Reflections on Our Relationships with *Anne of Green Gables*

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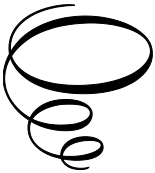
Kindred Spirits

Edited by

Jessica Carniel and Nike Sulway

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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CHAPTER ONE

KINDRED SPIRITS: REFLECTIONS ON OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH *ANNE OF GREEN GABLES*

JESSICA CARNIEL & NIKE SULWAY

Appearing across a vast and diverse array of media, from a lost silent film to contemporary Japanese animations and fan fictions, L.M. Montgomery's character Anne Shirley—Anne of Green Gables—is one of the most enduring fictional characters, finding kindred spirits within each generation since the novel *Anne of Green Gables* was first published in 1908. Although in her origins she is a literary character, our memories of and associations with Anne are also mixed intertextually with film, television, theatre, and even tourism. Although she is a Canadian icon with a strong sense of nation and place embedded in her character and story, she is not bound by geography. Anne Shirley is in many ways an idea, and an ideal, that appeals across time and space, a kindred spirit we carry with us from childhood to adulthood.

From almost the very first moment that you meet Anne Shirley—on the page, on the stage or on a screen—you know what she is seeking. Connection, belonging, deep and abiding friendship. Comfort, solace, and safety. She is seeking kindred spirits.

According to Irene Gammel, whose comprehensive study of L.M. Montgomery's life is a landmark in the field of Anne studies, the concept of a kindred spirit emerged for Maud (that is, for L.M. Montgomery) out of her own experience of the necessity and pleasures of friendship. Gammel writes that:

> The very first time Maud referred to "kindred spirits" in her journal, it was to describe her bond with Will [Pritchard] and his sister Laura … she and Laura were "twin spirits in every way." She could share "the thoughts of [her] inmost soul" with Laura. The ideal of the kindred spirit was all the

> more important to Maud because she lacked the security of a family. Despite her family pride, she felt often on the outside of the Macneill clan … There was safety in a kindred spirit. It was the fellow feeling, the sharing of sentiments, and the agreement of minds that she missed most profoundly in her daily life … Maud charged the concept of the kindred spirits with powerful emotion that she would call up … in *Anne* (Gammel, 2009, 47).

The force of emotion attached to the concept of finding a kindred spirit is one of the most appealing aspects of Anne's character and, we argue, one of the many ways in which she creates an echoing desire in her fans and readers. The desire to discover and connect with a kindred spirit is one shared by most, if not all, of Anne's readers; many of us find solace and inspiration in her adventures in seeking belonging: the despair she experiences when those connections are absent or disrupted, her enthusiasm and commitment to the connection when discovered, her flexibility and inclusivity in claiming a diverse array of kindred spirits, and her sheer joy in the connection when found. We argue, perhaps solipsistically, that many of Anne's fans dream of being claimed as a kindred spirit, or of finding—through her inspiration—that same connection in another. As Gammel argues, too, Montgomery's concept of kindred spirits has been key to Anne's appeal to generations of readers:

> In the sea of life's mutability [Maud] was seeking immutable ideals. These ideas and feelings all came together for Maud to create a friendship ideal of kindred spirits, a concept that would eventually draw legions of readers to *Anne* (Gammel, 2009, 48).

The editors and authors of this collection are among those legions; it is part of what drew us to write about her. The concept for this book emerged in response to the announcement of the new Netflix series, *Anne with an E*, in 2017. Like many other fans of Anne, we were both excited for Anne's story to be told again for a new generation, but we were also a little bit concerned to hear about the writer's *Breaking Bad* pedigree. We imagined ourselves, perhaps, as Anne's kindred spirits, and—in our shared protectiveness of the character and all that she stands for in our own imaginations—each other's kindred spirits as well. So, as Anne's kindred spirits, we were worried. Green Gables and meth labs in the Nevada desert are worlds apart! What would it mean to bring darkness and grittiness to Anne's world of spirit and fire and dew? What room would there be for our Anne's dreamy lake of shining waters: for the luminous, romantic, and hopeful? What scope would remain for the imagination if it was all gritty reality? This new Anne promised to be darker and edgier, her fragility rawer than before—but was

she still a kindred spirit? The series has inspired not just this volume's inception, but also new and old readers of Anne to reconsider their relationship with the text in an age of globalisation, intertextuality, and participatory culture. The varied responses to the series prompted a range of reflections on our individual and generational relationships with *Anne of Green Gables* as an enduring and iconic text in its various iterations, from the original book series to television adaptation. We asked ourselves—and then asked other kindred spirits, too—how do "we" construct Anne Shirley, and what does she mean to "us"?

This collection, then, draws together work from a range of scholars, writers, and artists who reflect creatively and critically upon their relationships with Anne Shirley and other characters from Avonlea as readers, viewers, and individuals. While the contributors to the collection are scholars, they have been asked to engage with the work as scholar-fans. As such, the tone and style of this collection is far more often highly reflexive. Furthermore, this volume includes creative fiction pieces directly inspired by Anne, drawing upon traditions and cultures of fan fiction, adaptation, and appropriation. The creative and the scholarly have been interspersed with one another throughout the collection to further underscore the ways in which Anne and related works have inspired each of us intellectually, creatively, and personally. The essays follow a roughly thematic trajectory from those concerned with varying degrees of friendship and belonging, to particularly feminist engagements with Anne, and concluding with Anne's place in contemporary participatory fan cultures.

A significant feature of this volume is that its editors and many (but not all!) of its contributors are Australian. The Japanese fascination with Anne of Green Gables is well-documented—and captured in part in two of the contributions here—but what of Anne in the Antipodes? Although on opposite sides of the world, Australia and Canada share the characteristics of settler-colonial Commonwealth states that have been built by colonisation and migration. Their climates are, however, like their geography, diametrically opposed. There is a great appeal in the lush, windswept landscapes of Prince Edward Island as described by Montgomery and captured in the Sullivan Entertainment adaptations of *Anne of Green Gables* that aired globally and came to define the iconography of Anne and the Island for a generation of readers and viewers. The enduring appeal of Anne in these juxtaposed landscapes is captured in Lisa Bennett and Kylie Cardell's memories of reading Anne in Canada and Australia respectively. For these authors, Anne is a portal that takes them home, transports them through time, and brings them together as kindred spirits in a tangled web of scholarship, motherhood, and memory. Megan Mooney Taylor's chapter

similarly connects to Anne through a contrast in the environments of reader and heroine, with a specific focus on waterways—burbling and abundant in Anne's Canada, and drying and scarce in drought-ridden Australia.

Reflection was not simply a mode of writing encouraged in this collection but also an important theme. After all, it is in her own reflection that Anne finds her first kindred spirit, albeit an imaginary and perhaps (in the end) unsatisfactory one. Monique Mulligan's chapter elegantly and imaginatively enters into a species of imaginative play with Anne, playing with imagined and perhaps real moments of desire, recognition, connection and collapse. Anne Betz's chapter—a suite of eight micro-memoirs—maps and reflects on a series of accidental echoes between her own experiences and character, and that of our Anne-girl.

Many readers found a kindred spirit in Anne Shirley, but she is also responsible for setting up high, perhaps unobtainable expectations for our real friendships as well. Anne seeks and finds kindred spirits wherever she goes, finding them 'not so scarce as [she] used to think' (Montgomery, 2004, 145), but are they as easy to find for the rest of us, and is a shared love of Anne enough to unite us? The path to true friendship is not so easy as there being another little girl in the neighbourhood who is the same age, to whom you can swear your undying love and devotion in the first afternoon of your friendship, as Christina Collins explores in her sometimes-heartbreaking essay of seeking connection. Despite its presentation of bosom friendship as a romantic ideal, Anne's notion of kindred spirits does, in the end, present a more realistic idea for the dispersed network of friends that many of us find ourselves in today.

Emily Newman's chapter explores the connections she has imagined and discovered between herself, Anne, and many of the other red-headed girls and women of children's fiction, in particular, while Sabina Mark dives deeply into the power of colour in refiguring our relationship to Anne's iconic puffed-sleeve dress, noting how the almost magical dress—changing colour over various adaptations—is central to the ways fans and readers connect with Anne and her story.

Our relationships with Anne are often intense, but perhaps none is so intense as the relationship between author and translator. Suzuki Hiroe's essay tracks the intimate relationship between Montgomery, Anne and her most well-known and successful Japanese translator, Hanako Muraoka.

The literal and metaphorical core of the volume takes up questions of feminist engagements with Anne that have been central to scholarship on Montgomery and her works for decades. Sakuma Kazuko's chapter performs a similar project in the context of understanding post-war Japanese attitudes to female higher education, and the inspirational and aspirational role the

Anne books have played for Japanese women. Julie Sellers's beautifully playful but rigorous essay explores the notion of Anne as both an avid reader, and an avid (re) writer of the world and her experiences, in the model of a female Quixote. Rebecca Sheridan digs just as deep in identifying the ways that syntactical constructions within the Anne books underscore the work's construction of both romance, and realism, particularly the realities of living through (and in the aftermath of) the First World War. Jessica Friedmann's eloquent chapter explores the echoes between Montgomery's journals and her character, most especially in *Anne's House of Dreams.*

Finally, the volume engages with Anne fandom and participatory culture, such as fan fiction and other textual engagements. Fan fiction is an important means through which readers assertively and creatively express their dynamic relationship with a text and its characters. They are also, as illustrated by Meghna Christina Mudaliar's essay and Dallas Baker's creative piece, important avenues for queer engagements with Anne to be explored and celebrated. Mudaliar's chapter explores themes of queer ecofeminism in Anne fan fiction while Baker enacts these principles in his reimagining of Anne as fae/queer. Fan fiction is, however, not the only form of fan textuality possible in an era of multiple new media platforms. As Emily Mohabir illustrates, platforms such as YouTube have also emerged as sites of intertextual fan creativity that allow fans to construct new interpretations of scenes from film and television adaptations by mixing these with text, songs, and commentary.

As illustrated in many of the contributions, there is a great deal of slippage between the books and its various historical and contemporary adaptations in the memories of the various generations of Anne's kindred spirits gathered together in this volume. Our closing chapter, by Jessica Carniel, draws together fan fiction, adaptation, and the problematics of nostalgia to critically examine how our nostalgia for the Sullivan Entertainment adaptations might affect our willingness and capacity to be open to new interpretations of Anne.

Through all of these pieces, we see a range of glittering connective threads that bring us back to our initial passion for the project. Each of these pieces identifies, maps, and reiterates the key theme in the Anne books—and many of its daughter texts—of seeking belonging. Of longing for and then discovering kindred spirits, sometimes in the most unexpected places, and of learning that 'kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It's splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world' (Montgomery, 2004, 145).

We hope that you discover an abundance of kindred spirits in these pages, or at least one: an echo, a connection, a source of inspiration. A sense of recognition, and of belonging.

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Chapter Two

'There is So Much More Scope for the Imagination': Reading *Anne* as 1980s Children in Canada and Australia

Lisa Bennett and Kylie Cardell

Whenever I think of her, Anne is always a bit blurry. She's pale-skinned, her face grainy more than freckled. A blizzard of flecks storms across her cheeks and forehead, faint grey spots that also spatter her pinafore, her ribboned hat, Avonlea's bright blue sky. Her famous red hair is garish on our small screen, Megan Follows' auburn braids now skewing orange, now almost yellow, the hues fickle, hard to pin down. After she foolishly dyes it, the ends of Anne's wavy hair seem more purple or navy than *green*. Our VHS tape is warped from too much rewinding, so her voice is sometimes shrill, sometimes drowning in deep waters. For several unsteady seconds, *Anne of Green Gables* becomes a silent image. A hazy, Technicolour wobble.

Time and technology inflect my many encounters with Anne. The oversized font of my cheap pocket-sized edition of the novel gives Anne shape in my mind, making her large and childish at a glance; the heavy grain of the paper, pages yellowed even when new, roughens the print and my readings of her. The low resolution of Kevin Sullivan's two-part miniseries, the recording seemingly weathered when it first aired nationally on CBC in 1985, seemed to add a gauze filter to each broadcast. Our television weighed more than I did back then, its convex screen crackling with static whenever I turned the volume dial or pressed one of its five or six channel buttons, transmission lines bending the golden views of Prince Edward Island as we whacked the set top, trying to get a clearer picture. Now, remembering Matthew *en route* to collect Anne from the train station, or Diana in the parlour guzzling herself drunk on cordial, or Rachel Lynde spying for gossip from her front porch is like peering through the screen door of my childhood

home as neighbours pass by on the street outside: they're all *right there*, audible, tangible, but seen through mesh, at a distance.

Whenever I think of Anne, I am a kid in Canada again: safe, suburban, surrounded by snow.

Whenever I think of Anne, I am home.

*

Home. Not the snow-covered in winter—lushly verdant, wildflower-strewn in summer—cliff-edged, avenue-dotted and gable-housed beauty of a small island in the Canadian East. I am at home, in our large, airy 1970s brick house with its high vaulted ceilings and dark glazed clay-tile floors. The rough wood of the ceiling beams is exposed, painted mission brown, the sludgy hued icon of the era. Several of the exterior walls are made entirely of louvred glass—an architectural-strategy for capturing every last breath of sub-tropical breeze—essential to relief from the humid, sticky atmosphere of a Brisbane summer. Outside, my mother is calling to me: a koala has been discovered in the tall, skinny eucalypt near our side gate. It's a not-entirely rare yet still unusual enough occurrence; before Bellbowrie was a newly developed suburb of Brisbane's late twentieth century (but still ongoing) urban sprawl it was pastoral and bushland. A working pineapple farm still operates three paddocks over from my school, and echidnas and frill-necked lizards are regularly spotted by the keen-eyed or lucky. But I don't want to see the koala; I don't want to leave the cool-dark of the living room where I am glued to scenes so fantastical to a ten-year-old from the Australian suburbs that Avonlea might as well be Avalon. It's not necessarily all about the weather—though the scenes with bright snow and dark fir forests stir my wonder and imagination mightily—and it's not necessarily the horse-drawn buggies and gabled cottages and the apron-wearing women and straw-chewing men or the steam trains or button-boots or the glorious, impossibly romantic puffed sleeves. On the small round-edged rectangle of our television screen, Anne Shirley of the shining imagination, Anne Shirley of the temper and the tongue and the impetuous, righteous intellect, Anne Shirley is growing and expanding before my eyes, taking up more space than I think I've ever seen a girl occupy (especially on TV). Anne Shirley is angry. Furious. Her lightly freckled face is bright and flushed and her cheeks burn with colour. Anne Shirley takes up her slate and she brings it down, squarely and with *feeling*, right over Gilbert Blythe's glorious, dark-chestnut curls, over his lovely, dreamy, teasing, infuriating head.

*

Anne makes me sentimental, almost painfully wistful. In my mind, she is firmly tethered to my childhood in the ’80s and ’90s, to my sisters, our bungalow in Ottawa, and the furniture that we shared there. I think of her and feel the loose section of carpet in the hallway, the one that always slid on the floorboards underfoot as I raced into my room to read. I hear the buzz of fluorescent bulbs in our basement, their ugly light glaring down on our collection of 1970s couches, all brown stripes and orange florals gathered around the family television. I see the TV stand shoved against the far wall, but often it’s the unstained pine IKEA shelf I’m picturing, which didn’t come until much later, when I was in university, rather than the white pressboard cabinet we had as kids, with its gold-speckled Formica top much too small for the ten-tonne TV set, and the little door behind which we’d cram messy stacks of VHS tapes. Anne doesn’t exist for me without these tapes, this television, either or both of these shelves. She still lives in that house on Cherrywood Drive, though the rest of us have moved out.

Anne is the home I’ve invented, the one I’ll forever miss. It’s the home as Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase have described it, one that is ‘no longer a geographically defined place, but rather a state of mind’ (1989, 1). She is everywhere in memories of my older sister, especially in her bedroom downstairs, decked out as it was in neo-Victorian finery. She hangs in the quaint oil lantern from Kelly’s ceiling, the lamp wired for electricity because it had to be practical as well as aesthetically accurate. She’s there in the old-fashioned wallpaper with its tiny rosebud clusters and navy blue stripes; the patchwork quilt, apparently handmade but actually picked up on sale at a discount department store; the brass candlesticks and simple white tapers; the floor-length nightgowns and frilled sleeping bonnets my mother sewed for each of us one Christmas, edged with lace and puffed like shower caps.

For me, Anne embodies places and moments that simultaneously existed and never did. She’s a fantasy version of a late-Victorian girl, an idealised figure from an irretrievable and imaginary past. L.M. Montgomery’s portrayal of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Canada is a utopian one, an impossible vision of Prince Edward Island that is as desirable as it is unattainable. Watching *Anne* so many, many times as a kid was a way of connecting with and also escaping from Canada. Trapped inside on long Saturday afternoons because it was too cold or wet to go out, I’d sit in front of the TV and feel the bitter wind as Anne trudged through the blizzard to nurse Minnie May Barry’s awful croup, knowing just how hard it was to trudge through thigh-high snow; I’d smell the mud and crushed maple

leaves underfoot as Anne and Diana tramped through the Haunted Woods in autumn; I'd hear the summer crickets and chickadees chirping in the White Way of Delight, just as they did in the forested Greenbelt around my house in Ottawa, picturing the long grass meadows dotted with clover, milkweed pods, and the bright red splashes of devil's paintbrushes. No matter how awful the seasons were outside my window, I superimposed the best aspects of my own natural world onto the one Anne lived in, though I'd never (and still haven't) been to P.E.I.

As a girl, I read *Anne* and yearned for the simplicity, comfort and wholesomeness of that fictional life, that impossible country. Nowadays, I also experience it with a nostalgic intensity best described by the Welsh term *hiraeth*: the ineffable sense of missing a home you can never return to, a home that may not be real. This yearning is the bread and butter of nostalgia, a word that combines the Greek term *nostos* 'to return home' with *algia* 'a painful condition' and which, as Julie Sinn Cassidy observes, explains why this acute sense of homesickness was initially diagnosed as a disease (2008, 147). Nostalgia is no longer considered a medical condition, but even as our understanding of the concept has evolved it has retained two distinct traits that resonate with my own experience of *Anne*: its 'capacity to impart charm and goodness to what at the time may have been experienced as ordinary and uneventful' (Davis cited in Cassidy, 2008, 147), and a perpetual and inseparable sense of longing (Cassidy, 2008, 146-147).

*

What did it mean to me to encounter Anne in this way? Why was this fictional girl the one who meant so much? Anne's refusal to suffer the teasing of her classmates can be read as pride, a particularly sinful condition for a young orphan girl. Pride is a failing that Rachel Lynde reminds Anne of early in the novel (an event resulting in the most lyrical, *unheartfelt*, wonderfully overwrought apology ever delivered by a passionate, red-headed orphan). Anne's vanity is a theme in the novels played out more than once with that usefully patronising moral antagonist, Rachel Lynde. But Anne's response to Gilbert's teasing might allow a more slanted reading than other incidents prompted by her notorious sensitivity to the hue of her hair, a colour she longs to be 'auburn' but mournfully fears will always be 'plain red'. After all, the attention that Gilbert seeks is one he feels is naturally owed—Montgomery is direct: 'Gilbert Blythe wasn't used to putting himself out to make a girl look at him and meeting with failure. She should look at him, that red-haired Shirley girl with the little pointed chin

and the big eyes that weren’t like the eyes of any other girl in Avonlea school’ (2012, 98). Passionately engaged in a daydream about the Lake of Shining Waters as she stares out the schoolroom window, Anne is returned sharply to reality:

> Gilbert reached across the aisle, picked up the end of Anne’s long red braid, held it out at arm’s length and said, in a piercing whisper:
> Carrots! Carrots!
> Then Anne looked at him with a vengeance! (Montgomery, 2012, 98)

Gilbert’s easy sense of entitlement, his natural fit to the codes and expectations of young manhood at the time, allow him a particular privilege: Anne, unable to see the ostensible compliment in Gilbert’s teasing (that is, in his attention) enacts a different standard and the consequences for the incident are disproportionately hers. That this scene should play out in the schoolroom seems significant. Is this an outburst predicated on vanity, or catalysed by power? Education is at stake; the opportunity that access to reading and time for learning and the pleasures of one’s daydreaming offer are a privilege that, particularly as *a poor orphan girl*, Anne is more highly alert to than most. Anne and Gilbert are scholarly rivals for much of *Anne,* a competition that is usually read, by the well-meaning matrons of Avonlea as much as anyone, as a mask for romantic tension. Anne’s insistence on prioritising her education in the face of romantic opportunity is interpreted by most around her as wilful and misguided. Marilla, too, uncharacteristically, shares a personal regret that Anne is sacrificing her chance at love by refusing Gilbert. Of course, the ultimate union of Anne and Gilbert confirms the romantic undertones of their long relationship, but crucially, Anne never sacrifices her education or her ambitions for Gilbert. It is filial affection that impels her to surrender her scholarship at the end of *Anne of Avonlea*, and it is a choice that feels, in the context of the society of the time, achieved with considerably more empowerment than those of her peers.

I still remember how breathless it made me feel: Anne’s outsize, socially inappropriate, passionate ambition. Her towering imagination that could not, would not, be contained. The western suburbs of Brisbane had no Way of Delight, no Lake of Shining Waters—though I understood Anne’s lesson that such things were the product of imagination and desire, the power of manifesting versus the power of seeing.

*

Much like Montgomery’s depiction of late Victorian life in Canada, my memories of *Anne of Green Gables* are sanitised, selective, simplified,

skewed. Remembering Anne means grasping for the intangible comforts of childhood, for the feeling of being looked after, of knowing problems will be resolved because someone else—someone older or more capable or experienced—will take care of things. It means reimagining the ordinary Ottawa of my ordinary childhood as a place of perfect Decembers, my early life as an idyllic Christmas wonderland, drinking hot chocolate by the woodstove after a day playing in the snow, conveniently forgetting the slush-filled winter doldrums of every never-ending February, the layers of snow-pants and mittens and scarves, the wet boots, the oppressive afternoon dark. It means wishing for more than a time machine, but rather a *place* machine. A vehicle that can transport me to the Canada Anne lived in—where, somehow, even the sorrows are sweet.

Though I knew reality separated us, I couldn't help but feel connected to Anne because we were both Canadian. In the 1980s and 90s, it was remarkable for a girl my age to see a story taking place in my own country, or at least an *idea* of it, recognisable even though it was refreshingly and enchantingly *not*.

Wait— a girl my age? But what age was that? Memory plays tricks. In my mind, Anne arrived in my life when I was much younger than, in fact, I actually was. I picture myself as a girl of seven or eight, watching Anne lay down in that skiff, the heavy tapestry covering her white dress, *The Lady of Shalott*. I picture Anne's hair long, full, definitely auburn; the scene is cast in the colours of Waterhouse's famous painting of the Lady, the stain of the boat's timbers not as they were in the film but as he painted them in 1888. This is the same trick of the mind that tries to convince me I was so young when I met Anne, instead of being the ten or eleven or twelve-year-old I must have been. As many kids do, I remember my past not in precise years but in places: we were in Edmonton when I was seven, but I watched Anne obsessively in Ottawa, so I must have been older. My sister's neo-Victorian room wasn't built until I was in Grade Six or Seven, a fact supported by photographic evidence—there's a faded shot of the three of us, my sisters and I, standing in the big, muddy hole in our backyard where the new bedroom was being excavated, showcasing the ugly 80s shag-cut of my hair (oh Anne, how I understood your pain when you'd ruined yours!), the grey and pink ski jacket I wore, bundled against the cold. My older sister must have been in high school then, this picture tells me so; she wouldn't have been any younger, otherwise our mother would never have let her fly by herself to P.E.I. to visit our aunt in Charlottetown, to visit the island's red sand beaches, to make the pilgrimage to Green Gables.

Eric Hobsbawm describes a twilight zone of time in which history and memory blend together, 'between the past and a generalized record which

is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one’s own life’ (1987, 3). Anne, in many ways, falls into this twilight zone, making ‘facts’ or ‘truths’ about her role in my life notoriously hard to grasp. When *did* we watch the mini-series? When did I first read the novel? Was it when my sister received the full set for Christmas before her trip to the Maritimes—or later, when I studied at Ottawa University and read it as part of a wonderful course on children’s literature? As I kid, I wasn’t even sure when, exactly, *Anne of Green Gables* was set. *The past*, sometime. Later than *Little House on the Prairie* (another period piece with which we were obsessed, and by ‘we’ I mean my older sister, while the rest of our family went along for the ride), but earlier than *now*.

Whenever I think of Anne, she is a souvenir of girlhood. A treasured gift handed down from my sister. A kaleidoscope through which I see bright reflections, ever-changing pictures of home.

*

There is some mild debate over whether *Anne of Green Gables* is a feminist text. Temma F. Berg reflecting on watching the Sullivan-directed miniseries some years after reading the book, notes: ‘the TV series seemed more feminist than the novel I remembered . . . I didn’t remember the women in the novel as quite so powerful as the women in the TV show, or Marilla as quite so warm-hearted under her gruff exterior. And I didn’t remember the strong-willed woman school teacher at all’ (2009, 104). In ‘Why Anne makes us Dizzy: *Anne of Green Gables* from a Gender Perspective,’ Julia McQuillan and Julie Pfeiffer note that while ‘classic’ girls’ books like the *Anne* novels have ‘often been seen as supportive of girls as powerful actors, they still reinforce the gendered social structure’ (2001, 17). Similarly, Berg argues that the feminism she ‘missed—consciously’ as a girl reading *Anne* may nonetheless have ‘all the more deeply imbedded itself in my unconscious’ (1988, 125). Indeed, the subtle feminism of *Anne of Green Gables* may be its power: Berg says that, ‘actually what Anne learns—to be a resisting reader—is the basic lesson of feminist criticism’ (1988, 126). Anne’s susceptibility to the lure of imaginative fiction plays out variously in Montgomery’s novel; a romantic re-enactment of Tennyson’s ‘Lady of Shallott’ with a leaky skiff sees Anne nearly drown in the river, but at other times her imagination is vital solace and protection: billeted to the Thomas family as domestic help at age ten, Anne imagines a much-needed *bosom friend*, Katie Maurice, who lives in the only unbroken pane of glass in the family’s empty bookcase. By the time she is ‘thirteen and three-quarters’

(Montgomery, 2012, 202), however, Anne commits to reform. Towards the end of *Anne,* with her prospects bright and her future at Green Gables safe, she recounts to Marilla that she has surrendered to Miss Stacy, an unfinished (such true penitence!) 'fascinating and creepy' (Montgomery, 2012, 203) gothic romance loaned to her by Ruby Gillis, trusting Miss Stacy's exhortations that such literature is not of value to a girl with aspirations for a career. Here, says Berg, is modelled an understanding that 'women readers need to be especially cautious as they assimilate and project the images that fiction gives them' (1988, 126). Berg's point is an interesting one; it's one I think can be understood from a positive angle. We read to be distracted and distraction can be profitable: for Anne, imagination is a buffer, a way of reconciling and a way of surviving.

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If I'm honest, my obsession with Anne was second-hand, at least at first, like the furniture in our basement and the flea market knick-knacks in my sister's room; I absorbed Kelly's passion for the story and its historical period as if by osmosis. Along with the mini-series, it was the trappings of Anne that my sister brought into our house, the cosplay of it all (though I didn't know that concept or that term at the time) that made the *idea* of Anne just as appealing as—or perhaps more than—the character herself. But soon Anne's own obsessions bound us together. Here was a girl, like us, who was obsessed with books, with study, with achieving and improving herself, a girl who was nerdy but still vain, still flawed, a girl who cared about boys but refused to let them come first, a girl who was introspective but outward-looking, who yearned to be independent but also admired, wanted, loved. Even more than her Canadian-ness, *these* were the traits I identified with, the traits we still share.

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For a girl from Brisbane, the romantic scenery of *Anne of Green Gables*, rendered so lovingly in Montgomery's novel and so unforgettably in Sullivan's mini-series, was inconceivably fantastic—Anne's desperate dash through the frozen landscape of a wintery night to act as nurse-hero to Diana's baby sister might well have been a scene from science fiction for all its relevance to my reality. Yet, Anne's impulse, the driving, orientating force of her good nature and her ability to use her past experience to rise up to the challenge, and so the fact and effect of this difference (in her past, her experience, her character) is what makes her heroic: and her heroism

transcends her particular context. Of course, such feeling is what any good literature can achieve in a reader—it is the force and power of story. The image that Anne allowed me to project into was safely far away; the pleasure of distance and dis-identification only amplified my sense of connection to her *character*.

My hair was long, and it was brown; occasionally it flecked to what I thought of as a pleasing honey colour: the result of long summers outdoors and sometimes applications of lemon juice, which *Dolly* magazine had assured me would act as a natural mild bleach. The agonies of too many freckles, or not enough, of a nose too big, or too small, the simultaneous indignities and excitement of boys who tease, the passionate, emotional rollercoaster of female friendships, these were experiences I knew, experiences that translated easily and readily far beyond Avonlea, but that Anne was always my ambassador for. Anne’s decision to jettison the dubious role model of gothic romance is an act of resistance that has a flipside: we also choose the stories, the narratives, we *want* to live—the characters we hope to be. Though faced with no opportunity to heroically intervene in a domestic near-tragedy in my Brisbane suburb, my pale pearl-blue Malvern Star bicycle and I would certainly be ready, or so I vividly imagined.

I am no longer at home in the hot subtropics, though my parents still live in the same airy home. It is too big for them now, empty for months of the year while they travel with 4WD and camper trailer and dog, exploring roads lesser known and even more remote. My sisters live not much further away from where we all grew up, in new suburbs, again sprung from cleared land and exhumed out of once-was-bush, at the creeping edge of Brisbane’s seeming never-ending urban sprawl. I am no longer the girl who lived with Anne through her trials and successes, who learned ‘The Highwayman’ by heart in honour of the mini-series (in the novel, Montgomery leaves the poem Anne recites unnamed) or who developed a passion for Tennyson suspiciously soon after watching Anne re-enact ‘The Lady of Shallot’. None of us are who we were then, Anne included. In ‘The Decline of Anne: Matron vs. Child’, Gillian Thomas observes that ‘if the Anne of the first book is often considered a spirited individualist, then the Anne of the final book seems a rather dreary Conformist’ (2008, 23). It is a trajectory that Thomas in no uncertain terms sees as a disappointment: matron-hood sets in motion a series of ‘social limitations’ that Anne Blythe nee Shirley—as ‘Mrs. Dr’—can no longer elude. ‘It is a sad thought’, says Thomas, ‘that, if the young Anne Shirley with her sharp eye for social hypocrisy were to meet her own grown-up self, she would probably not find that she was a “kindred spirit”’ (2008, 41). But perhaps there is a story here that is not about the

receding from view of mature women but a need to maintain a distinctive view of young women—I needed to encounter Anne then, and I don't need her now in the same way. Anne enables me access to an experience of youth and self on its way to maturity, she connects me to the young girl who used imagination to travel far from her own experience in order, in the end, to better understand and use its power. She reminds me that that girl is always there, ready and waiting, able to deploy the fruits of experience, but also armed with her powerfully childish, wonderfully girlish imagination.

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We both still have our old dog-eared copies of *Anne of Green Gables*, though neither would be considered valuable to anyone but us. They're not first editions: the pages are edged with fingerprints and dust rather than gold, but even so they're priceless. These little books are time capsules, keeping safe words and moments we once held dear, people and places we loved as kids—and still love, differently, as adults. Made of cardboard and paper, these novels are not airtight: the years have nibbled away at them, and us, and though the text bound inside their cheap covers hasn't changed since we first read it—Lisa in Canada, Kylie in Australia—the story isn't quite the same now as it was then. Diana Barry is more two-dimensional than she used to be, Marilla surprisingly sympathetic, Rachel Lynde somehow less vile. And Anne—whip-tongued, vivacious, saccharine Anne—has likewise suffered the rigours of time.

In 2018, we spoke on ABC Radio Adelaide about *Anne of Green Gables* for David Bevan's 'Book of the Week' segment. Beforehand, we dug up our well-loved books and plunged in, returning to Avonlea only to find its inhabitants were now neighbours with our own siblings, our own childhood towns, our own histories. The VHS tapes we once cherished (imperfectly-paused commercial breaks and all) are junk heap relics nowadays, but a DVD copy of Sullivan's mini-series still survives in Kylie's collection. In our separate homes—Kylie in the lounge room with her nine-year old daughter, and Lisa on a dinosaur of a laptop (with CD-ROM) she rescued from the obsolete electronics pile in the garage—we re-watched the adaptation, which neither of us had seen for many years. From the first scene, we were awash with nostalgia, hearts aglow, and soon weeping through our smiles. There was Anne, definitely different from how she was in the novel, different from how she was in our memories, but still doing the same thing she always did: wending her way through the Canadian landscape, unashamedly daydreaming, reciting lines from the literature that had changed her—and our—life.

We both noted—but it didn’t matter—that the written Anne didn’t start as the filmed Anne did, performing a verse from Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ in a theatrically wistful voice. What mattered was her presence, her imagination and spirit, her fantasies and obsessions. What really mattered was what she continues to represent for us, and for millions of readers like us. During our chat on Bevan’s morning radio program, the phone lines lit up. So many listeners wanted to share their own stories: women in their sixties who had read *Anne of Green Gables* as girls; their mothers, now in their 90s, who still owned the whole set of Montgomery’s novels, each volume a precious Christmas gift; wives who recounted trips taken with their husbands to Prince Edward Island, inspired by the *Anne* books; other readers who recalled receiving the book as a prize for achievements at school. This last resonated. Underscoring all of her fanciful tangents, her aspirations, her *joie de vivre*, is the fact that Anne Shirley is a reader, a learner, and, through adversity and hardship, books are fodder for her grand and much remarked-on imagination. Reading is consolation, escape, and it is education. Reading is what allows Anne to rise above and momentarily jettison the poverty and hardship of her childhood, and it is what allows her to transcend the circumstance of her birth, shaping both her character (making her lovable to Marilla and Matthew) and her aspirations. Reading saves Anne Shirley as surely as it inspires her audience—including us.

Reading *Anne* has been—and continues to be—a significant communal experience. We think of Anne fondly not just because she is a figure from our own pasts, a plastic doll blurred in the snow globe whirl of our childhood memories, but because she is an heirloom we can share with other girls, with our daughters, with perfect strangers. We will always read Anne in deeply personal, universal ways, and remember her as a kindred spirit.

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CHAPTER THREE

IN SEARCH OF A BOSOM FRIEND: REMEMBERING MY KINDRED SPIRITS PEN PAL

CHRISTINA COLLINS

I've never had a best friend. At least not a mutual one. In grade school, the person I considered my best friend considered someone else *her* best friend, and that pattern continued. I became resigned to it. Maybe I just wasn't best friend material. Maybe I wasn't the kind of person who would ever wear one half of a heart charm that says Best Friends with a zigzag splitting the phrase down the middle.

When I first read *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery at thirteen, I only picked it up off a classroom bookshelf because I needed a book, any book, to add to my monthly reading log for English class. But that was how I discovered the friendship of Anne Shirley and Diana Barry. A *bosom friend*. A *kindred spirit*. This idea—this ideal—was exactly what I longed for: a friend truer than any other, a companion who felt the exact same way about me. Where could I find myself one of those? Just as Anne says in the novel: 'I've dreamed of meeting her all my life' (Montgomery, 1908, 82).

Mind you, I was more like a Diana than an Anne—darker-haired, not as bubbly, less confident. Less interesting, you might say. But Diana was worthy of a friend like Anne, so maybe I was, too. And maybe, if I were patient enough, I'd get one someday.

An obstacle that stood in the way was, no doubt, my selective mutism. I wouldn't even encounter that term—selective mutism—until years later, when I was in college and had thankfully overcome the worst of it on my own. But from the ages of about thirteen to seventeen, I lived in a dark and very quiet place in my head. At home with my family, I was one person—comfortable, chatty, myself—but at school I was silent. Frozen. Scared. Confused.

In retrospect, I can now see what I was going through: an anxiety condition. Selective mutism refers to someone who chronically doesn't

speak in certain situations where speech is expected, such as at school, despite speaking freely in at least one other such situation, such as at home. I had the low-profile sort, meaning I sometimes managed to speak minimally at school when absolutely necessary, but I didn't initiate contact or make requests. Whether high-profile or low-profile, though, selective mutism involves high anxiety levels, and it can completely derail your social life—as it did for me.

Many years later, I would write and publish a novel exploring this condition. It would be cathartic. But for the time being I was just trying to survive middle school and high school while speaking as few words as possible.

So, while my friendships and social life dwindled, my obsession with the world of Avonlea escalated. By the end of the eighth grade, I had read and come to own every book in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne* series, watched and re-watched all three mini-series by Kevin Sullivan, and sought out every other film adaptation I could get my hands on. I especially liked to re-watch the scenes where Anne meets Diana, and where they swear to be bosom friends. I liked to imagine my own versions of those scenes playing out someday, somewhere, in my own life.

As the summer approached, my dad brought up the question of where we should go for our family vacation that year. My mom and brother didn't have any suggestions, and at first, I didn't think I did either. Then I blurted out, 'There's this place called Prince Edward Island. It's in Canada.' The setting of the Anne books seemed so far away from us in Massachusetts, and I didn't expect for a second that we would actually get to go there. But then a couple of weeks later, my dad said, 'Hey kiddo, guess where we're going in July?'

The Confederation Bridge connecting Prince Edward Island to mainland Canada had been open for a few years at that point, so it was possible to reach the island by car. Luckily, I don't remember much of the twelve-hour drive (I likely spent it fighting with my younger brother). But I remember sticking my head out the window as we crossed the bridge, the longest one I'd ever seen, and breathing in deep.

I remember making my family go to every Anne or L.M. Montgomery related site on the island, even though they had never read the books or seen the films and didn't care about a redheaded fictional character; they were real troupers.

I remember the skits at Avonlea Village, and the sound of horse-drawn carriages riding through the streets.

I remember the sun glinting on the 'Lake of Shining Waters' near the Anne of Green Gables Museum.

I remember the taste of raspberry cordial, and the illustration on the label: a bright, smiling Anne clutching a book to her chest.

I remember feeling happier than I'd felt at Disney World.

I'd grown fond of musicals at the time, and when we saw a performance of *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical* at the Charlottetown Festival during that trip, I fell in love with the songs. One tune in particular, 'Kindred Spirits', caught my attention. This happy duet between Anne and Diana, professing their exclusive devotion to each other ('we'll stick together, just me and you') made me long even more for a special connection like theirs.

Perhaps that's why I subscribed to *Kindred Spirits,* a magazine I spotted in the gift shop at the site of L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish home. Published quarterly on Prince Edward Island and edited by L.M. Montgomery's relatives, George and Maureen Campbell, each issue cost five Canadian dollars and fifty cents and was printed in black and white on thick, ivory paper bound with staples.

Holding the latest issue, thumbing through the pages, and just looking at it made me feel calm. It made me feel connected to Prince Edward Island, even when the trip was over and I was back in boring old suburban Massachusetts.

The contents of *Kindred Spirits* included everything from L.M. Montgomery-related news to Prince Edward Island recipes to Anne-inspired poems and fan fiction, and there was also a section called Pen Friends. There, subscribers seeking a pen pal could write in, much like a personal ad. They would usually offer a few sentences about themselves and what they were looking for in a pen pal, closing with their name and full address—something we would probably never see in a publication now. Not every issue included this section, and in the ones that did, the pen pal seekers were either much younger or much older than me. It wasn't until four issues later that I saw an entry submitted by a fourteen-year-old girl living on the opposite side of the country, in California—almost as much a world away as Prince Edward Island.

'I live [sic] the L.M. Montgomery books,' she wrote. I let the spelling error go—or maybe it wasn't an error. Maybe she lived out aspects of the book in her everyday life, which was all the more reason to read on. 'I enjoy nature, stories, collecting antiques, and learning to quilt. I am looking for a girl pen friend who is between 13 and 15 years of age, lives anywhere in Canada, and shares similar interests.'

I didn't live anywhere in Canada, and I didn't quilt or collect antiques. But I did like nature and stories—who didn't?—and this was the first pen pal request I'd seen from someone around my age. So, I decided to write to her. The worst that could happen was that she wouldn't write back.

I waited. I went about my life, my schoolwork, my selectively mute world.

Then, to my delight, her response appeared in my mailbox.

She didn't mind that I wasn't from Canada—although, as it turned out, I was the only person who had answered her pen pal request anyway. So began a few years of exchanging letters about how much we loved the world of Avonlea, along with other favourite books, movies, and music. She was a year younger than me, but she seemed more mature. She competed in ballroom dance competitions, for one thing. She even sent me a DVD of one of her performances—a foxtrot. Flowing dress, fancy heels, and all. As someone who'd taken dance classes since I was three but never felt graceful in my own skin, I was in awe. But *she'd* never been to Prince Edward Island and I had, and she was in awe of me for that. Despite our different lives, we had that one thing in common: our love of Anne.

But did that make us bosom friends?

I'll admit it: I was the one who stopped writing. When I went off to college, writing to my high school pen pal dropped pretty low on my list of priorities. Predictable, really. I was trying to make new friends—*in-the-flesh* friends—and do well in my classes and all the other things that came with college life. I was being more social and meeting fellow dorm residents with common interests—though not anyone who loved *Anne of Green Gables* as much as I did. I was escaping the misery of high school. I wasn't really thinking about how my pen pal must have felt, being left behind—perhaps similar to how Marilla felt when she thought Anne was going to go off to Redmond College after Matthew's death.

Or maybe my pen pal didn't feel that way at all; I knew from the home videos she'd sent me that she had lots of friends. More than I had. For all I knew, she barely missed my letters.

By the time I was a junior in college, studying abroad in England, this thing called Facebook had really taken off among college kids—especially as a way to procrastinate on coursework. Almost every college student had an account on the social network. One night, instead of writing a paper that was due the next day, I decided to search my old pen pal's name on Facebook. Sure enough, her picture came up at the top of my search. She was now a sophomore at a university in Texas.

My cursor hovered over the 'friend' request button. In many ways, the word 'friend' meant little on social media. Half of my Facebook friends were people I'd met once or twice, or maybe not at all. But there was still a strange sense of intimacy. If someone sent you a friend request or accepted yours, it meant this person liked you enough to grant you access to all of their personal photos and posts. And if you couldn't pass that first barrier