoulos  
Simon Fraser University  
September 2001

### PART A/ YOUR EXPERIENCES WATCHING (ROAD TO) AVONLEA

1. When did you become aware of *Road to Avonlea*?

a. when episodes were first run

If so, indicate season:

b. in re-runs

c. on video

Choose one:

2. When did you watch *Road to Avonlea* most frequently?

a. when episodes were first-run

b. in re-runs

c. on video

Choose one:

3. Do you watch *Road to Avonlea*

a. more now than when it first ran

b. as much now as when it first ran

c. not as much as when it first ran

Choose one:

4. Have you ever (choose as many as apply)
- a. belonged to a *Road to Avonlea* fan club
  - b. written fan letters to *Road to Avonlea*
  - c. participated in a *Road to Avonlea* email chat group
  - d. written *Road to Avonlea* fan fiction
  - e. read *Road to Avonlea* fan fiction
  - f. subscribed to a *Road to Avonlea* newsletter/fanzine
  - g. produced a *Road to Avonlea* newsletter/fanzine
  - h. created a *Road to Avonlea* website
  - i. surfed the net for *Road to Avonlea* websites
  - j. held *Road to Avonlea* social events
  - k. collected *Road to Avonlea* memorabilia

Answer:

5. When did you read L.M. Montgomery?
- a. before *Road to Avonlea*
  - b. because of *Road to Avonlea*
  - c. because of the Anne movies with Megan Follows
  - d. have not read L.M. Montgomery

Choose one:

6. Did you/do you watch *Road to Avonlea* by yourself?

Answer:

If no, with whom do you usually watch (e.g., mom, friend, daughter—do not give specific names)?

Answer:

7. What were your main reasons for choosing *Road to Avonlea*?

Please describe:

8. What kinds of episodes did you find most appealing? Were some seasons more appealing than others?

Please describe and indicate why:

9. Are there episodes you have watched several times?

If yes, please describe and indicate why:

10. What kinds of episodes did you find least appealing? Can you specify a least favourite episode? Were some seasons less appealing than others?

Please describe and indicate why:

11. Does *Road to Avonlea* take a stand? Is there a moral/lesson/message? Are they trying to tell us something?

Please describe:

12. What other TV shows do you consider favourites?

Answer:

13. How would you compare *Road to Avonlea* to other television programs?

- a. different from
- b. similar to
- c. both different and similar

Choose one:

Please explain why:

14. Who is your favourite female character and why?

Answer:

15. Who is your favourite male character and why?

Answer:

16. Do you know any people like those on *Road to Avonlea*? Are the people in Avonlea like real people?

Answer:

17. What problems/conflicts come up in *Road to Avonlea*?

Answer:

18. How would you describe the community of Avonlea?

Answer:

19. If it were possible to live in Avonlea, do you think you could?

Please describe why or why not:

20. Did the guest stars

- a. add to the series
- b. take away from the series

Choose one:

Please explain why:

21. When watching, were you aware that the show is set in Prince Edward Island, Canada?

- a. yes, completely
- b. yes, somewhat
- c. no, not at all

Choose one:

Please explain why:

22. Were you aware that the series was produced in Canada, with a mainly Canadian cast and crew?

- a. yes
- b. no

Choose one:

Please explain why:

## PART B/ DETAILS ABOUT YOU

23. What is your nationality or country of residence?

- a. Canada
- b. United States
- c. other (please indicate)

Answer:

24. Would you describe yourself as

- a. white European
- b. Asian
- c. South Asian
- d. African heritage
- e. Middle Eastern
- f. First Nations/aboriginal
- g. Hispanic/Latin American
- h. other (please indicate)

Choose one:

25. What is your gender?

- a. female
- b. male
- c. other (please indicate)

Choose one:

26. Which of the following describes you?

- a. heterosexual
- b. gay
- c. lesbian
- d. bisexual
- e. queer
- f. transgendered/transsexual
- g. other (please indicate)

Choose one:

27. What is your age group?

- a. 60 or over
- b. 40 to 59
- c. 25 to 39
- d. 15 to 24
- e. under 15

Choose one:

28. What role does organized religion play in your life?

- a. a big role
- b. somewhat of a role
- c. no role

Choose one:

29. Are you

- a. agnostic
- b. atheist
- c. Buddhist
- d. Christian
- e. Jewish
- f. Muslim
- g. Sikh
- h. pagan
- i. other (please indicate)

Choose one:

30. If you chose a faith in question 29, would you describe your practice of it as

- a. mainstream
- b. fundamentalist
- c. liberal
- d. conservative
- e. don't know

Answer:

31. Would you describe yourself politically as

- a. liberal/left of centre
- b. conservative/right of centre
- c. don't know

Choose one:

32. How many people live in your household?

Answer:

33. What is your spousal status?

- a. single
- b. married
- c. partner/common-law

Choose one:

34. Do children live in your household?

Answer:

35. What is your average annual income for your entire household?

- a. \$75,000 or over
- b. between \$50,000 and \$74,000
- c. between \$25,000 and \$49,000
- d. under \$25,000

Choose one:

36. How would you describe your work situation?

- a. professional/managerial
- b. service industry/retail
- c. office worker
- d. labourer
- e. homemaker
- f. unemployed
- g. student
- h. freelancer
- i. other (please indicate)

Choose one:

37. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- a. public school
- b. high school
- c. technical institute
- d. apprenticeship
- e. university/college
- f. graduate degree

Choose one:

38. May I quote you anonymously in my research findings?

Answer:

39. May I contact you if I have further questions?

Answer:

40. Do you have *Road to Avonlea* fans/viewers in your acquaintance who ought to fill in this questionnaire, too? Would you consider forwarding a blank questionnaire to them?

Answer:



Many thanks!!

Any information obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent permitted by law. Knowledge of your identity is not required. You are not required to include your name or any other identifying information on the questionnaire. Data collected will be held in a secure location and will be destroyed after the completion of the study. However, it is possible that, as a result of legal action, the researcher may be required to divulge information obtained in the course of this research to a court or other legal body. You may withdraw your participation from this research at any time. You may register any complaint you may have about the experiment with Dr. Catherine Murray, Chair of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada (murraye@sfu.ca). You may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting Patsy Kotsopoulos, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada (kotsopou@sfu.ca).

## APPENDIX D COMMITMENT LEVEL OF PARTICIPATING FANS

Respondents were asked to choose as many activities out of the eleven listed that applied to their engagement with the series. I assigned a value to each activity according to level of commitment required to participate with five representing a high level of commitment (e.g., publishing a newsletter) and one representing a low level of commitment (surfing the Internet). The highest total activity score anyone could receive was 55. The purpose was to ascertain the typicality or extraordinariness of the sample. Since the majority could only claim to be involved in activities requiring low commitment, we can say respondents exhibit attachment that is typical.

Value of activity in terms of commitment involved:

5	Written fan fiction
5	Produced a newsletter/fanzine
5	Created a website
4	Written fan letters
4	Held social events
3	Read fan fiction
3	Subscribed to a newsletter/fanzine
2	Belonged to a fan club
2	Participated in an email chat group
1	Surfed the net for websites
1	Collected memorabilia

Possible total score: 35

	Number	Percentage
Low activity: score of 0 to 10	25	50
Medium activity: score of 11 to 20	17	34
High activity: score of 21 to 35	8	16
<i>Totals:</i>	n=50	100

N.B. Average score is 11 out of 35 or medium activity.

## APPENDIX E CREDITS AND EPISODE LIST

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### *Road to Avonlea (1990-1996)*

*Alternate titles:* *Avonlea* (Disney Channel broadcast); *Tales From Avonlea* (Walt Disney Home Video). Produced by Sullivan Films Inc. [Story Girl Productions Inc., Golden Road Productions Inc., Rose Cottage Productions Inc., Red Cliff Motion Pictures Inc.] and Sullivan Entertainment Inc. [Pink Beaches Productions Inc., Shining Lake Productions Inc., Long Road Home Productions Inc.] in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Disney Channel, with the participation of Telefilm Canada (I-VI), the Cable Production Fund (VII), and the assistance of the Ontario Film Investment Program (V-VI). Running time: 91 episodes (seven series of 13 episodes) x 46-59 minutes. CBC airdates: 7 Jan. 1990 — 31 Mar. 1996. Disney Channel airdates: 5 Mar. 1990 - 8 Dec. 1996.

*Cast:* Sarah Polley (Sara Stanley) (I-V), Jackie Burroughs (Hetty King), Mag Ruffman (Olivia King [I-III]; Olivia Dale [III-VII]), Zachary Bennett (Felix King), Gema Zamprogna (Felicity King) (I-VI), Lally Cadeau (Janet King), and Cedric Smith (Alec King).

*Credits:* A Kevin Sullivan Production. Adapted from the novels *The Story Girl*, *The Golden Road*, *Chronicles of Avonlea*, and *Further Chronicles of Avonlea* by Lucy Maud Montgomery. Series developed by Fiona McHugh (I-III). Executives in Charge of Production for CBC: Deborah Bernstein (I-V), Susan Morgan (V-VI) [should be V-VII], and Catherine Denson (VI-VII). Executives in Charge of Production for the Disney Channel: Cathy Johnson (I-V) and Jude Schneider (V-VII). Line Producers: Len D'Agostino (I), David Shepherd (I), and Brian Leslie Parker (II-IV). Associate Producers (II): Mairin Wilkinson and James Lahti. Executives in Charge of Production: Paul Quigley (III) and Nicholas J. Gray (V). Production Supervisor (VI): Noella Nesdaoly. Associate Producer (VI): Deborah Nathan. Producer (VII): John Ryan. Executive Producers: Kevin Sullivan and Trudy Grant.

*Commentary and Synopsis:* A co-production for CBC and the Disney Channel, *Road to Avonlea* began as a 13-episode series in 1990 but became the most successful and one of the longest-running dramatic series in the history of Canadian television: during its seven-year run, the series achieved unprecedented and still-unsurpassed ratings for a Canadian dramatic series in English, reaching at peak 2.6 million viewers during its first season and rarely missing the 1 million mark for the duration of its 91 episodes, even for prime-time rebroadcasts. Developed by Fiona McHugh, who co-wrote *Lantern Hill* with Kevin Sullivan, the series adapts unrelated Montgomery texts — her novels *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*, with additional material excerpted from her collections of short stories *Chronicles of Avonlea* and

*Further Chronicles of Avonlea* — in order to create a conceptual and thematic spin-off of Sullivan's two films *Anne of Green Gables* (1985) and *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* (1987). In order to shield his daughter from possible scandal after he is framed for embezzlement, a wealthy Montreal businessman decides to send her to her late mother's relatives, unknown to her, in the village of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island. Like Anne Shirley, Sara Stanley arrives into the closed society of Avonlea as an outsider but uses her intuitiveness, her common sense, and her gumption to win over the friendship and acceptance of her extended family and the community at large. As the series progressed, the extended cast increased to allow the series to become more of an ensemble show, easing the eventual resignation of series regulars Polley (after five seasons) and Zamprogna (after six seasons), though both continued to make infrequent appearances until the series' end.

The Disney Channel, which aired the series as *Avonlea*, pushed for a considerable number of well-known American guest stars in order to promote Avonlea awareness in the United States; over its 91 episodes, Faye Dunaway, Stockard Charming, Madeline Kahn, Dianne Wiest, Meg Tilly, Peter Coyote, Michael York, Kate Nelligan, Christopher Reeve, and Christopher Lloyd made guest appearances. Colleen Dewhurst reprised her role of Marilla Cuthbert for three early episodes; her character was killed off at the end of Series III after Dewhurst died of lung cancer in August 1991. Patricia Hamilton also reprised her role of Rachel Lynde in 30 episodes of the series, while Marilyn Lightstone, as Muriel Stacey, joined the series as a semi-regular for Series V-VII.

Over seven years, the series earned four Emmy Awards (out of 16 nominations), five CableAce Awards (out of 28 nominations), 17 Gemini Awards (out of 66 nominations), and numerous other prizes and accolades. In 1999, *Road to Avonlea* neared the top of the all-time Ten Best Canadian TV Series entry in *The Great Canadian Book of Lists*, second only to the 1964-1966 news programme *This Hour Has Seven Days* (Keamey and Ray 24). A follow-up movie, *Happy Christmas, Miss King*, followed in 1998.

*Episode List*: W = Writer. D = Director. T = Teleplay. S = Story. 1<sup>st</sup> date = CBC airdate. 2<sup>nd</sup> date = Disney Channel airdate. Both the CBC and (to a greater extent) the Disney Channel aired the episodes in a different order. Some episodes contain extra scenes broadcast on the Disney Channel but not on the CBC; these episodes are marked by +. Altered Disney Channel titles appear in square brackets [ ].

### *Series I*

+1.1/1: The Journey Begins (W = Heather Conkie; D = Paul Shapiro) (7 Jan. 1990; 5 Mar. 1990)

1.2/2: The Story Girl Earns Her Name (W = Heather Conkie; D = Bruce Pittman) (14 Jan. 1990; 12 Mar. 1990)

1.3/3: The Quarantine at Alexander Abraham's (W = Heather Conkie; D = Don McBrearty) (21 Jan. 1990; 26 Mar. 1990)

1.4/4 The Materializing of Duncan (W = Heather Conkie; D = Don McBrearty) (28 Jan. 1990; 10 Sept. 1990)

+I.5/5: Old Lady Lloyd [Song of the Night] (W = Heather Conkie [CBC broadcast]; W = Fiona McHugh [Disney Channel and videocassette broadcast]; D = Bruce Pittman) (4 Feb. 1990; 17 Oct. 1990)

+I.6/6: Proof of the Pudding (W = Suzette Couture; D = Dick Benner) (11 Feb. 1990; 19 Mar. 1990)

I.7/7: Conversions (W = Patricia Watson; D = Stuart Gillard) (18 Feb. 1990; 30 Apr. 1990)

I.8/8: Aunt Abigail's Beau (W = Heather Conkie; D = Harvey Frost) (25 Feb. 1990; 2 Apr. 1990)

I.9/9: Malcolm and the Baby (W = Heather Conkie; D = Harvey Frost) (4 Mar. 1990; 9 Apr. 1990)

I.10/10: Felicity's Challenge (W = Lori Fleming; D = Dick Benner) (28 Oct. 1990; 7 May 1990)

+I.11/11: The Witch of Avonlea (W = Suzette Couture; D = René Bonnière) (21 Oct. 1990; 2 Apr. 1990)

I.12/12: The Hope Chest of Arabella King (W = Heather Conkie; D = Don McBrearty) (4 Nov. 1990; 14 May 1990)

I.13/13: Nothing Endures But Change (W = Heather Conkie; D = Stuart Gillard) (11 Nov. 1990; 24 Sept. 1990)

## *Series II*

II.1/14: Sara's Homecoming (W = Heather Conkie; D = René Bonnière) (2 Dec. 1990; 29 Apr. 1991)

II.2/15: How Kissing Was Discovered (W = Suzette Couture; D = Stuart Gillard) (9 Dec. 1990; 8 Apr. 1991)

+II.3/16: Aunt Hetty's Ordeal (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Stuart Gillard) (16 Dec. 1990; 15 Apr. 1991)

+II.4/17: Of Corsets and Secrets and True True Love (W = Marlene Matthews; D = René Bonnière) (23 Dec. 1990; 22 Apr. 1991)

II.5/18: Old Quarrels, Old Love (W = Heather Conkie; D = Allan King) (30 Dec. 1990; 13 May 1991)

II.6/19: May the Best Man Win (W = Grahame Woods; D = Harvey Frost) (6 Jan. 1991; 10 June 1991)

II.7/20: Family Rivalry (W = Jerome McCann; D = Harvey Frost) (13 Jan. 1991; 3 June 1991)

II.8/21: Sea Ghost (W = Janet MacLean; D = Allan King) (20 Jan. 1991; 20 May 1991)

II.9/22: All That Glitters (W = Janet MacLean; D = Harvey Frost) (27 Jan. 1991; 17 June 1991)

II.10/23: Dreamer of Dreams (W = Heather Conkie; D = Allan King) (3 Feb. 1991; 9 Sept. 1991)

II.11/24: It's Just a Stage (W = Marlene Matthews; D = René Bonnière) (10 Feb. 1991; 24 June 1991)

+II.12/25: A Mother's Love (W = Suzette Couture; D = Don McBrearty) (17 Feb. 1991; 6 May 1991)

+II.13/26: Misfits and Miracles (W = Heather Conkie; D = Harvey Frost) (24 Feb. 1991; 16 Sept. 1991)

### *Series III*

+III.1/27: The Ties That Bind [Sister of the Bride] (W = Heather Conkie; D = F. Harvey Frost) (12 Jan. 1992; 2 Mar. 1992)

III.2/28: But When She Was Bad...She Was Horrid (Part 1) (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Don McBrearty) (2 Feb. 1992; 9 Mar. 1992)

III.3/29: But When She Was Bad...She Was Horrid (Part 2) (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Don McBrearty) (9 Feb. 1992; 16 Mar. 1992)

III.4/30: Felix and Blackie (W = Heather Conkie; D = Allan King) (19 Jan. 1992; 30 Mar. 1992)

+III.5/31: Another Point of View [Facts and Fictions] (W = Charles Lazer; D = Allan King) (26 Jan. 1992; 13 Apr. 1992)

III.6/32: Aunt Janet Rebels [Aunt Janet's Rebellion] (W = Janet MacLean; D = F. Harvey Frost) (16 Feb. 1992; 11 May 1992)

III.7/33: A Dark and Stormy Night (W = Hart Hanson; D = Allan King) (23 Feb. 1992; 6 Apr. 1992)

III.8/34: Friends and Relations (W = Heather Conkie; D = Stephen Surjik) (1 Mar. 1992; 26 Apr. 1992)

III.9/35: Vows of Silence [True Confessions] (W = Hart Hanson; D = Gilbert Shilton) (8 Mar. 1992; 20 Apr. 1992)

III.10/36: After the Honeymoon (W = Janet MacLean; D = Don McBrearty) (15 Mar. 1992; 18 May 1992)

III.11/37: High Society (W = Janet MacLean; D = George Bloomfield) (22 Mar. 1992; 1 June 1992)

III.12/38: The Calamitous Courting of Hetty King (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Stuart Gillard) (29 Mar. 1992; 30 Nov. 1992)

III.13/39: Old Friends, Old Wounds (W = Heather Conkie; D = George Bloomfield) (5 Apr. 1992; 23 Nov. 1992)

#### ***Series IV***

IV.1/40: Tug of War (W = Leila Basen; D = Don McBrearty) (17 Jan. 1993; 8 Mar. 1993)

IV.2/41: The Lady and the Blade (W = Deborah Nathan; D = Otta Hanus) (17 Jan. 1993; 15 Mar. 1993)

+IV.3/42: Incident at Vernon River (T = Rick Drew; D = F. Harvey Frost) (24 Jan. 1993; 22 Mar. 1993)

IV.4/43: Boys Will Be Boys (T = Robert Adetuyi; D = Don McBrearty) (31 Jan. 1993; 5 Apr. 1993)

IV.5/44: Moving On [Sara and the Marshal] (T = Charles Lazer; D = Stephen Surjik) (7 Feb. 1993; 29 Mar. 1993)

IV.6/45: Evelyn (W = Raymond Storey; D = Graeme Campbell) (14 Feb. 1993; 12 Apr. 1993)

IV.7/46: The Dinner [Felicity's Grand Design] (T = Heather Conkie; D = Robert Boyd) (21 Feb. 1993; 19 Apr. 1993)

IV.8/47: Heirs and Graces (W = Hart Hanson; D = Don McBrearty) (28 Feb. 1993; 26 Apr. 1993)

IV.9/48: Hearts and Flowers (T = Hart Hanson; D = Stephen Surjik) (7 Mar. 1993; 1 Nov. 1993)

+IV.10/49: Felicity's Perfect Beau (W = Thérèse Beaupré; D = Don McBrearty) (21 Mar. 1993; 8 Nov. 1993)

IV.11/50: The Disappearance (W = Deborah Nathan; D = F. Harvey Frost) (28 Mar. 1993; 15 Nov. 1993)

+IV.12/51: Home Movie [Jasper's Home Movie] (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Don McBrearty) (4 Apr. 1993; 22 Nov. 1993)

IV.13/52: Hearth and Home (W = Deborah Nathan; D = Otta Hanus) (11 Apr. 1993; 29 Nov. 1993)

#### ***Series V***

V.1/53: Fathers and Sons (W = Heather Conkie; D = Otta Hanus) (9 Jan. 1994; 21 Mar. 1994)

- V.2/54: Memento Mori (W = Heather Conkie; D = Don McBrearty) (9 Jan. 1994; 7 Mar. 1994)
- V.3/55: Modern Times (W = Charles Lazer; D = F. Harvey Frost) (16 Jan. 1994; 14 Mar. 1994)
- V.4/56: A Friend in Need (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Allan Kroeker) (23 Jan. 1994; 28 Mar. 1994)
- V.5/57: Stranger in the Night (W = Janet MacLean; D = Allan King) (13 Feb. 1994; 4 Apr. 1994)
- V.6/58: The Great Race (W = Rick Drew; D = Stefan Scaini) (6 Feb. 1994; 7 Nov. 1994)
- V.7/59: Someone to Believe In (W = Avrum Jacobson; D = Eleanore Undo) (20 Feb. 1994; 14 Nov. 1994)
- V.8/60: Strictly Melodrama (VV = Yan Moore; D = Allan Kroeker) (30 Jan. 1994; 21 Nov. 1994)
- +V.9/61: Thursday's Child (W = Heather Conkie; D = F. Harvey Frost) (27 Feb. 1994; 28 Nov. 1994)
- V.10/62: Best Laid Plans (W = Deborah Nathan; D = Eleanore Undo) (6 Mar. 1994; 5 Dec. 1994)
- +V.11/63: Otherwise Engaged (W = Heather Conkie; D = Allan King) (13 Mar. 1994; 12 Dec. 1994)
- +V.12/64: Enter Prince Charming (W = Raymond Storey; D = Stephen Surjik) (20 Mar. 1994; 11 Apr. 1994)
- +V.13/65: The Minister's Wife (W = Raymond Storey; D = Allan King) (27 Mar. 1994; 18 Apr. 1994)

### *Series VI*

- VI.1/66: The Return of Gus Pike (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Stephen Surjik) (15 Jan. 1995; 16 Oct. 1995)
- VI.2/67: Lonely Hearts (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Graeme Lynch) (15 Jan. 1995; 2 Oct. 1995)
- VI.3/68: Christmas in June (W = Avrum Jacobson; D = William Brayne) (22 Jan. 1995; 23 Oct. 1995)
- VI.4/69: Comings and Goings (W = Deborah Nathan; D = Eleanore Lindo) (5 Feb. 1995; 9 Oct. 1995)
- VI.5/70: The Trouble with Davey (T = Raymond Storey; D = Stacey Stewart Curtis) (12 Feb. 1995; 30 Oct. 1995)



VI.6/71: Great Expectations (W = Laurie Pearson; D = Charles Wilkinson) (19 Feb. 1995; 6 Nov. 1995)

VI.7/72: A Fox Tale (T = Laurie Pearson; S = Jim Henshaw; D = Kit Hood) (26 Feb. 1995; 20 Nov. 1995)

VI.8/73: Fools and Kings (W = Raymond Storey; D = William Brayne) (29 Jan. 1995; 4 Dec. 1995)

VI.9/74: The More Things Change (T = Rick Drew; D = Allan Eastman) (5 Mar. 1995; 27 Nov. 1995)

VI.10/75: Home Is Where the Heart Is (W = Avrum Jacobson; D = Stacey Stewart Curtis) (12 Mar. 1995; 11 Dec. 1995)

VI.11/76: What a Tangled Web We Weave (W = Marlene Matthews, D = F. Harvey Frost) (19 Mar. 1995; 13 Nov. 1995)

+VI.12/77: A Time to Every Purpose (W = Laurie Pearson; D = Stefan Scaini) (26 Mar. 1995; 18 Dec. 1995)

VI.13/78: Homecoming (W = Janet MacLean and Raymond Storey; D = Allan King) (2 Apr. 1995; 1 Jan. 1996)

### *Series VII*

VII.1/79: Out of the Ashes (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Allan King [CBC broadcast], D = Stefan Scami [Disney Channel broadcast]) (14 Jan. 1996; 26 Aug. 1996)

VII.2/80: Love May Be Blind...but the Neighbours Ain't (W = Raymond Storey; D = Allan King) (14 Jan. 1996; 15 Sept. 1996)

VII.3/81: Davey and the Mermaid (W = Jeremy Hole; D = Allan King) (21 Jan. 1996; 22 Sept. 1996)

VII.4/82: Woman of Importance (W = Janet MacLean; D = Allan King) (28 Jan. 1996; 29 Sept. 1996)

VII.5/83: Secrets and Sacrifices (W = Laurie Pearson; D = William Brayne) (4 Feb. 1996; 20 Oct. 1996)

VII.6/84: King of the Great White Way (W = Hart Hanson; D = F. Harvey Frost) (18 Feb. 1996; 6 Oct. 1996)

VII.7/85: Total Eclipse (W = Heather Conkie; D = William Brayne) (25 Feb. 1996, 13 Oct. 1996)

VII.8/86: Ah...Sweet Mystery of Life (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Stacey Stewart Curtis) (11 Feb. 1996; 3 Nov. 1996)

VII.9/87: From Away (W = Laurie Pearson; D = Stefan Scami) (3 Mar. 1996; 27 Oct. 1996)

VII.10/88: After the Ball is Over (W = Raymond Storey; D = Graeme Lynch) (10 Mar. 1996; 10 Nov. 1996)

VII.11/89: Return to Me (W = Raymond Storey; D = F. Harvey Frost) (17 Mar. 1996; 17 Nov. 1996)

VII.12/90: The Last Hurrah (W = Laurie Pearson; D = William Brayne) (24 Mar. 1996; 24 Nov. 1996)

VII.13/91: So Dear to My Heart (W = Marlene Matthews; D = Graeme Lynch) (31 Mar. 1996; 8 Dec. 1996)

## APPENDIX F LIST OF CHARACTERS

Only characters appearing in recurring roles and mentioned in the dissertation are listed. For special guest stars, see Appendix G.

### *King Farm*

Alec King  
Janet King  
Felicity King  
Felix King  
Cecily King

### *Rose Cottage*

Hetty King  
Olivia King  
Sara Stanley  
Peter Craig

### *Dale Residence*

Jasper Dale  
Olivia King Dale  
Montgomery Dale

### *Pettibone Residence*

Clive Pettibone  
Arthur Pettibone  
Izzy Pettibone

### *Green Gables*

Marilla Cuthbert  
Rachel Lynde  
Davey Keith  
Dora Keith

### *The Lighthouse*

Gus Pike

### *White Sands Hotel*

Simon Tremayne  
Pierre Lapierre

### *Other Villagers*

Peg Bowen  
Eulalie Bugle  
Clemmie Ray  
Archie Gillis  
Angus MacCorkdale  
Margaret MacCorkdale  
Stuart MacRae  
Muriel Stacey  
Amos Spry

## APPENDIX G SPECIAL GUEST STARS

Credits for *Road to Avonlea* are inconsistent as they change according to the changing status of the actors on the series. For instance, from Series II to Series IV, Michael Mahonen is credited as a supporting actor, but becomes a special guest star for his appearances in Series V to VII. Some actors like Patricia Hamilton and R.H. Thomson had recurring roles on the series with characters that are well integrated into the Avonlea milieu. But they are not listed as part of the regular cast, and instead, are credited as special guest stars. Still others like Marilyn Lightstone and Kay Tremblay begin as special guest stars, but are later designated supporting actors. To help clarify, I have denoted recurring roles with an asterisk (\*)

### *Series I*

Lloyd Bochner  
 Zoe Caldwell  
 Colleen Dewhurst\*  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Rebecca Jenkins  
 W.O. Mitchell  
 Tom Peacock  
 R.H. Thomson\*

### *Series II*

Joseph Bottoms  
 Peter Coyote  
 Colleen Dewhurst\*  
 Don Francks  
 Andrew Gillies  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Madeliene Kahn  
 Marilyn Lightstone\*  
 R.H. Thomson\*  
 Kay Tremblay\*  
 Michael York  
 (two episodes)

### *Series III*

Ned Beatty  
 Jonathan Crombie  
 Rosemary Dunsmore\*  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Christopher Lloyd  
 Kate Nelligan  
 Christopher Reeve  
 R.H. Thomson\*

### *Series IV*

Robby Benson  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 R.H. Thomson\*  
 Meg Tilley  
 Diana Rigg  
 Treat Williams

### *Series V*

Stockard Channing  
 (two episodes)  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Bruce Greenwood  
 Marilyn Lightstone\*

Michael Mahonen\*  
 Gordon Pinsent  
 Linda Sorenson  
 R.H. Thomson\*

### *Series VI*

Faye Dunaway  
 Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Frances Hyland\*  
 Marilyn Lightstone\*  
 Michael Mahonen\*  
 Sarah Polley\*  
 Maureen Stapleton  
 R.H. Thomson\*

### *Series VII*

Patricia Hamilton\*  
 Eugene Levy  
 Michael Mahonen\*  
 Sheila MacCarthy  
 Sarah Polley\*  
 R.H. Thomson\*  
 Dianne Wiest  
 Gema Zamprogna\*

## APPENDIX H CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL MARKERS

Compiled while viewing all 91 episodes of *Road to Avonlea*, excluding the reunion movie *Happy Christmas, Miss King*. Although I endeavoured to be as attentive as possible, this appendix should not be considered an exhaustive content analysis.

### *Ties with Britain*

Balmoral Castle	Empire, The	Prince George, His
British army (Canadian soldiers are under British command)	Empress of India Chapter	Highness
British defeat (American Revolution)	England	Prince of Wales
British history (especially Kings and Queens of Britain)	God Save the King (anthem)	Queen of England
British navy	Harrods	Queen Victoria
British subjects (Canadian citizens are British subjects)	India (travelling to or writing about)	Queen's College
Buckingham Palace	King Edward	Realm, The
Cambridge University	King's English, The	Royal Conservatory
Colonial Empire, The	King of England	Royal Family
Constable	King George	Royal Mail (on mail bags)
Covent Garden	Knights of P.E. Island	Royal Order of the Daughters of the Dominion
Cricket	London	Royal Society
Crown, The	Majesty (a magazine)	Royal Winter Fair
Crown injunction	Oxford	Royalty (in the service of)
Crown of England	Portraits of British monarchs (e.g., Queen Victoria)	The Suez (conflict)
Duke, The	Pride of the Punjab (made-up pulp novel)	Tea
		The Tudors
		Union Jack flag
		William the Conqueror

### *Other Cues (Historical, Cultural)*

Acadians	Hockey	Marauding Yankees
Canadian Almanac (magazine)	Influenza	Sugar bush
Canada First (magazine)	Lobster	Methodists
Canadian Homemaker's Companion (magazine)	Loyalists (not mentioned by name— Eulalie's family fled to PEI after the American Revolution)	Micmac native remedies
Canadian National (railway)	Maple Leaf Forever (song)	New Woman
Canoeing	Maple motifs (in children's art)	Potatoes
Chain gangs	Maple sugar ("old Québécois recipe")	Presbyterians
Consumption		Temperance
French Canadians		War of 1812
Gibson Girl		Winter activities (e.g., skating, ice fishing, tobogganing)

## APPENDIX I AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

### *Cable Ace Awards*

1991-94

Best Dramatic Series

1994

Best Writing in a Dramatic Series (Heather Conkie)

### *Cable Ace Award Nominations*

1990

Best Dramatic Series

Best Actress in a Dramatic Series (Jackie Burroughs)

Best Costume Design

1991

Best Actress in a Dramatic Series (Jackie Burroughs)

Best Actress in a Dramatic Series (Colleen Dewhurst)

Best Costume Design

1992

Best Dramatic Series

Best Writing in a Dramatic Series (Charles Lazar)

1994

Best Dramatic Series

1995

Best Dramatic Series

Best Actress in a Dramatic Series (Jackie Burroughs)

Best Actress in a Dramatic Series (Stockard Channing)

Best Direction in a Dramatic Series (Harvey Frost and Don McBrearty)

Best Writing in a Dramatic Series (Heather Conkie)

1996

Best Dramatic Series

Best Writing in a Dramatic Series (Marlene Matthews and Laurie Pearson)

Best Guest Actress in a Dramatic Series (Maureen Stapleton)

1997

Best Dramatic Series

Best Guest Actress in a Dramatic Series (Dianne Wiest)

Best Costume Design for a Special or Series

### *Emmy Awards*

1992

Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series (Christopher Lloyd)

1993

Outstanding Children's Program

- 1995 Outstanding Individual Achievement in Costume Design for a Series
- 1997 Outstanding Guest Actress in a Dramatic Series (Dianne Wiest)

*Emmy Nominations*

- 1990 Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (Colleen Dewhurst)
- 1991 Outstanding Children's Program  
Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (Colleen Dewhurst)  
Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series (Peter Coyote)
- 1992 Outstanding Children's Program  
Outstanding Lead Actress in a Dramatic Series (Kate Nelligan)
- 1994 Outstanding Guest Actress in a Dramatic Series (Stockard Channing)
- 1995 Outstanding Children's Program
- 1996 Outstanding Children's Program  
Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (Maureen Stapleton)  
Outstanding Costume Design for a Series
- 1997 Outstanding Costume Design for a Series

*Gemini Awards*

- 1990 Best Direction  
Best Costume Design  
Best Original Score  
Best Performance by a Lead Actress (Jackie Burroughs)  
Best Original Score
- 1992 Best Leading Actor (Cedric Smith)  
Best Guest Performance in a Series (Kate Nelligan)  
Best Direction in a Series (Allan King)
- 1993 Best Actress (Jackie Burroughs)
- 1994 Best Guest Performance in a Series (Bruce Greenwood)  
Best Original Score  
Best Actress (Lally Cadeau)
- 1995 Best Supporting Actress (Patricia Hamilton)  
Best Original Score



1996

Best Supporting Actress (Kay Tremblay)  
Best Guest Actress (Frances Bay)  
Best Original Score

*Gemini Nominations*

1996

Best Dramatic Series  
Best Actor in a Continuing Dramatic Role (Cedric Smith)  
Best Actress in a Continuing Dramatic Role (Gema Zamprogna)  
Best Supporting Actress (Patricia Hamilton)  
Best Supporting Actor (Michael Mahonen)  
Best Costume Design

*Other Awards and Nominations*

John Labatt Classic Awards 1990-92

Most Popular Program in Canada (chosen by the public)

Best Series Nomination 1995

Banff Television Festival

Silver Medal 1994

International Film and Television Festival (New York)

Gold Medal 1993

International Film and Television Festival (New York)

Silver Medal 1991

International Film and Television Festival (New York)

Bronze Medal 1991

International Film and Television Festival (New York)

Silver Hugo Award, Dramatic Series

Chicago International Film Festival

Silver Award 1995

Worldfest Houston Festival (USA)

Honourable Mention 1991, 1994

Columbus International Film and Video Festival (USA)

Golden Apple Awards (2) 1995

National Educational Media Competition (USA)

Red Ribbon Award 1992

American Film and Video Festival

Chris Award

Columbus International Film and Video Festival (USA)

Golden Monitor Award 1992

Umbriafication TV Festival (Italy)

Golden Gate Award 1993

Best of Television Drama Category (USA)

Gold World Medal

International Film and Video Festival (New York)

U.S. Family Film Award Nomination 1996

Best Drama Series

Frankfurt Film Festival Nomination 1990  
Best Picture  
Honourable Mention 1990  
Columbus International Film and Video Festival (USA)  
Finalist 1990  
International Film and Television Festival (New York)  
Gold Apple Award 1991  
National Educational Film and Video Festival (USA)  
Bronze Award  
Houston International Film and Video Festival

**APPENDIX J TELEFILM CANADA CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO ROAD TO AVONLEA**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Contributions</b>
Season I	Production	\$3,640,000
Season I	Distribution	\$213,262
Season II	Production	\$3,240,000
Season II	Distribution	\$191,000
Season III	Production	\$3,240,000
Season IV	Production	\$2,428,658
Season IV	Distribution	\$369,000
Season V	Production	\$2,403,750
Season V	Distribution	\$361,452
Season VI	Production	\$2,330,000
Season VII	Distribution	\$180,726

**Source: Policy, Planning and Research, Telefilm Canada.**

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