

***L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.* Ed. Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999. Pp. xv + 267, reference, index, \$25, ISBN 0-8020-4406-9.)**

Diane Tye

Volume 22, numéro 2, 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087908ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087908ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Tye, D. (2000). Compte rendu de [*L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.* Ed. Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999. Pp. xv + 267, reference, index, \$25, ISBN 0-8020-4406-9.)]. *Ethnologies*, 22(2), 301–302. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087908ar>

**L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.** Ed. Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999. Pp. xv + 267, reference, index, \$25, ISBN 0-8020-4406-9.)

*L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* is, in the words of editors Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly, “the first systematic effort to investigate the question of the Canadianness of Montgomery’s writing.” The editors continue, “The essays in this collection argue that L. M. Montgomery strategically inscribes the signifiers of Canadian distinctness, even while appealing to a broad, international readership. This collection maps the important cultural, social, and popular domains of Montgomery’s impact” (5). Some of the seventeen essays were originally given as presentations at two symposia organized by the L. M. Montgomery Institute of the University of Prince Edward Island while others were solicited and written specifically for this publication. Contributed by an impressive list of international authors, articles are organized under six subheadings: Montgomery and Canadian Nationalism; Romance and the Shaping of Canadian Culture; Religion, Education and Technology; Motherhood, Family, and Feminism; Anne as Cultural Icon; and Montgomery, Canada and Cultural Tourism. The volume does not consider the popular television versions or series of Montgomery’s work or the popular stage play, *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical* which the editors indicate is the focus of another upcoming study. However, the essays do cover a wide gamut, contextualizing Montgomery’s writing (in light of cultural aspects such as Scots Presbyterianism, education and the technological and social changes of the author’s lifetime), exploring multiple meanings readers make of Anne, and examining intersections of Montgomery’s works with popular and traditional culture. So, while I am not particularly excited by this book — there is not a lot new here — it is certainly a very solid collection of essays that recognizes Montgomery as the influential Canadian writer she was.

*L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* is not so much a departure as an elaboration of the growing literature that treats Montgomery as a serious author and attempts to better assess her impact. Both contributors and themes will be familiar to readers of Montgomery and literary treatments of her work, connecting her writing to broader social and cultural trends, exploring her powerful evocation of place and identifying sites of contestation and resistance in her fiction. Folklorists might find useful interdisciplinary models here for textual interpretations: Laura M. Robinson explores communal identity; Mary Henley Rubio demonstrates an appreciation of the power of storytelling in

her look at Scottish-Presbyterian agency in Canadian culture; Erika Rothwell points to the multiple meanings of knitting, linking it and Montgomery's fiction with maternal feminism; Theodore F. Sheckels contrasts Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* with the 1934 American film based on the novel, and Yoshiko Akamatsu examines Anne's contemporary popularity in Japan. However, there is no strictly folkloristic discussion of Montgomery's fiction for, as Rubio indicates in her essay, aspects such as the influences of Scottish oral tradition on Montgomery have not yet been adequately investigated (104).

My favourite pieces are the personal reflections, beginning with Adrienne Clarkson's preface. Clarkson sets up the collection with her description of how L. M. Montgomery's books offered her a "profound understanding of what Canada is" (ix). She writes: "L. M. Montgomery understood emotions and she understood motivation; her people *are* Canada. I was taught by them as I read through her novels. Fiction, like art, tells the truth from the inside" (x). She concludes that Montgomery offered her a sense of belonging and "That is the magic of fiction; that is its transforming power" (xii). Illustrative of this transformative power is another reflective piece, an interview with Sharon J. Hamilton. Now a professor of English, Hamilton found a positive sense of identity as a young girl through the pages of books such as *Anne of Green Gables*. Her early identification with Anne literally changed her life, helping her to envision other ways of living and to recognize that she should have access to love and affection (196). The book ends, outside of a brief epilogue, with a personal comment by Margaret Atwood who confesses that *Anne of Green Gables* is one of those books you feel almost guilty liking (my own sentiments exactly) before going on to consider the centrality of Marilla, rather than Anne, to the book's popularity among adults. These reflections gave me much to think about and reaffirmed once again my conviction that social scientists in general, and folklorists in particular, can make fuller use of such personal experience narratives at the same time we might contribute to better understanding the meanings individuals make of popular culture. I finish *L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* well reminded of what scholars of traditional culture can learn from and offer to interpretations of regional and national literatures.

Diane Tye  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
St. John's, Newfoundland