In the News: ***Anne of Green Gables*** *and PEI's Turn-of-the-Century Press*

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Résumé: *Cet article compare l'arrière-plan idéologique d'* ***Anne et la maison aux pignons verts*** *et celui des journaux de l'Ile-du-Prince Édouard à la fin du XXe siècle. Au sujet de l'éducation, du statut des sexes et du rapport à la société, ces journaux ont forgé des discours dominants qui se manifestent dans le récit de L.M. Montgomery. Celui-ci leur résiste mais finit par les entériner. D'où un roman polyphonique ancré dans un dialogue avec les voix culturelles des journaux de l'époque.*

Summary: *This article investigates* ***Anne of Green Gables*** *and Prince Edward Island's turn-of-the-century newspapers. By focusing on education, community, and gender, the article argues that the newspapers both reflected and created pervasive dominant discourses that manifest themselves in* ***Anne of Green Gables****. Montgomery, in turn, both resists and ultimately conforms to these dominant discourses, creating a layered text that works in dialogue with the print culture of its own time.*

We can better understand L.M. Montgomery's significance as an icon in Canadian popular culture today if we recover her relationship with the popular culture of her own time. In this article, I examine the author's most famous novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, from within Montgomery's own print culture by placing the text alongside the most powerful and pervasive medium of its time — the newspaper.[1] Prince Edward Island was, to quote Marie Campbell, a "word bound culture," host to a plethora of voices in print. Each of these voices contributes to the creation of an historical record that offers scholarship access to the dominant discourses circulating in turn-of-the-century PEI.

I examine the discourses surrounding community, education and gender, illustrating how these are expressed both in the news and in *Anne of Green Gables*. I begin by looking at community, with a focus on the shared

relationship between the newspapers and *Anne of Green Gables*. Next, in my discussion of education, I argue that flexible notions of education on the Island resulted in Montgomery's characterization of education in *Anne of Green Gables*. I continue my analysis by examining gender from within the same framework, exposing the rigidness of Island doctrines of femininity and masculinity and placing *Anne of Green Gables* alongside them. I argue that, while offering echoes of resistance to dominant constructions of gender, L.M. Montgomery created a text that embodies the master narratives of her culture, time and place.

My primary archives are two Charlottetown papers: *The Patriot* and *The Examiner*.[2] I have focused my research on the time period extending from 1880 to 1911 (the year Montgomery married Ewan Macdonald and left her Island for good). For the purposes of this article, however, my emphasis is centred upon the years directly surrounding the conception, writing, publication, and reception of *Anne of Green Gables*, years that approximately cover the first decade of the twentieth century.

Why look at newspapers for traces of dominant cultural discourses? In PEI at the turn of the century, there was no greater communications tool than the printed page, no more pervasive forum to discuss the issues of the day, to check out the products most in demand, and to absorb the most heavily-circulated cultural ideologies of the time. By offering what Aled Jones calls, in *Powers of the Press*, "a narrativisation of the world" performed throughout the paper by different voices, the newspaper in fact created an entire, complex world (Jones 92). Claiming to represent a society, the press also has a role in forging, influencing, and determining that society (Jones 90). The narrative impulses propelling newspaper production are ones that are replicated, with significant variation, in fictional texts. Thus Montgomery, in her construction of a fictional world that resembled the Island, was engaged in a similar process of "narrativising" her world, based, in part, on the running narrative she was met with daily in the public press of her province.

Islanders were born into a certain newspaper readership, just as they were born into a certain religion. A Liberal Islander, for example, had little choice but to read *The Patriot* — choosing any other newspaper would have been tantamount to treason. But it is also clear that cross-reading did occur. Islanders would have had to read more than one paper to understand fully the contents of any. Dialogue defines these papers more than any other factor: the majority of *The Patriot*'s outbursts are in direct reply to the contents of *The Examiner*, showing the shared readership between the two papers. This observation is perhaps nowhere as relevant as it is when applied to a discussion of community notes appearing in Island newspapers.

Community notes appear in both *The Patriot* and *The Examiner* daily. Signed in pseudonym, notes range from detailing the weather, to noting the

comings and goings of various villagers, to offering sarcastic reflections on rural life. Such notes appear to be submitted without solicitation and they appear sporadically, suggesting that they were penned in leisure hours. Some towns, like Earnscliffe and Donaldston, are represented almost weekly; others, like Montgomery's Cavendish, are represented only once or twice a year. Correspondents from any town or settlement, however small, qualify for publication; neither wit nor regularity are key requirements. One must simply write and submit to enjoy the glory of one's name in print. But one must also beware that once published, any glaring grammatical, philosophical, or observatory flaw is subject to the ridicule and attack of correspondents from other newspapers.

For example, the following appeared in *The Examiner* under "Upton Notes" on May 6, 1904: "After reading the answer of the Dundas correspondent of *The Patriot* I have come to the conclusion that she knows as much about politics as a puff adder would know about cornmeal porridge" (2). Critical commentary can, however, be levelled in the newspapers simply as a means of letting off a little hot air, as the following brief but very cranky comment aimed at a competing newspaper attests: "*Guardian* brag is sufficiently sickening at any time, but in this warm weather it is simply nauseating. Self praise is no praise" (*The Patriot*, July 20, 1904, 2).

Any discussion of community correspondence in PEI's turn-of-the-century presses must privilege *The Examiner* over *The Patriot*. Sharp, witty, and frequent, *The Examiner*'s correspondents outshine their counterparts in originality and rhetorical flair. Men like the pseudonymed "Rex" of Earnsliffe and "Starlight" of Donaldston interact on the pages of *The Examiner* throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, but with most energy and enthusiasm in the years directly surrounding Montgomery's writing of *Anne*, suggesting that Montgomery's creative impulses did not flourish in isolation. As Montgomery wove her community discourses into her fiction, country correspondents were engaged in a similar process in the newspaper. "Starlight" of Donaldston writes:

> What is going to be done for the winter's amusement? It is high time to be evolving a programme. Intellectual culture is needed for young and old. A community without it is not in a progressive state. Our young men are desirous to have some intellectual exercise. Let us have a debating society, to meet every Thursday night in Glendale school during the winter months, or some such interesting and instructive amusement. (December 8, 1904, 7)

"Starlight's" discussion affirms that community, in isolated rural PEI, was providing its members with intellectual and social stimulation, an idea that is reinforced throughout *Anne of Green Gables* with concert recitations (203), Sunday school picnics (90), the formation of the story club (210), and Ladies

Aid meetings (213). Montgomery even makes an explicit link between community events and community notes. Diana says to Anne, "'Mind you, Mr. Allan is going to send an account of it to the Charlottetown papers.'" And Anne replies, "'Oh Diana, will we really see our names in print? It makes me thrill to think of it ...'" (203). This quotation suggests that notes in fact reinforce and validate community events by their appearance in public print.

In *The Examiner*, community writing concerns must be balanced with the many demands of agricultural life. On November 20, 1903, "Ben Bramble" of Dundas writes:

> Like most other men who have to procure their livelihood by tilling the soil, Ben has been too busy of late to write up even a few of the many important things that have daily been taking place in this bustling section of PEI Island. (7)

"Ben's" sense that his world must eventually be written reveals a mentality shared by the voracious contributors to *The Examiner* and by Montgomery. Alternately critical, insinuating, and gossipy, correspondents write to *The Examiner* to exercise their brains and vent a creative energy that does not otherwise have an outlet. And, perhaps more sinisterly, notes serve as gossip made more legitimate and potentially destructive by their appearance in a published forum. Verbal sparring appears frequently in the pages of the newspaper and is not limited to levelling criticisms at non-correspondents. Power struggles surface, not only across but also within papers. On April 3, 1905, "Rex" from Earnscliffe is almost usurped from his role as contributor by a blunt "Boss:"

> Rex — You should give up writing for the paper; you cannot write notes as good as an old hen. The trouble is you think you can. But you can't. Please stop, you make me awfully tired. Go West two years. We would have better crops. Do anything but write notes. But if you must write, write on a snowbank. (2)

"Rex" comes back nine days later with the following words:

> 'The Boss' — and so you are 'boss' are you? Boss of what — hencoop or crow's nest? The latter we presume, so we apologize to our readers for paying attention to a 'Crow' [sic] Now 'Boss' if you ever poke your head out of the nest again to pick at Rex, we will surely scatter your feathers on a snow bank — and there will be one 'crow' less in a district near Earnscliffe — Ta ta. (April 12, 1905, 7)

Community is thus built by creating a printed world that mimics the fractious real one. "Rex" and "The Boss" and "Starlight" write into the paper

with a sense of performance, enjoying the public display of their words. Shaping and reflecting communal concerns, the newspaper becomes, as J. Herbert Altschull writes in *From Milton to MacLuhan,* a "billboard" for its audience (212).

The relationship between communal activity and the newspaper is clear: the paper serves the needs of the community, compensating for distance, isolation, and a very poor mail service. A product and producer of hegemonic discourse, *The Patriot*'s turn-of-the-century byline reads, "all the news that's true and fit to print." *The Patriot* and *The Examiner* undoubtedly shape Prince Edward Island, but the newspapers are also shaped by the community they seek to represent. As such they are an important and pervasive part of communities, households, and conversations across the Island and find their way into the alternate discourses produced within its community. One such discourse is Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables.*

Unlike Montgomery's *Emily* novels, *The Golden Road,* and the later *Anne* novels, *Anne of Green Gables* contains few direct references to the newspaper. And yet the newspaper's presence in shaping Avonlea's sense of reality, particularly Avonlea's sense of the outer world, is palpable throughout the story. When Mrs. Lynde learns of the Cuthbert's adoption plan, her reaction is heavily influenced by the "sensational" as it would have appeared in local papers:

> 'Well, Marilla, I'll tell you plain that I think you're doing a mighty foolish thing — a risky thing, that's what.... Why, it was only last week I read in the paper how a man and his wife up west of the Island took a boy out of the orphan asylum and he set fire to the house at night — set it on purpose, Marilla — and nearly burnt them to a crisp in their beds." (7)

From the very outset, *Anne of Green Gables* is about synthesizing the various voices at work within a rural community.

Montgomery's novel is made up of a variety of different voices. The narration remains rooted in a kind of third person, omniscient perspective, but Montgomery uses indirect discourse to convey the eternal, important, and pervasive presence of the all-powerful community voice:

> Junior Avonlea found it hard to settle down to humdrum existence again. To Anne in particular things seemed fearfully flat.... Could she go back to the former quiet pleasures of those faraway days before the concert?... Eventually, however, Avonlea school slipped back into its old grooves and took up its old interests. To be sure, the concert left traces ... Josie Pye and Julia Bell did not 'speak' for three months, because Josie Pye had told Bessie Wright that Julia Bell's bow when she got up to recite made her look like a chicken jerking its head, and Bessie told Julia.... Finally, Charlie Sloane fought Moody Spurgeon MacPherson because

> Moody Spurgeon had said that Anne Shirley put on airs about her recitations, and Moody Spurgeon was 'licked:' consequently Moody Spurgeon's sister, Ella May, would not 'speak' to Anne Shirley all the rest of the winter. (205-6)

This quotation illustrates that the same kind of power struggles and internal conflicts exemplified by "Rex" and "Starlight's" correspondence find a place in Montgomery's text; Avonlea is not drawn as uniformly harmonious, but instead mimics the Island communities shown in the newspapers: community is figured as problematic, powerful, and pertinent to the lives of its members.

Furthermore, Anne's conversation is continually peppered with phrases like "Mrs. Lynde says ..." (207) or "Mrs. Allan says ..." (207). Disdainful and envious references to Josie Pye (252) indicate that individual experience and understanding is, in a rural community, bound up with a wide variety of different voices, personalities, narrators, and conflicts. *Anne of Green Gables* extends the community voice presented in the newspapers of the Island outside of the realm of supposedly factual public discourse and into its own fictionalized world, suggesting that the ideas infusing every country note were a part of a larger Island discourse. In both the Island newspaper and in the Island's most famous fictional text, we can see that the watchful community is figured as central and controlling, that language is privileged over plot and fact, and that provincial realities are shaping Island ideologies and manifesting themselves in public discourse. One of the most prominent of these public discourses is education.

Mary Rubio has commented extensively on the cultural influences shaping the Island's perception of education in "L.M. Montgomery: Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture." Rubio suggests that Scottish-Presbyterian educational principles defined Prince Edward Island, a province largely settled by Scots.[4] Rubio traces the history of education in Scotland, noting that public education was instituted by the ruling Presbyterians in late-seventeenth-century Scotland. Subsequently in PEI, the transplanted Scottish conceptions of education were both advanced and organic (91). Further, Ian Ross Robertson writes, in "Reform, Literacy and the Lease: The Prince Edward Island Free Education Act of 1852," that PEI was the "first of the Maritime provinces ... to establish 'free education'" (53). Dominant discourses on the Island well into the twentieth century reinforce PEI's continuing commitment to education.

One cannot read more than a few days of *The Patriot* or *The Examiner* before stumbling on extensive articles titled, for example, "Public Schools Report for 1895" (*The Patriot* March 31, 1896, 2) or "Our Education" (*The Patriot* March 1, 1909, 2). Exam scores and final grades are reported and published for every single student from each school — from local rural one-

room schoolhouses to the Prince of Wales College, from kindergarten to university. Education is rivalled only by election news as the hottest topic in the Island newspaper. Similarly, in *Anne of Green Gables*, school achieves a central position in the novel; the doctrine that education performs a vital social duty is established with Anne and Gilbert's consistent pursuit of academic excellence (136).

But despite all that is written in praise of the Island's educational system, there is room for criticism; Montgomery certainly gets her shots in, as do the newspapers of the era. At the turn of the century, *The Patriot* publishes an ongoing series of articles by a Judge Warburton. Entitled "Education As It Is," the articles assert that Islanders must remain vigilant in their pursuit of academic excellence. Warburton exposes and suggests solutions to a variety of educational problems on the Island. The first report of the series appears on June 4, 1901, and begins:

> When our Public Schools Act, 1877, was placed upon our Statute Book it was not only well abreast of the times but may fairly claim to have placed our Common School System in the very front. But the world moves, great advances in educational matters have elsewhere been made since 1877, while ... our system has practically no real advance except in cost. What was well in the van [sic] of educational progress twenty-three years ago is no longer in that proud position. (7)

Thus, a character like Montgomery's ineffectual Mr. Phillips would have been all too familiar in the domain of the real on Prince Edward Island; teaching was a choice often made for reasons of survival, accompanied by fairly pitiable compensation (Sharpe 132). Montgomery writes:

> Mr. Phillips was back in the corner explaining a problem in algebra to Prissy Andrews and the rest of the scholars were doing pretty much as they pleased, eating green apples, whispering, drawing pictures on their slates, and driving crickets, harnessed to strings, up and down the aisle. (111)

The impression such a criticism leaves suggests there was a grey area separating PEI's lofty ideas about education from practical application. Appearing in *The Patriot* on June 28, 1901, the following article reinforces this idea:

> To reach the maximum results our schools must be supplied with properly qualified teachers. This can be effected only by making remuneration for work faithfully performed.... Till this is done the present undesirable condition of things must remain, and the irreparable loss is the parents and the children's. ("Education and Teachers" *The Patriot* June 28, 1901, 4)

Contradictorily, on an island where education was highly prized, remuneration for teachers was barely livable. An article on the Teacher's Convention in September 1901, appearing in *The Patriot*, affirms the idea that teaching was compensated inadequately: "The fact is only too evident that teachers are too poorly paid and therefore too poorly qualified" (September 12, 1901, 4).

The Patriot and Montgomery are not exclusively negative, however, in their presentations of education on the Island. As Gabriella Ahmansson notes, Montgomery eventually dismisses the lamentable Mr. Phillips and replaces him with the infinitely more-qualified Miss Stacey, who is eventually replaced herself by Anne (140). One receives a picture of education on the Island in a state of hopeful progress; the newspaper's unrelenting goal is undoubtedly to better educational practice on PEI. The following article appeared in *The Patriot* on July 3, 1908:

> The greatest triumph of civilization is undoubtedly the efficiency and capability of the public schools. There is much in the modern world that is still discouraging and unsatisfactory, but there is one thing upon which every man can congratulate himself and his generation — the fact that we have progressed far enough to give education free to every child born in Canada. (*The Patriot* July 3, 1908, 4)

The Island, in its newspapers and its novels, prides itself on an educational system that, although flawed, is reflective of a history that values the intellectual (Rubio "Scottish").[5] But the ideological flexibility identifiable in Island education (which educated both males and females) had its limits when extended outside of the classroom and into the home. An examination of gender in the novel and the news illustrates that discourses concerned with the public sphere were infinitely more expansive than those concerned with the private.

Both *The Patriot* and *The Examiner* abound with poetry, anecdotes, and stories offering women up as the model of domestic purity and morality. Passivity and generosity are presented as the most integral characteristics of womanhood. The notion that women are inherently suited to life in a domestic sphere reinforces the idea of the differences between men and women widely circulating in British culture of that era (Poovey). These differences manifest themselves in such a way to ensure that men are viewed as separate, active entities, while women are only represented in regards to their relationship with men, as lesser counterparts, never partners (Shevelow). The following excerpted piece, which appears in *The Examiner* on November 27, 1905, demonstrates this:

> Comparing man with women, Professor Chamberlin of Clark University says:

> He is more gifted in art.
>
> He has greater business capacity
>
> ...
>
> He has more genius.
>
> He is more intellectual.
>
> He is more logical.
>
> ...
>
> We might add that:
>
> He drinks more whiskey.
>
> ...
>
> He stays out later at night.
>
> ...
>
> He gets in jail oftener. (3)

"She" does not appear at all. While the implication of this piece is to illuminate male weaknesses in comparison to implied female strengths — morality, emotion, purity, and modesty — it is clear that men are given the better part of the deal. Defined only by what she does "less," woman is slotted into a virtuous and stifling place on the pedestal of femininity; she is denied agency, representation, diversity, and voice; she is understood only in her relationship to men, and from there only within the home.

Women's columns offer a further, slightly more complex means for charting changes in gender ideologies. Examining *The Patriot*'s relationship with the column entitled "Woman and Home," for example, one can see that representations of women undergo seismic shifts in the newspaper. Often appearing on the front page throughout the 1890s, this column is pushed to the fourth page in the final years of the decade, and then, by the end of 1900, disappears altogether. "Woman and Home" was several columns in length and appeared to be imported from an outside source. The column often discusses the activities of urban American women, leading one to assume that it was produced in the US and syndicated for outside markets.

"Woman and Home," while certainly reinforcing popular notions of a woman's place in Victorian society and planting her firmly in the home, also transgresses nineteenth-century perceptions of domesticity. Publicizing the achievements of women in the public sphere, the column does not limit itself to Victorian ideals and instead promotes the image of woman as capable, dynamic and competent both inside and outside of the home. A typical column, appearing on the third page on February 16, 1900, contains a small article celebrating Julia Holmes Smith, a woman who broke out of a traditional role and "pursued the study of medicine in the Boston University School of Medicine for three years." The article details Dr. Smith's path to fame with approval. But discourses applauding female successes are at least partially neutralized by more traditional perceptions of a woman's place. The article directly following the piece on Dr. Smith reads:

> Girls Men Want to Marry
>
> Men who are looking for wives are growing more cautious daily. The up to date maiden of society must be careful if she would wear orange blossoms.... Remember, girls, men are born hunters. They value the girl who is not to be had for the first asking.... Odious mannerisms are fatal to a girl. Giggling simply maddens some men. One girl missed becoming the wife of a nabob because she 'sniffed.'

Such discourse affirms the idea that marriage was still considered as of primary importance to even progressive women, and that passivity and repression were helpful in winning a husband. The title of "Woman and Home" itself implies that dominant discourses about domesticity are the ones most affirmed by the publication, but it would be unfair to suggest that this column, like *The Patriot* or *Anne of Green Gables* itself, was predictable in its messages. Women's voices in *The Patriot*, after the disappearance of "Woman and Home" at the turn of the century, are heard directly only in advertising testimonials and in the poetry section, represented most notably by L.M. Montgomery. While women's voices are not regularly given space within the newspaper, references to their presence and their potential power abound.

Representations of women appearing in the newspapers, within community notes, advertising and on the front page, firmly place women in the home. Subsequently, concerns about the potential ramifications of entrenching such public discourses into daily, private life surface within the pages of the newspapers. Patriarchal anxieties about how gender inequalities translate into issues of control manifest themselves in editorials, anecdotes and, particularly, country correspondence in the newspapers. Prevailing gender inequalities certainly did not mean that women were devoid of power. The domestic sphere may have been devalued historically and in its relationship to the public sphere, but husbands and fathers often had little choice but to recognize women's power both within the home and in the local community.

Ultimately subject to patriarchal rules and inequalities, women had to be subversive in their claims for control, and anxiety about the power struggles inherent in a domestic relationship are consistently signalled in the news. Excerpted from the Chicago *Inter Ocean*, the following appeared on page three of *The Patriot* on February 22, 1900:

> The Resourceful Woman ...
>
> ... the door to the room stood partly open, and the result was that she ran into the door. In spite of the usual application for injuries of that nature the bruise just over her eye was painfully in evidence in a very short time, and her husband was sympathetic.
>
> 'Yes; it does hurt,' she said in reply to his question. 'It pains me a great deal. I think I ought to get $50 for that.'

> 'Fifty dollars!' he exclaimed. 'From whom?'
>
> 'From you.' She replied.
>
> 'But I didn't push you into the door ...'
>
> 'Nevertheless,' she asserted. 'I think that bruise is worth $50 ... I need it to get that gown I spoke to you about.' She explained.
>
> 'Oho! So that's it,' he returned. 'You want to work my sympathies to get the gown I have already refused to buy for you. Well, it won't do.'
>
> '... Suppose I should knock over a few chairs, rush around the flat noisily for five to ten minutes and then tip over a table,' she suggested ...' Then suppose after making such a racket as that, which could not fail to arouse the curiosity of the neighbors, I should go out on the street tomorrow with this swollen and discolored eye.... Suppose when I was asked how it happened I should appear ill at ease, laugh in a constrained sort of way and after some hesitation say I ran against a door.'
>
> 'You wouldn't do that?' he exclaimed in alarm....
>
> 'What would they think of you?' she went on. 'What kind of reputation would you get in this neighborhood?'...
>
> ... she got the gown. A resourceful woman can profit even by her misfortunes.

Scholars have noted that gossip is an effective way for women to exert some social control, particularly in rural communities. Patricia Meyer Spacks's *Gossip* is a book length study of the power of talk. Montgomery critics have extended Spacks's analysis to relate specifically to works like *Anne of Green Gables*. Rubio writes:

> In a patriarchy, a woman's personal power lay largely in what she could manoeuvre by using language (flattery, nagging, or subtly manipulating her husband); women's public power lay in their being able to censure through community gossip ... women could wreak havoc through the innuendos of gossip. It was not only a source of entertainment but also a form of social control. ("Subverting" 21)

Rubio's assertions about the potential of gossips are mirrored in the preceding anecdotal story of extortion and the truth of the implication of her assertions is equally mirrored in printed contributions of male correspondents, attempting to silence and devalue women "gossips." Anxiety about the power of women, located specifically in their ability to shape community perceptions, is a theme that recurs in community correspondence in Island news, as well as in *Anne of Green Gables*.

There is a distinction made, in *The Patriot* and *The Examiner*, between the local news described in published country correspondence and that whispered in country kitchens; it is a distinction based upon categories distinguishing the legitimate from the frivolous, skill from weakness, patriar-

chy from matriarchy, male from female. Despite the fact that male country correspondents are often circulating information culled directly from the private sphere, they never consider naming themselves gossips. Such a moniker, it seems, falls securely on the female sex.

Male commentary on the power of the female gossip subculture can range from tolerant and mocking to vaguely threatening and definitively patronizing. On October 14, 1903, the following appears in *The Examiner*: "Some of our correspondents are sending the latest news by the *new telewoman system*, which they find much better and faster than by mail" (7; my emphasis). "Starlight" of Donaldston writes, more maliciously, on December 5, 1904:

> Our local gossip announces that they have been talking too much of late and says that they are going to keep quiet awhile. We fear, however, that the good gossips control over their speaking apparatus is nominal rather than real, and that they are overestimating their power of self representation. (*The Examiner* 3)

"Starlight" himself is a very regular contributor to the pages of *The Examiner*; his writing often contains news of marriages, illnesses, deaths, and social happenings — but never, according to "Starlight" or his contemporaries, "gossip." Ahmansson notes:

> Gossip is traditionally seen as a female occupation. It is therefore not strange that the word has negative connotations and is supposed to be combined with a great deal of spite and ill feeling. It is also seen as a way of wasting time ... No matter what definition one chooses, gossiping is a means of communicating local news to a relatively small circle of people. When printed, gossip is about people who are well known to a general audience, treating them in fact as everybody's next door neighbour.
>
> By definition it is therefore impossible to gossip about great things; one cannot gossip about God, the infinite, man's eternal struggle with good and evil, the universal... (39-40)

According to Ahmansson's discussion then, and according to the male correspondents' refusal to recognize themselves as gossips, despite their focus on the local and the everyday, men cannot be gossips by virtue of the fact that their every interchange, unlike women's in turn-of-the-century culture, is infused with the potential of greatness and the respect due to the legitimate. In *Anne of Green Gables*, however, Montgomery offers the possibility that female gossip can in fact be associated with a kind of community power and greatness, providing a counter to the narrow, patriarchally-voiced disparagement presented in the newspapers. Montgomery presents an illustration of the power derived from female gossip that is only hinted at, filtered through male voices, in the newspapers.

Mrs. Lynde, strong, domineering, controlling and militantly domestic, challenges the simplistic image of the passive, idealized lady by giving shape and voice to the rural "telewoman" residing on the margins of public discourse and consistently mocked because she carries the kind of power voiced in anxieties suggested by country correspondence. The pragmatic and verbal Mrs. Lynde is certainly never fully supported by Montgomery or her core characters, but she is conveyed as a social inevitability. Her seemingly unchallengeable power is felt by all she comes in contact with, as Anne learns in her first explosive meeting with her. Marilla is horror-stricken at Anne's initial treatment of Mrs. Lynde, not because she recognizes it as unwarranted or unjust, but because she recognizes the extent of this woman's community power:

> How unfortunate that Anne should have displayed such temper before Mrs. Rachel Lynde, of all people! Then Marilla suddenly became aware of an uncomfortable and rebuking consciousness that she felt more humiliation over this than sorrow over the discovery of such a serious defect in Anne's disposition. (66)

Marilla later tells Anne, "'Well, you made a fine exhibition of yourself I must say. Mrs. Lynde will have a nice story to tell about you everywhere — and she'll tell it, too …'" (67). Mrs. Lynde's power as a gossip is recognized as potentially destructive within the small rural community; she, like *The Patriot*'s "resourceful woman," has the power to create people and destroy futures with her network of talk.

In illustration of this power, virtually every page of Anne's dialogue is peppered with the phrase "Mrs. Lynde says …," suggesting that Mrs. Lynde's ideas, while they are both accepted and rejected by Anne and by the narrator, are not to be lightly dismissed (Davey 168-9). Mrs. Rachel Lynde has weight in Avonlea. She functions as the "telewoman" feared and mocked by legitimized gossips like "Starlight"; she fills in the blank spaces implied by country correspondents' intolerance of gossips and the patronizing tone extended to them, by allowing the reader to understand that such women were not to be ignored. Montgomery thus broadens the narrow boundaries of a newspaper like *The Patriot* or *The Examiner* in her depiction of Mrs. Rachel Lynde by writing her into a new kind of discourse. *Anne of Green Gables* draws the private sphere as an active sphere, full of power exchanges and meaningful moments demanding recognition and discussion. Ultimately, however, Montgomery cannot resist echoing the sentiments of male country correspondents and consistently using her third-person narrative voice to patronize and undermine Mrs. Lynde.

Mocking comments are sporadically introduced to rupture Mrs. Lynde's power by pointing out her weaknesses; "Mrs. Rachel Lynde swept out and away — if a fat woman who always waddled *could* be said to sweep

away …" (66). Thus despite drawing the character as powerful and endowing her, and therefore the private sphere, with a kind of strength, the reader is taught not to take Mrs. Lynde without the requisite grain of salt. Ultimately, reflecting the dominant discourses of her time, Mrs. Lynde's character is not drawn without hesitation; despite her possible representation as a matriarch in Anne's world, and despite her characterization as a powerful female gossip, Mrs. Lynde serves, finally, as a representation of patriarchy and a patriarchal voice. Further analysis of the patriarchal voice inherent in Island gender discourse as it is manifested in the news will illustrate why Montgomery's characterization of Mrs. Lynde, and each of her characters, is ultimately problematic.

The following article appears on the front page of *The Patriot* on December 2, 1880. While its appearance predates Anne's publication by over two decades, the ideologies contained within it offer a foundation for the kind of separate sphere doctrines that are embedded more implicitly in later news production and in *Anne of Green Gables*, itself set in the 1880s. Titled "Shpenhauer's [sic] Opinions on the Sex," the article, obviously imported from an outside source, reads:

> The mere aspect of woman proves that she is destined neither for great labors of intelligence nor for great material undertakings. She owes her debt to life not by action but by suffering; she ought, therefore, to obey man, and to be his patient companion, restoring serenity to his mind.
>
> … Women are and will remain in their ensemble the most accomplished and the most incurable of Philistines, thanks to our social organization which is absurd to an extreme degree, and which makes them share the title and situation of man, no matter how elevated he may be.

Like the excerpt comparing women and men cited earlier, women are viewed only in terms of their "lesser" value to men.

It is ultimately the same patronizing voice that is responsible for the local news. Women, in turn-of-the-century PEI, are subject to a controlling, sometimes diminishing, always authoritative, patriarchal centre of power and control. The following appeared on the front page of *The Examiner* on July 7, 1909, scoffing at the stirrings of feminism in Toronto:

> It was declared at the Women's Congress in Toronto that one-half of the women in asylums and in their graves were mad or dead because of their husbands; that only about ten per cent of marriages were so satisfactory to justify their being undertaken; that in Canada it is woman's lot to be nearly thrashed before she dies; that divorces are less frequent because women have not the courage to ask for them — and more of the same sort. Can this be so? Or was the hot weather of Toronto too much for the fair one's nerves. (*The Examiner* July 7, 1909, front page)

The editorial voice of *The Examiner* turns the active, angry female reformer into an object of scorn. The force of patriarchal thinking is made manifest, and it becomes clear that, for the most part, dissension in any representation of gender ideologies would not have been supported from within the culture. Montgomery was, of course, absorbing and reflecting the dominant discourses of her culture in *Anne of Green Gables*, and her representations of gender alternately push themselves outside of those offered in the newspaper and shrink back into them.[6]

There is a patriarch living at Green Gables; his status as such is just masked by his gentle heart and soft voice. In *Anne of Green Gables*, Matthew works in a similar capacity as Miss Stacey, and even the Allans, who are introduced as broad-minded replacements of rigid educational and religious systems. Matthew works as Montgomery's vision of a better man, a better kind of patriarchy. Yet unlike Miss Stacey and the Allans, whose introduction mid-story represents a kind of progress from repressive to hopeful, Matthew is present from the beginning of the story, and his power is only ruptured and replaced at the end — with his death. Montgomery's broad and more progressive model of education stands in the final pages of her novel, but her expansive notions of patriarchal power are obliterated with Matthew's replacement with a patriarchal status quo, led (problematically) by Mrs. Lynde.

A traditional patriarch functions as the head of a household, the controlling organizer of public affairs, the "boss" responsible for rule making and implementation. Montgomery's Matthew fulfils many of these criteria; he is the nominal head of the household; he acts and interacts outside of the domestic sphere; he is in charge of the finances (291); he expects to have his domestic needs met and catered to by his sister (25). While little else about Matthew may suggest patriarchal values, his roles within Green Gables insist that we recognize that he retained some of the most defining characteristics of a patriarch.

Traditional scholarship[7] assumes that because Matthew is aligned with Anne, he is not controlling, an assumption that is disputed by the fact that almost every single major plot point in the novel is precipitated by Matthew's voicing of his authority and his position within Green Gables. Mrs. Lynde speaks loudly and continually throughout the novel, as does Anne, and even Marilla. Matthew does not speak often. Yet when he does his power is absolute. It is Matthew who extracts an apology out of Anne (71). It is Matthew who voices his desire to keep Anne and enables Marilla to act to fulfil her own repressed needs. When Matthew speaks the reader is conditioned to listen. Fitting Matthew in with the world constructed in the newspapers studied, a world that only truly legitimizes and authorizes the male voice, one can see that his position within the narrative is informed by his position within the culture that produced him. But Montgomery's inclusion

of Matthew is at least partially manipulative. She is responding to the demands of her culture by inserting a male voice into her narrative, but she is subverting those same demands by allowing her representative of patriarchy to be supportive of progressive gender ideologies.

Kornfield and Jackson call Matthew a "feminized man." (150).[8] While I will not disagree that Matthew is anything but the typical authoritative patriarch, I do think his presence within the text merits critical attention. Matthew loves and nurtures Anne, which is a very different thing from being loving and nurturing. In fact, Matthew's absolute fear of the female sex (with the exclusion of Marilla and, strangely, Mrs. Lynde) is one of the first pieces of information we are given about him. Before we are told what Matthew looks like, we are told "Matthew dreaded all women ..." (9). Later in the chapter, we are told that Matthew thinks: "Women were bad enough in all conscience, but little girls were worse. He detested the way they had of sidling past him timidly ..." (15). Thus to suggest that Matthew is feminine contradicts his characterization in the story dangerously.

Matthew is idealized only in his relationship with Anne, who is originally as far from typically, passively feminine as any girl or woman in Avonlea. Susan Drain writes: "Anne does not so much do the unusual as do the usual differently. Chiefly that consists of her being unlike her female peers without being at all like the male" ("Feminine" 43). I would extend this argument to apply equally to Matthew; he is not, then, a "feminized man," but rather Montgomery's version of a different kind of man, a different kind of patriarch.

Shaped by dominant discourses that privileged the male voice and imbued only it with authority, Matthew's presence sheds important light on Montgomery's perceptions of patriarchy and her efforts to filter them, as she filters education and religion, through a progressive lens (Berg 127). But this process is made more difficult because of the problematics inherent in cultural representations of gender: Matthew is ultimately less symbolic of traditional, status-quo-enforcing patriarchy (and subsequently less long-lived) than the story's supposed matriarch — Mrs. Rachel Lynde.

Standing above, inside, and on the edges of Anne's world, the powerful, thoroughly female Mrs. Lynde is a symbol of the nuances inherent in a binaristic code of gender roles (Berg 127). But Mrs. Lynde's own power is ultimately dependent on her own continual reinforcement of the patriarchal status quo. Her comments, often reintroduced through Anne, serve to suggest the kinds of dominant separate sphere discourses circulating in patriarchal Island society. For example, Anne says: "'Mrs. Lynde says they've never had a female teacher in Avonlea before and she thinks it is a dangerous innovation'" (182); and later, "' Why can't women be ministers, Marilla? I asked Mrs. Lynde that and she was shocked and said it would be a scandalous thing. She said there might be female ministers in the States and she

believed there was, but thank goodness we hadn't got to that stage in Canada yet and she hoped we never would'" (251).

Mrs. Lynde thus does not challenge male dominated culture; her position is dependent upon the maintenance of separate sphere ideologies and as such she continually voices doctrines supporting, not undermining, dominant patriarchal discourse. The gossiping Mrs. Lynde does not transgress gender roles; she may be powerful, but that power is dependent on her fulfilment of her own female role, on her status as an efficient housekeeper, a good wife, and an active Christian. In order to maintain her power, Mrs. Lynde must accept and not challenge the patriarchal mechanisms of her society (Davey 168-9; Drain, "Feminine" 48).

What happens when Mrs. Lynde, problematic and sometimes contradictory supporter of patriarchal values, meets the equally problematic and contradictory Matthew Cuthbert? Matthew and Mrs. Lynde interact directly only twice in the text. Most significantly, it is Mrs. Lynde who pronounces Matthew dead in the final pages of the novel (293). I suggest that this narrative choice is symbolic of the book's shift, from Matthew's kind of progressive patriarchy into Mrs. Lynde's narrower one. Mrs. Lynde's presence within the text at this precise moment is reflective of the book's losing battle with patriarchy; her presence reflects a narrative choice precipitated by the cultural ideals that were so pervasive in the news. From the point of Matthew's death onwards, a reversal occurs in the text, and Anne, up until the moment of Matthew's death in pursuit of a higher education, takes up her position, with Mrs. Lynde's full approval (304), as the self-sacrificing feminine woman of Green Gables.

Mrs. Lynde does not become less powerful at the moment of Matthew's death, but Anne and Marilla do. They slide out of the realm of prickly and disruptive and into the realm of neutral, passive, and perfect icons of Victorian thinking about women as nurturers, domestic angels. Mrs. Lynde, the only central character who voices almost purely patriarchal thoughts, does not lose any power because Matthew's absence (the absence of a different kind of patriarchy) guarantees her ideological ascension as a figurehead for the text. Anne's fate at the end of the novel does not conform to Matthew's vision for her future (in fact it works, at least temporarily, in direct opposition to it), nor does it conform to Marilla's vision for her, and it certainly does not begin to fulfil Anne's own hopes for herself. Mrs. Lynde is the only person whose expectations are fully and unhesitatingly satisfied with Anne's choice to stay at home.

Matthew's death creates a space for Anne at Green Gables and ironically gives her the most ideal and feminine of excuses to replace her ambition with conformity. Thus while, as I have argued, Matthew did work to control and shape the women of the text, he also worked to empower them by providing them with untraditional patriarchal acceptance. After Matthew's

death, patriarchy remains present, but it has ironically taken on a feminine shape infinitely more rigid than the masculine one that preceded it.

So why does Montgomery work backwards in her construction of gender? Why does she allow her progressive vision of education to stand unchallenged but feel compelled to kill off Matthew and keep Anne at home? It is clear, upon close examination of the oppressive dominant discourses manifested in the Island newspaper, that Montgomery had little alternative for her novel, culturally and personally. The patriarchal voice controlling the news infiltrated the culture and made, as the articles cited cannot fail to demonstrate, uncomplicated dissension and resistance impossible. Surrounded by a popular culture that defined itself according to patriarchal notions of female inequality, Montgomery wrote a text that frequently affirmed social conventions and, in so doing, further inscribed them into the discourses of her time.

Produced daily and with vigour, turn-of-the-century Island newspapers provide readers with an opportunity to reconstruct a culture, to identify the preoccupations, values, and ideologies specific to a time and a place. Loaded with dominant discourses both local and international, papers like *The Patriot* and *The Examiner* work to illustrate the cultural context out of which *Anne of Green Gables* was born. By examining some of the central themes defining Island life at the turn of the century — education and gender — alongside Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, we can see how the dominant discourses at work in the province were manifested in the news and the novel and that they were modified in each.

Anne of Green Gables will continue to have relevance for its empowering and unconventional investigations of girlhood and resistance; this article has argued that it is at least equally relevant to explore the ways in which the novel adapted itself to the ideologies of its time. No less powerful for its concessions to dominant discourse, *Anne of Green Gables* works to affirm, dismantle, and rewrite the master narratives of its own time and place. *The Patriot* and *The Examiner*, printed legacies of an Island and a culture Montgomery called home, act as important pathways into a work and a woman central to contemporary discussions of Canadian history, storytelling, and culture.

Notes

1 This paper is a much-abbreviated version of a Master's thesis I completed at the University of Guelph in December 1999. The longer study included a detailed investigation of community, education, religion, politics, and gender in *Anne of Green Gables* and PEI's turn of the century newspapers.

2 I also spent considerable time researching *The Guardian*. It was the first paper I examined and I combed a four month period extending from August to December

1903. I did not focus on *The Guardian*, although it is the only Island paper still in circulation, because archival resources did not permit. The University of Guelph only has holdings of *The Guardian* up until December 1903. More research on *The Guardian* may yield some further important insights since this was the paper with which Montgomery seemed to be engaged in the longest relationship; her journal excerpts indicate that she received the paper in Norval, Ontario, over two decades after leaving the Island (*SJ III* 21, 119).

3 As evidence of the awesome predominance of the newspaper in Island life, PEI's news production increased dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1885, PEI had a population of almost 108,891 and produced only twelve papers in total. While the population between 1885 and 1895 rose by only 109, newspaper production almost doubled. PEI's news production in 1885 was not noteworthy; by 1896 it was highly, even astoundingly, competitive, standing firm alongside metropolitan city centres (Boylan 190). For example, London, England, in 1896 boasted a population of 4.8 million and was producing 22 newspapers (Marzolf 535). In 1896, PEI, with an approximate population of 109,000 (*Year Book* 1912 3), had twenty newspapers of varying size and success in print (Boylan 192-3).

4 In 1911, 41,753 of the Island's 103,259 inhabitants were Scottish in origin, comprising the largest ethnic group represented in the province. The English are next at 24,043. In every other province, the English far outweigh the Scots (*Year Book 1912* 25). Scottish influences on the Island were thus significant, particularly as they pertain to developments in education.

5 Similarly, one can identify room for growth and some dissension in discussions of religion, despite the fact that the Island (and Island newspapers) are often overwhelmingly religious in focus and tone. As she does with education, Montgomery offers an expansive vision of religion in *Anne of Green Gables*, replacing the bland and insincere local preacher with the tolerant Allans mid-novel, and, in so doing, replacing rigid and old-fashioned notions of staunch Presbyterianism with equally religious but ultimately more spiritual ideas about God and faith.

6 Much academic debate about *Anne of Green Gables* has focused on Anne's development in the novel — from irrepressible girl into conventional young woman. This development obviously finds cultural reinforcement when the novel is located alongside the news of the era. While Anne's metamorphosis is undoubtedly complex and her metaphor of choice — the bend in the road — works, as scholars have suggested, to possibly subvert Anne's happy ending, there is little doubt that Anne's characterization at least superficially conforms to the predominant gender discourses of her time. See Rubio "Architect," and Drain.

7 See, for example, Patricia Kelly Santlemann (70).

8 See also Ahmansson (81), and Epperly and Gammel (7).

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