

**(Her)itage: Literary Tourism and the Popular Legacies  
of Louisa May Alcott, L.M. Montgomery, and Beatrix Potter**

by

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## **Dedication**

For  
Laura Conrad  
and  
Marcella Conrad



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## Introduction

*“One cannot understand any historical actor’s significance without confronting posterity’s repossession of him or her.” –Lawrence Buell*

The 2013 romantic comedy *Austenland* recounts the exploits of Jane Hayes (Keri Russell), a Jane Austen fan who travels to England to participate in an immersive literary tourism experience at an English manor house (Hess and Hale 2013). A stereotypical ‘plain Jane,’ this hapless protagonist is depicted as stuck in an adolescent obsession with Jane Austen’s books and their film adaptations. A life-sized cardboard cutout of Colin Firth from the TV miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) guards the front door to Jane’s apartment; her pastel-hued bedroom is cluttered with porcelain dolls, a large dollhouse, and ‘I heart Darcy’ bumper stickers. Jane’s awkward yet unabashed love of Austen is laid on thick; she uses her savings to book the vacation and arrives at Heathrow airport in a Regency-era dress and bonnet.<sup>1</sup>

The Austen attraction maps guests’ socioeconomic class onto the class hierarchy of Austen’s day, with tourists who can afford to pay more receiving better accommodations, costumes, and romantic experiences. The vacation package amenities hint at sex tourism, promising each lady ‘a proposal’ by the final night’s ball. Jane, who can only afford the lowest class package, is assigned stable boy Martin (Bret McKenzie) for her romance plot, but her flirtations with Mr. Darcy-esque Mr. Nobly (J.J. Feild) improbably yield a happy ending when he

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough review of scholarly discussions about Jane Austen fandom, see Juliette Wells’ *Everybody’s Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* (2012).

follows Jane back to the United States and declares his love for her.<sup>2</sup>

The film ruthlessly mocks package tours and the tourists who book into them. Pathetic and passive Jane, who cares too much about Austen's works, is contrasted by the brassy consumerism of wealthy American tourist Miss Elizabeth Charming (Jennifer Coolidge), who cares too little. Unapologetically brash and swaddled in bright pink fabrics, Miss Charming is a study in excess, embracing the fun of the charade despite being unfamiliar with Austen or the period. Miss Charming ultimately ousts elitist Austen experience director Mrs. Wattlesbrook (Jane Seymour) by purchasing the manor and democratizing it as a Regency-themed amusement park accessible to all.

Tourists visit sites of literary significance by the millions, with varying degrees of intellectual and financial investment. As one of the few popular depictions of literary tourists, *Austenland* raises a number of questions about how fans relate to writers, their works, and their historical milieus. *Austenland* leans on well-worn tropes of media fans as being immature and socially awkward (Jenkins 17). Tourist stereotypes—Jane as the shy, fish-out-of-water traveler and Miss Charming as the quintessential loud, uncouth American abroad—leave viewers to wonder: are adult women who derive personal meaning and pleasure from emulating real and fictional women from the past truly as gullible and pathetic as *Austenland* would have viewers believe? What might contemporary women's engagements with and emulations of historical figures reveal about the anxieties of their own time? Which aspects of historical feminine subjectivities are 21st century women drawn to emulate, and why?

This dissertation considers how writers' legacies are interpreted inside and outside literary house museums. The interlocking discourses generated by museum professionals,

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<sup>2</sup> The familiar embedding of an Austen-esque plot within the postfeminist romcom, common from the 1990s onward, constitutes something of a subgenre at this point (e.g. *Clueless* (1995) based on *Emma* (1815); *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) based on *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)).

tourists, and creators of derivative works reveal the ways particular writers and fictional works become resources for the articulation of their contemporary identities, femininities, and feminisms. Eschewing the sensationalist pathologizing of accounts such as *Austenland*, I theorize the pleasures and politics of adult women's engagements with famous literary women and with their own childhood memories through an examination of the popular legacies of Louisa May Alcott, L.M. Montgomery, and Beatrix Potter. These writers' iconic works of children's literature have endured for over a century as transatlantic classics beloved by adults as well as children. *Little Women* (1868-1869, American), *Anne of Green Gables* (1908, Canadian), and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902, English) have been translated into 30+ languages and continue to inspire admiration, adaptation, and tourist pilgrimage. The phenomenological spaces of literary tourism provide evocative settings for fans/readers/tourists to interface with the producers of heritage sites and creators of intertexts as they shape their personal interpretations. I argue that contemporary interpretations of historical feminine subjects furnish comfort, escape, and inspiration to contemporary women seeking to articulate feminine identity amidst the longings and anxieties of the 21st century postfeminist moment.

Extraliterary discourse about writers and literature occurs at physical and virtual locations too numerous to explore in a single dissertation. Gatherings such as the biennial L.M. Montgomery Institute and Beatrix Potter Studies<sup>3</sup> conferences resound with remembrance of and conjecture about these authors, but their participants tend to be academics and other experts. 'Ordinary' people and enthusiasts are more likely to visit internet fan sites and Facebook groups, which attract participants globally and provide opportunities for media fans to converse, debate, and celebrate the objects of their devotion. I focus on four sources of contemporary interpretation

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<sup>3</sup> The Louisa Alcott Society (<http://www.louisamayalcottociety.org/>) does not meet independently, but sponsors scholarly panels at larger literary conferences.

connected more or less closely to museums, because the historic house museums<sup>4</sup> where Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter are presented for tourists—opened to the public as official attractions in 1912, 1937,<sup>5</sup> and 1944, respectively—are long-standing, centralized, one-of-a-kind places where interpretation of authorial legacies is the *raison d'être*. Museums offer visitors a firsthand, immediate encounter with unique objects and with other fans, inspiring tourists to recollect their own childhood reading experiences while they explore the authors' life stories and literary stories. The phenomenological immersion of a museum site, including sights, scents, and sounds, is more intense than the experience of a virtual website, and more democratic than an academic or specialist conference.

I focus on a different group of 'interpreters' in each case study. Chapter One examines the interpretation of Louisa May Alcott's life and works by guides at Orchard House (Concord, MA). In Chapter Two, tourists' fantasies of recreating Anne's arrival at Green Gables have resulted in the popular practice of temporarily dressing up as the red-haired protagonist at Green Gables Heritage Place (Cavendish, PE) and elsewhere on Prince Edward Island. In Chapter Three, I compare the neofeminist interpretation of Beatrix Potter in the film *Miss Potter* (2006) with interpretations of her life at the Hill Top Farm (Near Sawrey, UK), a commemorative site that she co-authored. Chapter Four examines museum stores, where retail staff curate a collection of goods for sale that represent meanings generated by guides, tourists, and creators of intertexts. The built environment, collections of artifacts, and unique landscapes at these sites change at an imperceptible rate due to preservation and restoration efforts, but discourses

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<sup>4</sup> Hill Top is not technically a museum, as this designation requires an official accreditation in the UK, but for simplicity's sake I refer to all three houses interchangeably as museums or historic sites, as all three similarly maintain preserved material collections and interpret the past for visitors.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study, the founding of Green Gables Heritage Place is dated to 1937 as this is the year of the property's acquisition by the federal government for inclusion in the new Prince Edward Island National Park (MacEachern 87, 96). Prior to that point, owners Ernest and Myrtle Webb had been welcoming tourists for a number of years.

echoing through these historic houses are quite the opposite: dynamic, dialogic, and heavily influenced by the present-day cultural milieux of the people who populate them.

Though Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter were publishing in the latter-19th and early-20th centuries, interpretations by 21st-century museum guides, tourists, creators of intertexts, and retail staff reframe the literary past to be useful in the present day.<sup>6</sup> This is a study of how these writers and their stories, rather than being ‘timeless,’ are in fact actively, in American studies scholar Lawrence Buell’s words, ‘repossessed’ (1995: 312) by later generations in extraliterary forms that prolong and reinvent their usefulness for new generations of women.<sup>7</sup> As the title and literature review indicate, this is primarily a work of heritage/tourism studies, not literary criticism. The object of analysis is not literary texts, but the discourses around the literary tourism practices borne of literary texts. Tourism promoters tend to fetishize place as the root of authorial motivation and inspiration, but Nicola Watson (2006) argues that literary tourism is motivated by fictional texts that invite touristic engagement—that is, the fictional text brings attention to the place as exceptional rather than the exceptional place bringing forth the text.

Using Watson’s concept as an entry point into three house museums, I engage with the original works of Alcott and Montgomery, and a biographical film about Beatrix Potter, to analyze how

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<sup>6</sup> Literary tourism is a rich field replete with disciplinary intersections. For example, from an ecocritical perspective, one could examine the relationship of literary enshrinement to the economics, ecology, and poetics of landscape preservation; from a postcolonial perspective one might interrogate the canonization and museum interpretation of white, middle-class authors and fictional characters as presented to a diverse global audience. A postfeminist lens is by no means the only way to study interpretations at these sites, but limiting the scope of this study to a single possibility permits an in-depth analysis of meaning-making at specific sites, by specific groups.

<sup>7</sup> According to staff at Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top, their ‘typical’ visitor is an adult woman. Because visits often occur within the context of a family vacation to the area, male partners comprise a significant percentage of admissions. Labeled ‘accompanying husbands’ by several staff, these men exhibit varying degrees of interest and appreciation. An Orchard House guide comments, “It’s mostly women and their husbands who come along. Who’ve probably suffered through watching the movie a few times. We’ll get those men who say ‘we know the story, we had to watch the movie’” (Sousa 2014). Hill Top House Steward Catherine Pritchard reports that several times a week a man will comment that he is fascinated by the architecture of the house (Pritchard 2014a). I spoke personally with a number of couples celebrating wedding anniversaries with a visit to Green Gables in autumn 2011. One keen fellow proudly stated that he’d read his wife’s favorite book in preparation for the visit. “It was very good,” he assured me. And then he volunteered to recite his favorite line from *Anne of Green Gables*, much to his wife’s delight.

textual themes and content cue and constitute the tourism experience. This study of early 21st century interpretations and emulations of children's book authors and characters could certainly highlight aspects of the original texts that attract fans. The aim, however, is not to show what fans find of value in the original texts, but to show how multiple interpretive communities come together in a heritage setting to talk about a particular author or story in a particular way at a particular time. The curation and consumption of the past as observed in the adaptation of century-old literature for contemporary commercial uses and heritage interpretations sheds light on longings and anxieties of the contemporary moment.

This introduction begins with a rationale for the selection of Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter, followed by a definition of several key terms. I propose the term *(her)itage* to describe engagements of contemporary women with historical figures and memories of their own childhoods. I explain why analyzing a range of popular interpretations of these authors is the best way to comprehensively understand their extraliterary legacies as they have developed in the historical period of 'postfeminism,' and my methods for doing so within the theoretical frameworks of tourism studies and, to a lesser extent, feminist popular culture studies and museum studies. In conclusion, I discuss why this work is important to understanding how the legacies of historical women are inherited and interpreted as a resource for 21st century women's identities.

### **Why These Authors?**

#### ***The Golden Age, Canonicity, Multiplicity, and Transnationality***

The period in which Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter published their initial works of children's literature is known as 'The Golden Age' of children's literature. Dated from the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) through A.A. Milne's

*Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), The Golden Age was a period of prolific literary output for child-readers, during which a number of books now considered ‘classics’ were published. Among the larger forces that made this boom in children’s literature possible was the availability of less costly printing technologies and a growing middle-class consumer market for goods of all kinds. Perhaps most importantly, products for children during this period represented changing ideas about what children were ‘for’—changes brought about by child labor laws that excluded children as wage-earners and the new tendency of middle-class parents to have fewer children (Zelizer 1994). The market readily responded with books and goods intended to nurture, entertain, and reward cherished children. Children’s literature scholar John Goldthwaite describes in the period “an almost epicurean taste for sentimentalism and a rush to children’s books as an ideal place to indulge it” (Goldthwaite 1996: 11).

Coinciding as they did with the rise of the treasured and nurtured middle-class child, Golden Age texts provided sturdy cultural constructions of childhood as it ‘ought’ to be. The originator of the term, children’s writer and biographer Roger Lancelyn Green, argued in 1965 that Golden Age authors envisioned childhood as not only a unique time, but a unique place, “a new world to be explored” (Green, qtd in Sorby 2011: 97). Children’s literature scholar Humphrey Carpenter reads into a number of works from this period the desire of their late 19th and early 20th century authors to escape from contemporary society. Their fanciful fictitious jaunts to prelapsarian gardens of childhood, “presumably walled off from base urges and adult agendas” (Sorby 98) reflected the authors’ own nostalgia for a past, simpler time, and laid the groundwork for nostalgia on the part of readers a century later.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables* do not fit as tidily into the Golden Age classification as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, though chronologically they are certainly of this period. Neither Sorby nor Carpenter believe that *Little Women* belongs thematically to the British Golden Age paradigm. Sorby calls its inclusion ‘awkward’ (97); Carpenter includes it in his book on Golden Age works as a contrast to books about family being published in

The possibility of the utopias imagined by Golden Age writers was vanquished, according to Carpenter, by the horrors and upset of World War One, after which writing for children was never the same (1985: 211).<sup>9</sup> Preservation of the settings of fictions occurring in historic New England, rural Maritime Canada, and the sublime English Lake District can be seen as attempts to safeguard the idealized places and times the books evoke. That the utopias described by Alcott (the loving home), Montgomery (the gentle island), and Potter (the lush cottage garden) should be desirable tourist ‘escapes’ for 21st century readers even further distanced from this exalted time should come as no surprise. In addition to the Golden Age periodization and utopic settings of their most famous works, these authors were selected because their works share several key features: unremitting status as ‘classics,’ proliferation in multiple media, and transnationality.

Calling Golden Age books ‘classics’ firmly tethers them to their socioeconomic ‘class’ and the social power of the white, educated people who initially wrote, published, and purchased them. More than a label for an epoch, the ‘Golden Age’ signifies an elite cultural construction of childhood. Sorby cautions, “it is vital to remember that this metaphor [of a Golden Age] did not describe the whole world, but rather the middle- and upper-middle-class strata of the British Empire” (96), and the anti-multicultural position of those who occupied these strata. In original and adapted forms, however, the works in question have become ubiquitous, not quite reaching

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England during the period, though Alcott could be said to create an “Arcadia” of sorts in her depiction of the idealized March family (97). *Anne of Green Gables* is rarely cited as exemplary of Golden Age work; the term refers to British works with few exceptions and Canada’s historic ties to the United Kingdom have not warranted the novel’s inclusion. *Anne of Green Gables* has always been a kind of one-off, despite being the go-to children’s ‘classic’ of Canada, a nation not known for notable contributions to children’s literature. Thematically, however, Anne’s childhood is marked by curiosity, wonder, learning, a desire to be ‘good,’ and a Romantic connection to nature. The novel’s island setting is certainly reminiscent of the bucolic utopias of the Golden Age texts. Though debatable and untidy, the Golden Age is the best category available to periodize these works.

<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon to see the beginning of the War as marking the end of the Golden Age, rather than the later Milne date.



the least privileged, but certainly saturating school libraries, bookstores, and bedroom bookshelves of more diverse swaths of the middle classes.

The ‘gold’ in Golden Age can also be interpreted as reflecting the texts’ status as cultural currency, which is partly a holdover from the class status of their original audiences. Certain books continue to be printed, sold, and read generation after generation because caregivers shopping for a child will often select books they recall enjoying in their own childhoods. Books that sell because they are familiar become more familiar because they are highly visible and readily available in stores. (*Little Women*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and the collected tales of Beatrix Potter are predictably stocked on ‘classics’ shelves in any 21st century Barnes & Noble children’s department.) Children’s literature scholar Deborah Stevenson says “you do not have to read *Alice [in Wonderland]*, but you will be deemed culturally illiterate should you not acknowledge it as a children’s literature classic” (qtd in Kidd 57), meaning that even if the caregiver *didn’t* read any Golden Age books as a child, they are so ubiquitous on library, popular, and reviewer lists of ‘classics,’ and so reliably offered in the ‘classics’ section at the bookstore, that a purchase may be made solely based on the book’s canonical reputation.

Louise Seaman Bechtel, the first woman head of a children’s book division within a major publishing house, defined the classic as “a book so widely loved that it lives on long in print and in people’s hearts. It doesn’t have to be great literature” (Kidd 55). It also doesn’t have to be in ‘print’ per se. The longer a story remains familiar and accessible, the more likely it is to be translated, adapted, remade in different media, or reinterpreted in terms of authorial biography and historical context. Each iteration brings new audiences to the original work. Kenneth Kidd aptly characterizes the cycle of admiration and reinvention: “[w]e all share this sense of ‘classic’ as not only immutable and grand but also portable and familiar. The classic is meant to circulate

widely, even *promiscuously*” (emphasis added, Kidd 54). Undiscerning circulation and the familiarity it breeds cause classic texts to lose some cultural cachet at the expense of increased brand recognition. Whether or not it dilutes or commercializes the content, ‘promiscuous’ circulation—in the form of abridged versions of novel-length works for younger readers or film adaptations—democratizes classic stories, generates new audiences for them, and prolongs their popularity.

Best known as children’s writers, Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter created durable touchstones of culture for millions who have grown up reading them. The most famous works of each (incidentally also each author’s first published work for children) have been reinterpreted in multiple media in the century or more since their publication. Each has been translated from page to screen and stage, numerous times. Each author has been the subject of multiple biographies, and of biographical films of varying lengths. Each has inspired tourist pilgrimages to the historic and commercial sites maintained to commemorate her legacy. In each case, therefore, familiarity with, and access to, a text and its author, are not limited to the book itself. In each case, there is a massive archive of visual and material culture produced *because of* the text that exists *outside of* the text.

Considering the interconnected histories of the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and the intense cross-pollination of ideas resulting from cultural texts and people that have flowed between these nations for centuries, the juxtaposition of these three authors creates a comprehensive, transnational picture of interpretations of children’s literature writers.

Entanglement of these three national contexts is evident in terms of cross-readership and connections among the authors themselves. Beatrix Potter, though English, was interested in, and influenced by, American literature. In a letter to the Denver Public Library, Potter comments that

as a girl she: “had no access to the American current literature,” but “*Little Women* was a standard book” (Heelis 1930). In a 1934 letter to Helen Dean Fish she says “I did not meet with *Little Women* until much later” (qtd in Schafer 1999: 43), suggesting that she became familiar with Alcott’s work at some point in her life (Heelis 1930). Despite her denial of access to American literature, her journals and early drawings reveal a strong attraction to Joel Chandler Harris’s *Uncle Remus* stories (Goldthwaite 1996: 304-308).<sup>10</sup> Race relations in the United States underpin Potter’s books materially as well as aesthetically: Frederick Warne, founder of the publishing house that would print nearly all of Beatrix Potter’s books, “used to amuse the family by telling them that he married on the profits of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the rights to which he bought from the original publishers in the U.S.A.” (Clegg 1993: 7). In the United States, the second-bestselling children’s hardcover book of the 20th century was Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, with over 9 million copies in print (Roback and Britton 2001) and fifty percent of Beatrix Potter Society members hail from the United States and Canada, leading one Potter scholar to proclaim, “Potter has an important place in children’s literature in North America!” (Jacobsen 1996: 75).

Americans are the 3rd-largest group to visit Hill Top (14%), after tourists from the UK (45%) and Japan (32%) (Pritchard 2015). Beatrix Potter often entertained American visitors at Hill Top during her lifetime, finding them more appreciative and understanding of her works than her fellow Britons: “I am always pleased to see Americans,” she wrote in a letter to a favorite American visitor, “I don’t know what I think about you as a nation (with a big N!) but the individuals who have looked for Peter Rabbit have all been delightful” (qtd in Morse 11). When she needed to raise money in 1927 to purchase Cockshott Point, “a strip of foreshore

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<sup>10</sup> Copies of several Joel Chandler Harris books belonging to Potter’s father were found in her personal library at the time of her death, suggesting her lasting affinity for Harris’s works (Goldthwaite 1996: 305).

woodland and meadow” ahead of developers, she appealed to Bertha Mahoney, founder and editor of American children’s magazine *The Horn Book* for help. Mahoney reprinted the plea, in which Potter offered an autographed drawing for each donation of one guinea. Her American fans did not disappoint: “friends from Boston” contributed £100 to the conservation fund, leading Potter to write to American friend Marian Frazer Harris Perry, “Whenever I cross the ferry and look at the pleasant green banks [of the preserved Cockshott Point] I will think of the good friends across a wider stretch of water—who still believe in old England, and all she has stood for in the past” (Morse 9, 13-14).

L.M. Montgomery viewed a number of Concord writers’ houses, including Orchard House (not yet open as a museum), on a 1910 trip to meet with her publisher in Boston. She wrote that the experience “gave a strange reality to the books of theirs which I have read to see those places where they once lived and labored” (qtd in Rubio and Waterston 2013). Similarities between Jo March and Anne Shirley include their bright minds, shared interest in writing, difficulties adhering to ‘proper’ behavior for girls, and initial disinterest in marriage. Richard Coe advises “Despite real difference of history, geography, politics, and culture, most people from the United States perceive Anglo-Canadians as essentially ‘just like us.’” (Coe 849). Anne has been miscast or mistaken for an American girl numerous times; in an early film adaptation of *Anne*, Green Gables farm was relocated to New England, with an American flag flying over Avonlea school, much to Montgomery’s displeasure. Irene Gammel cites *The New York Times*’ touting of Montgomery as “the ‘Chick Lit Pioneer,’” and *Newsweek*’s location of Anne “within the American tradition of smart and funny heroines” (Gammel 2010: 9). After Canadians (69%), Americans are the next-largest group by nationality to visit Green Gables Heritage Place, comprising one quarter of total visitors (Parks Canada 2008: 2).

While undeniable cultural, social, political, and historical differences characterize each of these nations, the shared familiarity with and enjoyment of classic, Golden Age children's literature by their inhabitants, and the many documented moments of exchange between Montgomery and Potter with Americans and American culture justifies their collocation in this transnational American studies dissertation.

### **Key Terms: Visitors/Tourists/Pilgrims/Fans**

While some terms to describe the people who enjoy the works and tourist sites taken up here may seem to be used interchangeably, it is worth taking a moment to define what is meant by 'visitors,' 'tourists,' 'pilgrims,' and 'fans.' 'Visitors' is standard parlance in the museum profession as an inclusive term for non-staff people temporarily viewing a historic site. Visitors may be 'tourists' sightseeing in a place that is unfamiliar to them, or they could be locals who are out for a day with friends, or they could be school children on a field trip.<sup>11</sup> Visitors will have a range of responses: they will learn things, be interested, be bored, linger longer than expected, or rush through and get on to lunch. Interpretation expert Freeman Tilden characterizes visitors as "receptive" to seeing new things, learning, and relating: "The visitor's chief interest is in whatever touches his personality, his experiences, his ideals" (Tilden 36, 38). Because this could be said of tourists, as well, the distinction between the two is not particularly salient here.

I tend to use the word 'tourist' to connote museum visitors who are seeing and doing more in the area beyond the museum visit. Tourists possess a degree of privilege and access to resources, but are not necessarily wealthy. They have likely traveled some distance and likely consider themselves 'on vacation.' Depending on how far the site is from 'home,' some tourists

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<sup>11</sup> Sharon Macdonald has proposed that a visit to a local museum can approximate travel, since the museum's content may put the visitor in contact with other times, places, and cultures (Macdonald 2012: 51).

will plan and save for quite a while to make the trip; for others, leisure travel is a regular occurrence. I see ‘tourists’ as people who are primarily driven to consume—sights, goods, services, souvenirs—and who have disposable income at hand to do so. While the less-engaged tourist may be looked upon with derision by scholars such as Daniel Boorstin, who see consumers of packaged tours as passive and undiscerning (1961: 84), museum interpretation educators Larry Beck and Ted Cable urge museum professionals to take a more optimistic stance, viewing these people as “seeking a pleasurable and relaxing time, but nothing too demanding. Perhaps it is this moment of rest that will serve as a foundation for subsequent growth” (148).

Less frequently, I use the term ‘pilgrim’ which is common to the study of literary tourism. Pilgrims are tourists who have traveled from elsewhere on a personal quest to connect with a site that they consider meaningful to their identity. Behaviors that mark the tourist as a pilgrim include lingering longer at the site, experiencing heightened emotions during the visit, sharing their personal history with guides and other visitors, and spending a larger-than-average amount in the museum store.<sup>12</sup> Pilgrims are devoted fans of the author and/or story, though many will have encountered the stories in adaptation rather than their original book form.

‘Fan’ is a term often loaded with negative connotations, but it is used here as a judgment-neutral synonym for ‘enthusiast,’ inclusive of those who cannot be described as ‘readers’ because their familiarity with the stories comes from screen, stage, or other media adaptations. Henry Jenkins, who studies mass media, fan cultures, and everyday life, finds fandom difficult to define, being: “a complex, multidimensional phenomenon inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement” (Jenkins 1992: 2). The devoted spectators of media texts, according to

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<sup>12</sup> These characteristics synthesized from interviews with staff at Orchard House, Green Gables Heritage Place, and Hill Top.

Jenkins, are not “intellectually debased, psychologically suspect, or emotionally immature” (17). Though Jenkins’ ethnographic research focuses on science fiction/fantasy fans, the issue of maturity is highly relevant to the study of adult fans of children’s literature and culture. As should become clear throughout, the maturity and psychological state of the people discussed—from random visitors to zealous pilgrims—is not in question. The interpretations and uses of the literary past evidenced in the case studies represent mature perspectives on childhood, indeed, the maturity of these adults is foundational to understanding the constructive and participatory interpretations of the past that I call *(her)itage*.

### **Interpretation at Literary House Museums**

Because historically significant objects and buildings are vigilantly maintained, they seem to change little with each passing generation. Protection and refurbishment delay or mask natural degradations of material objects. A crumbling foundation is replaced with a modern basement, a fresh coat of paint is applied to the house exterior, and objects are repositioned during cleaning or annual inventory. No change would be perceptible to a once-in-a-lifetime visitor, and small adjustments are unlikely to be noticed, even by a repeat visitor. In contrast to slowly changing physical structures, the social lives of these houses and the artifacts contained within are dynamic and situational, determined entirely by how they have been, and will be, interpreted. Interpretation is an act of meaning-making—of translation, imagination, and revision. The term describes an activity common to all humans, which has been theorized within cultural studies, while at the same time possessing a definition specific to museological practice. Because this study brings together interpretation in both the general/cultural and the professional senses, it is useful to distinguish between the two, to note their interactions, and to explain the larger paradigms that influence acts of interpretation.

Within cultural studies, interpretation is dependent upon the interpreter's perspective when arriving at the object of interpretation, and the representations of this personal interpretation that they subsequently project to themselves and others. Cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall explains:

In part, we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them. [...] In part, we give things meaning by how we represent them—the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, [...] the values we place on them. (Hall 1997: 3)

Many factors contribute to an individual's interpretation of a text, place, or event. This study focuses on how interpretations of literary women of the past are influenced by contemporary cultural articulations of femininity.

Interpretation is central to any study of meaning-making in the museum. Professional interpreters—guides at museums and historic sites—are curators of discourse about museum objects, highlighting certain information at the exclusion of other information. Professional organizations, international conferences, and certifications exist to support excellence in interpretation.<sup>13</sup> Interpretation by heritage professionals was defined in 1957 by National Parks Service consultant Freeman Tilden as “[a]n educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden 33). Tilden's definition suggests interpretation as active supplementation of ‘simple’ facts, the nature of which is clarified in the definition created by the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), a professional organization for American interpreters. NAI defines interpretation as “a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the

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<sup>13</sup> In the U.S., the National Association for Interpretation; in Canada, Interpretation Canada; in the UK, the Association for Heritage Interpretation and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting.



interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.” The most significant contrast in these definitions is in the verb choice: Tilden refers to the interpreter’s activity as *revealing* connections, which suggests pre-existing meanings. To *forg*e meanings suggests active creation and openness to new possibilities, though the word ‘inherent’ ensures that meanings be grounded somehow in the resource. Both definitions carry the edict that guides and educators ‘reveal’ or ‘forge’ for the edification of the visitor, who requires expert guidance and insider knowledge to connect with a cultural resource.

Filmmakers who adapt writers’ lives and works to the big screen combine aspects of personal and professional interpretation, interpreting through their personal filters, but freely taking creative license with source material to engage audience emotions in ways typical of the cinematic genre employed. Retail staff interpret the meanings of a museum by selecting goods that will resonate with site themes and visitor desires. These disparate subjects (guides, visitors, filmmakers, and retail staff) are all interpreters, all engaged in social and personal acts of interpretation in the cultural studies sense of the word. This broad use of ‘interpreter’ should not be taken to trivialize the professional work of trained, certified museum educators. Instead, it points to the importance of interpretation to *anyone*’s understanding of the past—the past is to a particular person what that person makes of it—and to highlight the social and subjective nature of all interpretations.

Interpretations are inherited part and parcel with the cultural resources they explicate. Beck and Cable, who update the interpretation principles of Freeman Tilden and Enos Mills for the 21st century, acknowledge that “interpretation of history is based on interpreting other people’s interpretations of events. Thus, interpreters find themselves interpreting *interpretations*” (emphasis in original, Beck and Cable 2002: 73). Staff tasked with interpretation at museums as

old as Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top inherit facts, anecdotes, and methods from the generations of guides who came before them, revising and adjusting as needed based on interactions with visitors, institutional mandates, and contemporary paradigms. As the carefully plotted narratives of professional interpreters are received by visitors, they are filtered and re-interpreted through additional lenses of personal associations, expertise, or beliefs (Beck and Cable 2002: 19). This study demonstrates vividly that interpretations are always formed from a confluence of sources, including larger meaning-making paradigms circulating at a given time.

The histories of two fields, feminist cultural studies and museum studies, converge somewhat in the the latter part of the 20th century, influencing to varying degrees the development of personal and professional interpretations of Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter inside and outside of museums. During this period, scholars, activists, and historically marginalized people questioned the ways representations in mass media and culture naturalized power imbalances. Second-wave feminist scholars developed paradigms for understanding identity, politics, and power in a variety of cultural productions at the same time museums, complicit in the rehearsal and valuation of differences of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability, came under scrutiny for their role in “supporting particular regimes of power, most usually the status quo” (Macdonald 2006: 3). A burgeoning reflexivity in museums produced exhibits that sought to address epistemological and cultural biases. Museums gradually shifted to ask questions as well as provide answers, becoming dialogic and polyphonic spaces (Macdonald 2006: 3). This shift, dubbed ‘the new museology’ by art historian Paul Vergo, attended to “more theoretical and humanistic” aspects of museums, emphasizing the context of objects and their shifting and contingent meanings (Macdonald 2006: 2). Cultural studies scholar Rhiannon Mason identifies the new museology as a point of intersection between cultural studies and

museum studies (Mason 2006: 23). These parallel timelines, of the transformations of the new museology and of second-wave feminism as it came to impact the field of cultural studies, both centered on representational critiques.

Museums opening during the boom years of the latter twentieth century<sup>14</sup> may have been initiated by practitioners versed in new museology philosophy, but Orchard House, Green Gables Heritage Place, and Hill Top predate scholarly interest in feminine and popular genres. Scholars in the early and mid-twentieth century were not concerned with studying these museums,<sup>15</sup> which means that detailed accounts of early tourism and interpretation are not available for comparison.<sup>16</sup> Still, some changes brought by new approaches to women's texts and museum epistemologies can be discerned. As Chapter One shows, for example, the present day interpretation of Orchard House maintains the conservative agenda and enshrinement of *Little Women* present at its opening in 1912, tempered now by inclusion of the Alcott family's radical positions on the social issues of their day. This means that, at some point, guides began *interpreting* the Alcotts differently than guides had in previous decades. Jan Turnquist, the museum's executive director, estimates that the Alcotts' radicalism was first included on tours in the 1970s (Turnquist 2014), consistent with the timelines of the women's movement and the new museology. The example of the Alcotts' radicalism as it was omitted and then restored to Orchard House interpretation demonstrates the centrality of curation, not only of museum objects, but of verbal and written forms of interpretation. Guides cannot say everything there is

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<sup>14</sup> From the 1970s onward the museum world simultaneously experienced a boom as more (and increasingly specialized) museums opened to the public. This proliferation of museums, called the 'museum phenomenon' by Gordon Fyfe, resulted from a confluence of factors (MacDonald 2006: 4-5).

<sup>15</sup> Previously undertheorized texts associated with the popular and the feminine came to be recognized as important cultural productions. Results of these shifts can be seen today: a rich corpus of critical academic work on children's literature, romance novels, domestic advice texts and other popular genres written by and for women now exists.

<sup>16</sup> An ethnographic study of those who worked at and visited the sites decades ago might fill in some details, but the opportunity to capture daily lived experience of the museum with the immediacy of on-site observation has been lost.

to say about a topic—nor should they try—so they select details in accordance with key site themes, visitor interests, and institutional mission.

Interpretation is broadly defined in this dissertation as the assembling of coherent narratives that serve the purposes of the museum staff, tourists, creators of intertexts and retail staff who conceive them. Interpretation by these groups transcends the ‘facts’—birth and death dates, sales figures—tending instead toward NAI’s “intellectual and emotional” engagements. Whether embellished, fragmented, or invented, taken together, these interpretations comprise the popular legacies of Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter.

The dynamism of interpretations circulating within museums demonstrates that although they are famous for representing the past, historic sites also represent the present day. Museum guides change year to year, or even month to month, as contracts end and new opportunities are sought.<sup>17</sup> While historic sites provide singular experiences for their visitors, they are often parts of a larger, professionalized heritage system promoting ideas about identity, gender, and nation. Staff serve at the pleasure of these larger organizations—here, the Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, Parks Canada, and the National Trust, UK. The former is a smallish but longstanding nonprofit, but the latter two are large national operations, one governmental, the other a not-for-profit charity. Administrators and board members influence interpretation through direct mandates and organization-wide paradigm shifts, such as the National Trust’s change from ‘guarding to guiding,’ enacted in 1997.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> One year after my initial fieldwork at Green Gables, ten of the staff I’d interviewed returned to work at the site. Three years later, only four returned to work there (MacDonald 2014).

<sup>18</sup> A Hill Top volunteer docent of more than twenty years recalled his original duties being less about conversing with visitors and more about stewardship and “keeping an eye on people” (site observation 2013). The terms of the ‘guarding to guiding’ shift were first communicated in a National Trust document titled “A Watching Brief” (1997). An updated version titled “Information for Room Guides in National Trust Historic Buildings” came out in 2009 (Pritchard 2015). As National Trust philosophies changed, so too did the types of interactions possible at Hill Top.

Interpretations are influenced by forces outside the institution as well. The living people—staff and tourists—who populate historic sites leave the museum at closing time. They go to the movies for the latest chick flick, or tune into syndicated reruns of *Sex & the City*, or read a *New York Times* editorial about women leaning in and opting out. The people shaping discourses in historic house museums cannot help but view the past through a present day, lived optic. “People’s individual narratives [...] are always embedded within publicly-circulating narratives that are specific to times and places” (Lawler 38), which means each person who interprets an author’s life or works—each guide, each tourist, each film director—each is a product of her or his own cultural milieu, producing and consuming stories about the past in ways that are personally resonant.

### **Literary House Museums and the Postfeminist Subject**

The polysemous term ‘postfeminist’ is used throughout this study to describe the contemporary sensibilities through which heritage, though ostensibly about the ‘past,’ resonates. Two of its meanings are salient to the interpretation of famous literary women of the past. Understanding both, as well as the related but discrete term ‘neofeminism,’ will aid in understanding interpretation at these literary house museums in the 21st century.

Articulations of femininity emerging in popular culture in the decades following the 20th century women’s movement have been studied extensively by feminist media scholars under the rubric of ‘postfeminism.’ As with any ‘posted’ term, there is a risk of this term flattening feminism into a monolithic or homogenous concept when it is in fact much more complex and plural. I employ the term cautiously and specifically as it has been used by mainly British scholars of women’s popular culture produced from the 1980s through the early decades of the 21st century. As Chris Holmlund (2005) has shown, postfeminism is no more homogenous than

feminism, and is understood by different scholars to describe different articulations of women's roles in relation to feminism and culture.

In the first sense relevant here, postfeminism describes a historical period beginning in the mid-1980s, running through the 1990s, and into the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The feminism 'post'-ed here is second-wave feminism, the social movement that brought about epistemological and ideological changes in the social roles of women, women's rights, and cultural constructions of femininity in North America and the United Kingdom. In Charlotte Brunsdon's formulation, the term "is quite useful if used in an historically specific sense to mark changes in popularly available understandings of femininity and a woman's place that are generally recognized as occurring in the 1980s" (qtd in Hollows 2003: 181). When used in this sense, the term is basically neutral, describing a time period following a set of events that influenced women's culture in myriad ways, without a particular value judgement.

The 'post'-ing of feminism can also label the polemic stance that the work of 20<sup>th</sup>-century feminism—access to equal pay, opportunity, and security, for example—has been adequately achieved. Angela McRobbie uses the term in this way to describe "pernicious" discourses that contribute to a disavowal or demonization of feminism: "through an array of machinations" popular culture has engaged in "the undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism" (2004: 255). Susan J. Douglas (2010) proposes the term "enlightened sexism" to label this latter phenomenon, particularly as it occurs in 'girl power' discourses of the 1990s. Because popular culture texts that 'undo' the gains of second-wave feminism are so prolific, feminism may seem entirely unnecessary to privileged young women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century whose lives post-date the struggles of the period that led up to the women's movement.

Both definitions are complemented by Hilary Radner's introduction of the term *neofeminist*, which is also useful in examining the popular legacies of historical women. Neofeminism, according to Radner, runs contemporaneous with the period Brunson labels postfeminist, but rather than being a response to second-wave feminism, Radner sees neofeminism as an alternative to it. Neofeminism is a parallel but discrete "reaction to the same conditions that produced second-wave feminism," rather than a reaction to the women's movement itself (2011: 4). Neofeminism, she says, provides an alternative model "for women seeking to confront the complexities of contemporary culture" (5). Studying major 'chick flicks' from the 1980s onward, Radner concludes that rather than a "turning away from feminism" suggested by McRobbie's use of the term 'postfeminist' (5), these films represent an expression of neoliberal values that seem to resemble feminism because they share a number of catch-phrases, such as 'empowerment' and 'self-fulfillment' (2). Neofeminism furnishes feel-good rhetorics that imply empowerment can exist outside a feminist politics. Neofeminism thus operates in tandem with McRobbie's version of postfeminism and Douglas's enlightened sexism, in which the goals and gains of the women's movement are undercut. Because Radner's neofeminism is contemporaneous to Brunson's historical definition of postfeminism, postfeminism is used throughout to refer to the period, and neofeminism used to refer specifically to Radner's concept of neoliberal feminine empowerment.

In the engagements of adult women with children's literature in the postfeminist era, the figures of 'the girl' and 'the consumer' come forward as dominant archetypes, both in service of a theme of 'becoming.' As a galvanizing trope, 'becoming' fits naturally with the chronology of girlhood (a stage of growing up) and a major tenet of postfeminist femininity—ongoing improvement of the self. Postfeminist evocations of the girl and the consumer manifest most

commonly in popular ‘chick flick’ and ‘chick lit’ style films and novels, in lifestyle magazines and blogs, and in advertisements for feminine products from lip gloss to birth control.

Neoliberal, capitalistic currents underpin these popular culture forms, most of which make no secret of their commercial motivations. Radner writes, “Explicitly and implicitly, women are instructed by their environment (from the school room to the women’s magazine) in how to ‘become’ a woman—a task that is never completed and is subject to constant revision. This concept of identity as a process of ‘becoming’ has been understood as offering emancipatory possibilities to the individual who is invited, not to take up a stable, untested and fixed position, but, rather, to see her ‘self,’ or even ‘selves,’ as subject to a multiple and on-going process of revision, reform, and choices” (Radner 2011: 6). Polysemous and portable, the ‘girl’ represents a desirable liminality—she is in a state of becoming.

‘Girlhood’ is “an apparently simple term,” according to education and women’s studies critic Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2011: 92), yet it remains difficult to pin down in terms of age. For the purposes of this project, I define girlhood imprecisely as starting in the age of literacy. In keeping with Sorby’s “prepubescent and prelapsarian” Golden Age (Sorby 2011: 98), the period of girlhood germane to this project ends before the age of adult sexuality<sup>19</sup> and marriage. Thus, my temporal definition of girlhood encompasses Anne’s age (11 in the first book) and the age of Montgomery’s child-readers (age 7-10), Jo’s age (15 in the first book) and the age of Alcott’s child-readers (age 8-11),<sup>20</sup> and Beatrix Potter’s age in the flashback scenes of *Miss Potter* (also age 11).

In addition to age, childhood studies scholar Lynne Vallone deems sexuality and class as “two of the ‘essential’ elements of girlhood that determine the womanhood to follow” (1995: 3).

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<sup>19</sup> This is in contrast to Caitlin Flanagan, for example, who defines girlhood in *Girl Land* (2013) as the period of adolescence and burgeoning sexuality.

<sup>20</sup> Age recommendations for readers estimated by [www.commonensemedia.org](http://www.commonensemedia.org).



In literary critic Angela Sorby's gloss of Roger Lancelyn Green, Golden Age authors perceived childhood as "a life-stage with positive attributes that should be creatively celebrated, not didactically squelched." Sorby equates Golden Age depictions of childhood with Romantic notions of innocent, non-sexual, and angelic childhood. Unlike the emphasis on girlish bodies and sexuality in 21st century postfeminist popular culture and more so in texts intended for male audiences (Douglas 2010), the girl-themes examined herein are almost entirely interior, intellectual, and emotional. (The hair, complexion, and build of Anne and Jo figure prominently in their characterizations, but their bodies are never sexualized, that is, the authors do not describe their breasts, posteriors, etc., nor do these girls express sexual urges or curiosities, though some scholars have noted the intense homosociality of both girls (Anne with her friend Diana, and Jo with her sisters).<sup>21</sup>

Class, a factor in the initial publication and continued popularity of these books, also defines the nature of the girlhood these protagonists represent. Celebration of the presexual girl is one of the ways these authors and texts function as an antidote to contemporary anxieties about feminine becoming—these girls are productive and flourish in the absence of a hypersexualizing popular culture. That said, both the presexual girls of the Golden Age and the hypersexual girls of postfeminist popular culture conform to the white, middle or upper middle class appearances and norms of an idealized Western childhood. The girls literary tourists are identifying with and emulating have only their gender to 'overcome,' possessing as they do the privileges of being white, educated, and well-cared for in terms of nutrition, clothing, and housing.

The themes of 'becoming' that preoccupied Alcott, Montgomery, Potter and (excepting the latter) their girl-protagonists—speaking one's mind, publishing one's written works, financial

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<sup>21</sup> See Cecily Devereux's (2002) account of Laura Robinson's arguments for lesbian desire between Anne and Diana and Humphrey Carpenter's chapter on Alcott in *Secret Gardens* (1985).

independence, marriage, and home—are the very topics around which today’s postfeminist discourses continue to circulate. The words, images, fantasies and feelings created by and about Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter fulfill longings of the 21st century women who admire and emulate these authors and their characters in a variety of ways. I call these productive and imaginative engagements with the past *(her)itage*.

### **(Her)itage: Postfeminist Nostalgia and Emulation**

(Her)itage names a practice of postfeminist nostalgia characterized by emulation of or reference to past femininities. In this practice of (her)itage, some perceived quality of the past is longed for or recreated as an annotation to the present day subject’s identity. The ‘her’ in (her)itage highlights it as a past created, possessed, used, and rehearsed by women.<sup>22</sup> Like heritage, (her)itage is often intangible—when a child is named after a fictional character, a way of making bread, or ideas about the body, gender relations, women’s networks, or ‘proper’ behavior.

Different past times and archetypes can be evoked in response to contemporary cultural narratives about gender. Feminist scholar Joanne Hollows’ analysis of the ‘domestic goddess’ fantasy proffered by British cookbook author and food television personality Nigella Lawson provides a starting point for considering imaginative engagements with feminine subjectivities of the past—what I call (her)itage—as a means of coping with anxieties and instabilities of daily life. Hollows argues that Lawson’s embrace of the figure of the ‘domestic goddess,’ rather than

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<sup>22</sup>Though feminine pronouns are used throughout, this is not meant to suggest that men cannot also draw inspiration from past femininities. As Carol Mavor (2007) has shown, a man’s relationship with (and longing for) his mother can be a source of inspiration, as it was for J.M. Barrie, Roland Barthes, and others. There are certainly adult men who recall reading Alcott and Montgomery as boys (and definitely those who read Potter, since her works are considered appropriate for both sexes). But the majority of readers and pilgrims to these sites are female, and the majority of men who visit are accompanying a female family member for whom the visit is more significant. It would make a fascinating study, indeed, to examine male pilgrims to the house museums of female writers and to better understand their motivations and uses of these cultural resources.

being an antifeminist position, as some popular press have stipulated, represents a fantasy identity to be pleurably and temporarily enacted. Through Lawson's 'domestic goddess' fantasy, present-day, postfeminist women draw from femininities of the past as a comfort and escape from pressures of contemporary life:

[...] [In] a postfeminist landscape in which it is often manifest that contemporary femininity is multiple and complex, the desire to temporarily inhabit a figure of femininity which appears stable, which is of another time (literal or mythical) in which things seem simpler and less contradictory than the present, can also appear to offer a sense of escape from the pressures of managing and ordering both everyday life and feminine selves. (Hollows 2003: 195)

Extending Hollows' argument beyond the domestic heritage evoked by Nigella, this concept of escape through temporary inhabitation of a stable, simplified feminine subjectivity is extremely useful to understanding the appeal of 'visiting' female writers and their girl-protagonists in the erstwhile domestic context of a house variously understood to be a private residence, a fictional setting, and a public museum.<sup>23</sup>

Hollows proposes Nigella as a relief from strictures of present-day feminine lives that include time scarcity and a lack of sensual engagement with food. Hollows clarifies that Nigella should not be understood as "simply a prefeminist figure of femininity, a throwback to a 'real' past, but instead offers a point of feminine identification that responds to the contradictions of the present" (Hollows 190). This framing of the past being evoked as a balm of fantasy that ameliorates pains of the present echoes Humphrey Carpenter's analysis of what Golden Age authors were themselves doing—creating an Arcadia in contrast to a changing world that did not

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<sup>23</sup> Though it is not the focus of this study, (her)itage can also be applied to evocation of women from the individual's personal past. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen (1998) found that people commonly looked to ancestors for clues to their own identities. Informants incorporated into their own biographies the perceived influence of ancestors of living memory (e.g. mothers and grandmothers) as well as those of family 'legend' such as the first family member to immigrate to the current country of residence or an ancestor who participated in a historical social movement.

please them. The particular way in which the real world was subverted was specific to the author's own frustrations.<sup>24</sup>

(Her)itage tends toward generic, idealized female archetypes: Nigella's 'domestic goddess,' Alcott's tortured young authoress; Montgomery's 'glad girl' orphan,<sup>25</sup> *Miss Potter's* feisty Victorian rebel, and others all represent an edited, 'simple' set of traits the contemporary woman can imagine as annotating, complementing, or comforting her as a temporary escape from her lived, complicated, messy identity. Commemorated and canonized historical figures become what Susan Stewart calls 'idealized bod[ies]': "The idealized body implicitly denies the possibility of death—it attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic. This is the body-made-object, and thus the body as potential commodity, *taking place* within the abstract and infinite cycle of exchange" (author's emphasis, 1993: 133). The feminine archetypes of (her)itage are 'bodies-made-conceptual objects' adapted for consumption and use by the contemporary woman as she emulates the gestures, clothing, attitudes, or practices of the idealized historical subject. Proximity to, or pretend inhabitation of, idealized literary bodies at the sites examined herein express a range of modalities for engaging with historical subjectivities deemed personally meaningful. These emulations celebrate, reclaim, or experiment with the values the writer or character have come to represent in the minds of fans. As with any heritage text, practice, or site, direct, unmediated access to the past is not possible. I stress, therefore, that the term (her)itage be defined as engagements with or uses of *contemporary interpretations* of historical feminine subjectivities and experiences. These engagements are expressed in a variety of ways, depending on the author and the site.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, bank manager and unhappy husband Kenneth Graham created the peaceful rural idyll of a riverbank world of domestic comforts and delectable meals populated entirely by male animals (Kuznets 1988).

<sup>25</sup> Children's literature scholar Humphrey Carpenter characterizes *Anne of Green Gables* as belonging to the 'glad girl' subgenre of girls' books, in which a young heroine remains perpetually cheerful regardless of circumstances. Other examples are Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1913) and Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903).

Postfeminist nostalgia for Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter is often grounded in collective ideas about the ‘best of’ their historical period—warm kitchens, crackling fires, merry laughter—and high points of their biographies—inspiration, imagination, delivery from poverty via writing skills—combined with pleasant personal associations their works have with the individual’s girlhood reading.<sup>26</sup> But in order to be inspired by women of previous generations, the tourist must feel she knows something about them. She must find a familiar ‘hook’ to which she can relate. Heritage scholar David Lowenthal writes that “the past renders the present familiar [...] every earthly locale has some connection with our experienced past” (1985: 39). Interpreters at house museums address two questions to help contemporary visitors relate to people of the past: what *did* they like and what *were* they like? The former, relying on written accounts and the material record as evidence, often provides answers to the latter. To feel one knows the answers to these questions is to feel a kind of intimacy with the writer.

Writers’ houses cater to visitors’ desire for close proximity to the writer’s personal spaces and effects, revealing intimate, ‘backstage’ areas such as the writer’s bedroom.<sup>27</sup> Tourism scholar Dean MacCannell usefully extends sociologist Erving Goffman’s concept of frontstage/backstage to describe the contemporary tourist’s desire for ‘backstage’ access. In Goffman’s original formulation, the self is performed and presented to others socially in front regions. Back regions, those places where the work to produce the image of the self is completed, are concealed (MacCannell 1976: 92). MacCannell extends this concept to analyze the allure of tourist attractions that advertise opportunities to ‘go behind the scenes’ and see something exclusive or formerly hidden (98). The significance of access to bedrooms and

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Reading’ is used to indicate early exposures to a writer’s works, but it is acknowledged that the tourist’s familiarity may have come from being read to, from viewing a film adaptation as a child, from acting in a theatrical staging of the story in school, or from some other encounter with a story in girlhood.

<sup>27</sup> The tourist is spared seeing bathrooms of her 19th and early twentieth century idols, those being outhouses long since demolished, though chamber pots do make an occasional appearance.

kitchen is highlighted, for example, on some Orchard House tours. It is explained to visitors which rooms would have been used by family only and which rooms would have been open to guests. Unlike the Alcott's *own guests*, the contemporary visitor is granted (a feeling of) full access.<sup>28</sup>

This interpretation, common at historic homes, lends a note of exclusivity to what are no longer backstage areas so much as “staged back regions” (MacCannell 1976: 99). The promise of intimacy is further fulfilled through the display of objects owned or handled daily by the author. Traces of DNA are unlikely to remain, but the tourist is encouraged to imagine the kind of person who would collect owls (Alcott), embark on woodland rambles (Montgomery), or champion a rare breed of heritage sheep (Potter). If Nigella offers the fantasy of not being a domestic goddess, but feeling like one, literary tourism sites offer the fantasy not of *knowing* the originator of a cherished text, but of *feeling* like one does.

(Her)itage as imagined through interpretations of museum guides, creators of intertexts, and museum retail staff focuses on writers and fictional girl-protagonists. These famous women and texts are always already linked, however, to the tourist's own recalled self-as-girl. Meaning-making in culture “is about feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas” (Hall 1997: 2). Memories of one's own childhood are often heavily embroidered with nostalgia, an aestheticized type of longing in which one idealizes past times, people, and places. For adult women, girlhood is both fantasy and memory, encompassing transition, choices made, potential to succeed, and burgeoning agency. Literary tourism is a means for adult women to engage simultaneously with familiar girls' culture and personal nostalgia in a materialized, immersive way.

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<sup>28</sup> This feeling of intimacy is amplified during ‘living history’ tours, for which the site's executive director Jan Turnquist appears in period costume, as Louisa May Alcott, giving a tour of her own home.

(Her)itage references collective histories and values, yet it is practiced individually by and between women. The books (in tattered or newly purchased editions) are literally passed down: Orchard House guide Jenny Johanson attributes the continuing popularity of *Little Women* to three factors: its themes of becoming, social verisimilitude, and the tendency of women to bequeath it to descendants: “[I]t’s a coming of age story in a lot of ways, and [...] the fact that so many have early memories, ‘my mother used to read that story at night!’ so having your grandmother, your mother and you know, it gets passed down, the love for the story gets passed down” (Johanson 2014). Henry Jenkins, writing about television fans and their memories of favorite episodes, notes how:

[T]he episodes become enmeshed in the viewer’s own life, gaining significance in relation to when they were first encountered and evoking memories as rich as the series itself; these experiences alter the viewer’s identifications with characters and the significance they place upon narrative events. (Jenkins 1992: 69)

A visitor who knows the books through a beloved family member or caregiver associates the collectively known cultural production and tourist site with personal memories of family (see Chapter Two for more on this). Childhood memories are accessible any time, but intensified thinking about childhood is not an everyday sort of activity. In a large-scale survey conducted by historians Rosenzweig and Thelen, respondents felt “most connected” to the past at family gatherings, where memories were cued by interactions with relatives, but, surprisingly, museum visits ranked a close second (mean of 7.9/10 compared to 7.3/10) (Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998: 20). For many respondents:

[V]isits to historic sites and museums sparked an associative process of recalling and reminiscing about the past that connected them to their own history. Their visits, far from a passive viewing of a version of the past arranged by a museum professional—became a joint venture of constructing their own histories either mentally or in conversation with their friends and kin. (Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998: 32)

Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top permit one to ‘gather’ (literally or in memory) with family in the evocative space of a museum dedicated to a shared literary story, cultural history, and (her)itage.

The manifest nationalism of each author’s legacy—Alcott, the American; Montgomery, the Canadian; and Potter, the English—remains secondary to the ‘heritage of femininity’ that comes forward in the common affinities and themes that seem to cross racial, ethnic, or national boundaries. Admittedly, these authors are white women of Anglo or Anglo-Celtic heritage, and certainly, their works are read most widely by middle-class children in the United States, Canada, and England. But the whiteness of these writers and their characters has not hindered their achievement of worldwide adoration by readers from Brazil to Kenya to Iran to Japan.<sup>29</sup> The attraction of texts by Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter for readers and fans outside their authors’ national and racial contexts requires historicizing and nuance beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet there are aspects of these girls’ stories and their struggles to articulate their own version of femininity in the world that would seem to speak to experiences of women across cultures. (This is not to imply that the books are ‘universal’ by any means, especially considering the significant modifications texts undergo in translation.)

Women may first encounter the texts, artifacts and sites that inspire their practices of (her)itage as girls, but its continuing relevance to mature identities is evidenced by tourism, derivative texts, and consumer goods marketed to adults. The case studies herein share an

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<sup>29</sup> Japanese nationals comprise the largest minority tourist groups at Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top, and this is noteworthy for two reasons. First, staff I interviewed at these three sites reliably brought up Japanese tourists in the context of pilgrimage, seemingly citing international interest as ‘proof’ that the author was exceptional—her works being so appealing that *even* Japanese people *halfway around the world* come to visit the site. Second—and I cannot go into this beyond my personal observations—I found white, anglophone tourists at each site to be, in some ways, tourists of Japanese tourism. They would regard Japanese tourists with curious looks and whispered remarks. White American and Canadian tourists seemed to be surprised or amused that texts they perhaps see as belonging to distinctly white American/Canadian/English cultures would appeal to so many Japanese women. See Iwashita (2006) on Beatrix Potter and Japanese tourism.



emphasis on ‘growing up’ and ‘becoming,’ a process that begins in girlhood for Alcott and Montgomery’s protagonists, and in a cinematic portrayal of Beatrix Potter. Fans inherit from each of these authors ideas that can help them to articulate their own femininity, stage a temporary respite from contemporary life, and construe memories of their own girlhoods from new perspectives.

### **Methods**

This study takes as a premise that a text’s popularity across time exists beyond its pages, in wider realms of cultural production where writers, stories, and places are inherited, imagined, and interpreted by and for successive generations. The importance of guides, tourists, creators of intertexts, and museum store staff as the discursive forces that shape and perpetuate literary house museums is demonstrated in the case study chapters. While an entire study could be devoted to guides at each of the three sites, tourists at each of the three sites, or intertexts affecting visitation to each of the three sites, the juxtaposition of chapters that focus on each illustrates the interconnectivity of these groups.

Humanistic approaches to tourism studies benefit from interdisciplinary analysis, which permits the researcher to construct a comprehensive picture of the constellation of factors in play. My interdisciplinary, multi-modal approach employs methodologies from cultural studies and museum studies, complemented by literary and material culture analyses. A variety of complementary research methods from these three fields are used to reveal the personal, ideological, and commercial interpretations of Alcott, Montgomery, Potter, and their classic stories.

Interviews with museum administrators, guides, and other staff form the core ethnographic data in this study for several reasons: producers of museums and heritage sites are

often underrepresented in academic studies of such sites even though professionals in these positions exert a great deal of influence over visitor experience. Staff observe visitors daily, over the course of years in some cases (a degree of site immersion I was unable to replicate). Lastly, those who have worked at sites for a considerable amount of time have likely thought deeply about interpretation and visitor experience as a result of their immersion at the site.

Because it was beyond the capacity of the current project to interview visitors en masse, I derive conclusions about visitors from the impressions they leave behind on comment cards, visitor surveys, travel websites, and personal blogs, and from firsthand, incidental interactions that occurred during my on-site observations.<sup>30</sup> I supplement these direct visitor voices with anecdotes and visitor statistics provided by museum guides and administrators via personal interviews and correspondence. I read primary texts alongside a diverse popular archive of intertexts including tourism promotions, popular films, and souvenirs sold in museum stores. I analyze spatial rhetorics of each site and observe tours and tourist tendencies at the exact moment of encounter with the attraction.

The present study is an effort to capture museum sites as phenomenological milieux, showing “the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice” (Hall 1997: 6). This is not a “totalizing account” but, in the style of media studies scholar Henry Jenkins, a set of “partial, particularized, and contingent accounts of specific encounters” (Jenkins 1992: 4). I overlay the interpretive discourses that circulate around these sites onto the larger cultural map of postfeminist popular culture, demonstrating, in vivid “local details” (Jenkins 1992: 3) how postfeminist women’s culture influences personal and professional interpretations of three writers by early 21st century people. What an author or site

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<sup>30</sup> Interactions with anonymous visitors are used herein only to illustrate insights gained through less anecdotal means.

becomes for a particular generation, community, or individual is inflected by broader contours of the cultures in which they are immersed. Only by blending methods and methodologies can scholars understand the synergistic relationships that link literature, museums, tourist cultures, and other popular culture forms.

### **Contribution to Humanistic Tourism Studies**

Successful interpretation, according to Freeman Tilden, connects the cultural resource to the visitor's ego (38) and it is this personalized use of the past that is central to the concept of (her)itage. In this modest contribution to the field inaugurated by scholars who sought to theorize tourism on a grand scale, I closely read three case study sites to get at the implications of identity—specifically gender and personal history—as they influence interpretations at three literary house museums. This dissertation is undertaken as a humanistic extension of important early work on tourism that considers the subject position of the tourist relative to the tourism destination.

In an early assessment of 20th century tourism, Daniel J. Boorstin vividly depicts drastic changes in the modalities of tourism as it was democratized by mass transit and travel agencies. His account of packaged tours at the time of writing (1961) leaves little room for tourists to have meaningful experiences within the confines of safe, predictable, insulated package tours they (in his view) passively consume. The tourist is more empathically theorized by Dean MacCannell in his 1976 *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. MacCannell rejects Boorstin's assertion that tourists desire "superficial, contrived experiences" (1976: 104), arguing that they are engaged in "a quest for authentic experiences, perceptions, and insights" (105) that may be accessed as they peel back layers of staging and artifice.

Erik Cohen (1979) distinguishes five tourism modes that include the two types described by MacCannell and Boorstin, both of which are relevant to the notion of (her)itage. The ‘recreational’ tourist mode, which Cohen likens to consumption of any other mass-entertainment, is marked by enjoyment without “a deep commitment to travel as a means of self-realization or self-expansion.” Redeeming recreational tourists accused of gullibility by Boorstin, Cohen defends those who embrace a manufactured experience for what it is and “legitimately enjoy themselves” in the suspension of their disbelief (184). Cohen’s second tourist mode, the ‘experiential,’ closely matches MacCannell’s tourists on pilgrimage, in search of authentic experiences in places peripheral to their ‘center’ or home culture. In a brief aside, Cohen grants that a tourist’s pilgrimage “to the artistic, national, religious, and other centres of his own society or culture [to] pay them ‘ritual respect’” can occur, but what is most salient to defining this modern tourist type are “experiences far beyond the limits of the traveller’s own cultural realm” (188). The case studies herein, however, demonstrate that artistic centers of one’s own culture can furnish a meaningful experience that combines the playfulness and suspension of disbelief that characterizes recreational tourism with the ‘authentic’ insights that characterize experiential tourism.

Authenticity is a quality that frequently emerges as a benchmark for tourism—in promotional discourses as well as scholarly analysis. My formulation of (her)itage as a nostalgic, imaginative practice suggests that the ‘authenticity’ of the tourist experiences examined herein are grounded in the tourist’s relationship with a text/author/site *before* the visit occurs—the memories of childhood, the personal affinity for the story, and perhaps a long time waiting and hoping to make the trip. The manufactured material trappings of the tourism industry (hats with fake red braids, for example) need not be authentic. The tourist’s cultural ‘center’ is temporally,

rather than geographically, defined as the present day (21st century daily life and norms). The ‘periphery’ traveled to is the time of the writer’s life depicted in the museum, or, perhaps more abstractly, the tourist’s memories of her own childhood. This self-generated sense of authenticity—auto-authenticity, one might call it—may be more powerful and meaningful to the tourist than staged time travel experiences offered by tourism operators, no matter how realistic they may manage to seem.

Moving into the subset of *literary* tourism, much of what has been written on the topic has been intended for the general public with the aim of promoting writers’ spaces as interesting to learn about and to visit. Popular press books replete with photographs of unoccupied desks or of the writer at work fetishize the writerly workspace and cater to the same curiosity that writer’s house museums do, but for the armchair traveler. Pictorial essays show spaces of inspiration and composition, accompanied by text describing the writer’s work habits or thoughts on writing. Representative texts include Jill Krementz’s compact *The Writer’s Desk* (1996) and J.D. McClatchy and Erica Lennard’s *American Writers at Home* (2004), a large ‘coffee table’-style book. Most popular publications about literary tourism are guidebooks, a genre that came to prominence in 19th century England (Watson 2006), and guides to literary sites in the United Kingdom continue to dominate the genre. Several specifically instruct in children’s literature tourism, such as Melanie Wentz’s *Once Upon a Time in Great Britain: A Travel Guide to the Sights and Settings of Your Favorite Children’s Stories* (2002) and Colleen Dunn Bates’ *Storybook Travels: From Eloise’s New York to Harry Potter’s London, Visits to 30 of the Best-Loved Landmarks in Children’s Literature* (2002).<sup>31</sup> Guidebooks for tourists generate value and

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<sup>31</sup> Literary tourism guidebooks for American destinations include Shannon McKenna Schmidt and Jodi Rendon’s *Novel Destinations: Literary Landmarks from Jane Austen’s Bath to Ernest Hemingways’s Key West* (2009), B.J. Welborn’s *Traveling Literary America: A Complete Guide to Literary Landmarks* (2005), and Michelle Prater

desire for the sites they recommend, and as such are part of the discourse around these sites, but they trade mainly in temptation and logistics without venturing into analysis of how the sites are produced or consumed.

Spanning the gap between the popular and the scholarly are first-person accounts by academics whose idiosyncratic jaunts to literary places are presented as travelogues peppered with critical insights. Rhetoric scholar Anne Trubek's *A Skeptic's Guide to Writer's Houses* (2011) is a prime example, blending brief histories of house museums with first-person sensory descriptions, observations, and at-times cynical commentary. Trubek offers the non-academic reader a lens for viewing literary sites that is less celebratory (and less practical) than a guidebook.<sup>32</sup>

Visiting fictionalized places has been a popular practice since at least the 18th century, but accelerated with the growing genre of specifically located realist fiction in the nineteenth. Nicola Watson's *The Literary Tourist* (2006) is the defining work of the literary subset of tourism studies, tracing this history through a plethora of UK sites and archival study of historic guidebooks and tourism promotions. Though Watson includes anecdotes about her own literary tourism experiences, this is a scholarly work first and foremost. Her typology of the forms taken by literary tourism defines the contours of the practice and establishes a foundational concept of literary tourism studies, one that recurs in each case study of the present work: that literary texts create 'literary places,' and not the other way around (2006: 12).

The work of cultural geographers Gary Backhaus and John Murungi, though not limited to literary landscapes, is useful to understanding the relationship of literature to place that

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Burke's *The Ideals Guide to Literary Places in the US* (1998). It appears no specialized guides to literary tourism exist for Canada.

<sup>32</sup> Other first-person travelogues in this vein include Michael Pearson's *Imagined Places: Journeys into Literary America* (2000) and Fred Setterberg's *The Roads Taken: Travels Through America's Literary Landscapes* (1998).

underpins literary tourism. In their introduction to *Symbolic Landscapes* (2008) editors Backhaus and Murungi argue that landscapes are experienced along a continuum of perception and imagination, with one faculty informing and complementing the other and neither functioning exclusively (10). Their perception-imagination continuum is particularly salient in the study of literary heritage sites because preexisting knowledge of a ‘story’ set in a locatable place has primed the visitor to ‘see’ the actual landscape in that place as representing that particular fictional milieu. Literary tourists who have previously ‘visited’ a place in the pages of a novel will feel they know something about that place and the events that unfolded there. As these consumers transition from reading an easily-accessed, mass-produced text toward a less-easily-accessed point of origin in a natural or built landscape, they embark more actively on a quest for the ‘back regions’ theorized by MacCannell.

Literary house museums have also been studied by historians interested in the politics of their development. Patricia West’s *Domesticating History* (1999), a survey of America’s earliest house museums, includes a meticulous retelling of the cultural and political forces that drove the Concord Women’s Club and their offshoot, the Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, to create Orchard House as a shrine to *Little Women*. In a similar vein, Hilary Iris Lowe (2012) researches the histories of four of Mark Twain’s former residences, drawing conclusions broadly applicable to literary house museums—that they are created with the primary aim of accommodating visitor expectations, not presenting critical commentary, and that tourists are drawn to discover the ‘origins’ of esteemed authors and stories. Both West and Lowe explain the values and ideas that drove the formation and continued operation of their sites, but the scope of their projects limits them from situating the sites within a larger contexts of popular culture or

commenting extensively on the contemporary experiences of the tourists and staff who inhabit them.

Analyses of the intersections of literary tourism and popular culture typically take the form of single writer case studies. An excellent example is Juliette Wells' *Everybody's Jane*, which addresses a range of engagements with the literary legacy of Jane Austen, including tourism, films, and the collecting of Austen-bilia. Essays about L.M. Montgomery and popular culture, from films to tourism to dolls, were collected in *Making Avonlea* following a conference on the theme (Gammel 2002). Is it encouraging to see scholars increasingly analyzing the intersecting modes by which writers are remembered. Analysis at the intersection of tourism and related fields—popular culture and museums—is an important methodological move for specifically humanistic tourism studies.

Though this literature review positions this dissertation primarily within tourism studies and its subset of literary tourism studies, literary house *museums* are the touchstone for each case study. Museums have always had a close relationship to tourism—both as attractions for travelers from afar and as locally accessible contact zones where one can ‘travel’ by viewing collections (Macdonald 2012: 51). The subfield of visitor studies has produced many useful insights into visitor desires and behaviors in museums, but, as in tourism studies, quantitative social science-based research typically serves practical purposes of the institution, offering prescriptions for increasing attendance, learning, and visitor satisfaction. Such work is important to the continued evolution and sustainability of these cultural institutions, but does not adequately address questions about the meanings of museums and tourism and their relationship to visitor identities, histories, or other humanistic concerns. This account of interpretations in and



around museums emphasizes description, not prescription, demonstrating how discourses inside museums connect to myriad popular discourses outside museums.

Unlike most studies conducted under the auspices of museum or tourism studies which tend to focus on visitor feedback, the people who perpetuate literary tourism sites—the museum staff, tourists, and creators of intertexts—are granted ample treatment in this project. This work further contributes to museum/heritage studies by demonstrating the museum’s position within an ecosystem of modalities for engaging with the past that interweaves the discourses of ‘official’ historic sites with discourses in popular culture.

This project supplements the researcher’s scholarly perspective with the perspectives of three distinct, directly involved interpretive communities, showing their interrelationships and highlighting the cultural climate they share (such as beliefs about ‘becoming’ in the postfeminist era). Each chapter seeks to get at the factors that determine why certain interpretations have come forward as dominant. Examining the forces that influence how guides interpret the Alcotts in Chapter One, how tourists interpret ‘Anne’ in Chapter Two, how filmmakers and site staff interpret Beatrix Potter in Chapter Three, and how retail staff interpret all three in Chapter Four diversifies the question of ‘meaning-making in the museum,’ which typically focuses on visitors alone. At the same time, because none of these groups interpret in a vacuum sealed off from the others, this approach shows points of interface and influence—points of dialogue where interpretations get reconsidered and revised. Explanations of how interpretations are borne of the writers’ and the sites’ histories and the interpreter’s interactions with other interpreters whose stakes may differ from her own, is followed by discussion of the implications of dominant interpretations—commercial, personal, institutional, or other. In each instance, even with a particular narrative taking precedence over others in remembering a writer’s legacy, there is

always space to read against the grain and to entertain less obvious interpretations still grounded in the known history and literature. Polysemy prevails in museum interpretations.

In addition to offering an interdisciplinary assessment of the network of interpretations that circulate at literary tourism sites, this dissertation suggests museums as an underexplored site of analysis for scholars of postfeminist popular culture seeking to understand the cultural texts, artifacts, and practices used to articulate 21st century femininities. As ‘postfeminist’ emerged as a category with increasing frequency in the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars directed their attention toward literary, televisual, cinematic and commercial depictions of women’s lives (see, for example, Probyn 1993, Hollows 2000, Tasker and Negra 2005, Hollows and Moseley 2006, Tasker and Negra 2007, Radner and Stringer 2011). In the 1990s, moving into the new millennium, studies of postfeminist domesticity addressed the rise of lifestyle media (see, for example, Brunsdon 2005, Bell and Hollows 2005, Gillis and Hollows 2009). Despite the fundamental differences between museums and mass popular culture,<sup>33</sup> museums warrant investigation by feminist scholars concerned with mass media forms because museums, like mass media, trade in representations that employ text, images, video, and narratives about identity. Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top are sites where discourse around femininity, feminism, and gender norms occurs in remarkably similar veins to those found in popular culture texts. Feminist cultural studies can offer a fresh perspective on museums in concert with methodologies from museum/heritage studies, which recognize the museum as a

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<sup>33</sup> The dearth of attention paid to museums and historic sites by scholars of feminist popular culture is explained in part by audience size, given the field’s tendency toward analysis of ‘mass’ forms. Hollywood ‘chick flicks’ and glossy fashion magazines that reach millions over the course of a few weeks arguably exert a broader effect on the attitudes of their respective audiences than museum sites seen by only 50,000 people per year. And yet, daily small groups of museum visitors accumulate throughout the year, and over the decades. Open to the public since 1912, 1937, and 1944, respectively, Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top consistently attract tens of thousands of visitors annually, from all over the world. Though visitor numbers ebb and flow over time, one could estimate that a site welcoming 50,000 visitors per year may have been seen by as many as five million people since its doors opened a century earlier, though each will have a slightly different experience.

unique site of education, leisure, and inspiration. This project expands the scope of postfeminist popular culture to include literary house museums where personal and historical feminine subjectivities of the past are evoked in ways that reveal the longings and anxieties of the postfeminist consumer.

### Chapter Overview

Chapter One focuses on interpretation of Louisa May Alcott by guides at Orchard House Museum in Concord, MA, and the entanglements of Alcott's life and art that have shaped interpretations of her legacy today. Alcott drew upon memories of her own girlhood in crafting *Little Women* (1868-1869), but omitted mention of her family's controversial support of social reform issues of her day. In the 21st century, interpretation is grounded in themes from the novel—the March family (as based on the Alcotts) and the nostalgia visitors feel for the story. Orchard House guides today tout the real-life Alcotts' social activism, yet promote self-discipline in the face of hardship as the Alcottian trait visitors would do well to emulate in their personal lives, citing Louisa Alcott's elevation of her family from poverty via tenacity and self-sacrifice. I contrast the interpretation of the Alcotts' commitment to social reform at Orchard House to interpretation at the Harriet Beecher Stowe House in Hartford, CT, where inspiring social change through the emulation of Stowe takes top priority. Reading the sites side by side, I show how interpretation matches the genre and politics of a writer's most popular works and argue that the themes introduced by Alcott in *Little Women* and latched onto by subsequent generations of fans overshadow her usefulness as a role model for radicalism. Louisa May Alcott, who advocated for women's suffrage, abolition of slavery, coeducation, and other radical social changes, is celebrated for caring about larger social issues, but interpretations related to the visitor's potential emulation of her as a role model emphasize neoliberal aims of a striving

individual and her duty to family, not a socially conscious agent of change resisting injustice in American society.

Chapter Two examines nostalgic and emulative tourist practices that have developed around Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). Montgomery modeled her fictional setting after a farm near her home in Cavendish, on the north shore of Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. At Green Gables Heritage Place, and elsewhere on the Island, temporarily playing 'Anne' by donning a souvenir straw hat with attached red braids is a popular tourist activity. The tourist's arrival fantasy—embodied in the practice of playing Anne—is derived from Montgomery's account of Anne's journey to Green Gables, which introduces themes that extend into tourist interpretations and practices on the Island today: the desirable natural beauty of the Island, which cues tourism; the literary focalization of Anne's appreciative yet appropriating gaze, which frames the PEI landscape in Anne's terms; and Anne's preoccupation with her red hair as her defining attribute, which becomes the consumable visual symbol of her character. I argue that, for the adult women who come to the Island on a literary pilgrimage, playing 'Anne' is a way to perform (her)itage by temporarily inhabiting a feminine identity of the past at a key moment of potential flourishing, and to reflect on personal memories of girlhood caregivers, reading experiences, and fantasies of one day arriving at Green Gables themselves.

Acknowledging the important role that makers of derivative texts play in shaping public attitudes toward an author's life and works, Chapter Three compares narratives of personal empowerment in two different interpretations of the life of Beatrix Potter. The film *Miss Potter*, a 2006 biopic starring American actress Renee Zellweger, retrofits major events of Beatrix Potter's life to suit the generic conventions of neofeminist romance genre, infantilizing Potter in

order to frame her gradual independence from her parents as a belated ‘coming-of-age.’ I contrast the film’s depiction to the dialogic, impressionistic interpretation of Potter’s conservation legacy presented to visitors at her Hill Top Farm in the English Lake District, a literary tourism site that witnessed a significant uptick in visitation as a result of the film’s popularity. Both the film and the site present Potter as becoming increasingly independent (financially and romantically) through the creation of literary works and making a sizeable charitable bequest during an era in which it was unusual for a woman to exercise such agency. Each, however, highlights different aspects of Potter for the viewer/visitor to emulate, and presents a different take on what her legacy means. Comparing commentary from filmmakers about their interpretations in the film with commentary from museum staff about the interpretations offered at Hill Top, I argue that this historical female subject is evoked for the public in two very different—yet linked—cultural productions based on how two different sets of interpreters identify and imagine the past to serve their own interests.

Chapter Four deviates from the format of previous chapters to consider the ways retail staff interpret authorial legacies in the museum store and how museum stores are used by visitors to provide closure to the visit. Museum stores are spaces where a confluence of interpretive discourses, from guides, tourists, and intertexts intermingle, and where institutional and consumer identities entwine, their points of intersection expressed in the meanings of goods sold and purchased. Though their interpretive role is not as explicit as that of educators and guides, retail staff who plan, stock, and manage the museum store contribute to visitor experience in meaningful ways. Store offerings (determined by the factors discussed in the first part of the chapter) will shape, to some degree, the visitor’s memories of the museum experience. The latter part of the chapter argues that, as the visitor prepares to return to ordinary life, the museum

store's souvenir offerings smoothe the transition away from the extraordinary exposures to other times and places offered by the museum. In these specific case studies, the visitor's reflection on the past femininities presented within the museum and the inspiration to emulate the values, behaviors, or aesthetics of the women commemorated will guide selections as she departs, transformed in some way by the liminoid museum experience. Retail narratives—how the store relates to the museum and how museum stores serve the visitor—extend the values of the institution, the themes of the visit, and the idiosyncratic meanings made by the visitor into the time and space beyond the tourism encounter.

### **Significance of the Project**

Alcott, Montgomery, Potter, and their works live on in popular memory through their representations in new texts, practices, and commodities, providing words, images, fantasies, and feelings that remain useful to today's feminine identities. By studying the ways present day femininities are annotated by past femininities through reference, emulation, and experimentation, we can better understand how the heritage commemoration of famous women reponds to longings and anxieties of the early 21st century postfeminist period. Examination of the extraliterary legacies of Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter is useful to understanding larger questions about the relationship between childhood reading experiences and adult tourism practices, the synergy between historic sites and popular culture productions, and the blending of personal histories and cultural histories that motivate visits to museums and historic sites.

## CHAPTER ONE—‘Little Women Grow Up to Be Great Women’: Emulation and Self-Discipline at Louisa May Alcott’s Orchard House Museum

One of Orchard House museum guide Jessie Robinson’s favorite memories is of a rare tornado warning that sounded in Concord, Massachusetts, one late afternoon. A couple was waiting to take the last tour, and a group of cyclists stopping outside—two women and six children—“had no place to go.” After collecting a stock of snacks from the staff room, she recounts, “we brought them in the house, we brought them downstairs, and people were nervous, and so we were passing out water bottles, and I picked up a copy of *Little Women* and started reading out loud. And it was so moving. To me, it’s that feeling of overcoming obstacles, and we’re burrowing in together like the Alcotts would have done in a situation like that” (Robinson 2014). The appeal of behaving “like the Alcotts would have” is a theme that recurs on numerous Orchard House tours. Already inhabiting their domestic spaces, visitors are encouraged to ‘inhabit’ Alcott traits and values as well.

Orchard House receives a modest 30-50,000 visitors annually, with surges in visitation corresponding to the release of film adaptations. Most visitors who come are fans of *Little Women* (1868-1869), a novel recounting the trials and triumphs of the four March sisters as they come of age in Civil War-era New England in the company of their wise mother, Marmee, and charming neighbor boy, Laurie. Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) drew upon memories of her own life experiences in creating her characters and crafting plots for the first part of *Little Women*, conventionalizing controversial aspects of her biography to ensure the fictional March family would appeal to mainstream readers. Writing reluctantly at the behest of her publisher,

Alcott produced a novel that would become an American classic, and in doing so, set forth the parameters for her popular legacy as it would endure for more than a century.

After introducing Orchard House museum and the people who visit it, I identify choices Louisa Alcott made in composing *Little Women* that would become the themes of her popular legacy: her invention of the idealized March family, her nostalgia for her own girlhood, and her edicts for feminine ‘becoming’ through self-discipline. These themes continue to inflect interpretations of her legacy, nearly 150 years after the book was published, and over a century after the museum was founded. The later inclusion of the Alcotts’ radicalism within the museum’s interpretive scheme presents a potential fourth theme, derived from Louisa Alcott’s life rather than her established popular legacy. While lauded, however, this radicalism does not find a strongly expressed place in calls to emulate the Alcotts today. I contrast the situation at Orchard House briefly with the Harriet Beecher Stowe House in Hartford, Connecticut, where inspiring social change through the emulation of Stowe takes top priority. The Stowe House represents a road not taken in the case of Louisa Alcott’s legacy, and comparing the literary and historical provenances of the two sites not only shows how an author’s legacy durably represents the genre, politics, and reception of her most popular work(s), but also how neoliberal celebration of exceptional individuals at heritage sites tends to outshadow opportunities to proactively promote social change in the present day.

### **A Visit to Orchard House Museum**

Unassuming in its cocoa brown paint, Louisa May Alcott’s Orchard House Museum sits in a small clearing surrounded by trees. A quaint red and white roadside shingle advertises its significance as ‘the Home of Little Women.’ A few benches on the small lawn offer respite for visitors waiting to join the next guided tour. The original fruit trees no longer exist, but several



spindly new apple saplings gesture toward a restoration of the namesake orchard. Low maintenance flower beds, including one labeled “The Little Women’s Garden” dot the lawn. Slightly behind and left of the house looms the ‘Hillside Chapel,’ a structure built by Louisa’s father Bronson to house his Concord School of Philosophy. Celebrating its centenary in 2012, Orchard House has remained cherished by literary pilgrims and tourists for over a century.



**Figure 1: Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, in Concord, MA.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

Despite Bronson Alcott’s significant role in transcendental thought and Louisa’s large corpus of published works, visitors are drawn to the site primarily because of its connection to *Little Women*. According to one guide, “probably 80% know what they’re here for, or, a family member is very excited” (Robinson 2014). When asked about the typical pilgrim, staff respond ‘they’re mostly women, of course,’ then relate anecdotes of interactions with visitors from nearly every continent who testify that *Little Women* was foundational to their coming-of-age. Guides<sup>1</sup> at this museum describe pilgrims as excited, appreciative, and often, emotional:

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<sup>1</sup> Professional guides at Orchard House are officially called ‘educators,’ and those who staff the ticket desk, ‘in-charges.’ Some are paid staff, others are unpaid volunteers. (A number of paid staff began as volunteers.) For simplicity, I use the term ‘guides’ throughout this chapter.

We'll get people who say, 'I read this [*Little Women*] when I was seven, I've wanted to come here my whole life, I'm 84,' and they have really been thinking about it all those years, and they are so excited. (Robinson 2014)

We'll get a lot of people who come in, they walk through the door and they'll say 'Oh my God this is my favorite book, I'm so excited I'm here, I can't believe I'm finally here, I've waited XYZ number of years to be here this is so great and I love this story' and you know this is the one thing they've wanted to do their whole entire life, once they found out this was a real place. (Sousa 2014)

I had one older lady come in from the West coast and say 'I've waited all my life to come to see Orchard House, where the story was written where Louisa May Alcott lived,' and also that her children out west, they loved *Little Women* so much, it passed on to them, and they had their own little theater and put on *Little Women* every summer growing up. (Halleran 2014)

Once-in-a-lifetime visitors come from all over the world. All over Europe, Australia, New Zealand...probably Africa's the least common...South America more and more, for a long time they were very rare, but now, more and more for whatever reason. [...] [Visitors] really identify with the story somehow. Obviously, it's usually women. (Zirpolo 2013)

They love Louisa May Alcott, they love *Little Women*. [...] Everyone who's coming will say, 'this is the book that I loved and now [I'm] here.' They're so excited to be here. Yesterday on one of my tours I had three young girls—well, in their twenties—from Italy, a woman from Israel, and a woman from Germany. The woman from Germany had read it in German, the woman from Israel had read it in Hebrew, the girls from Italy had read it in Italian. And they were just thrilled to be here. [...] I had a lovely couple from Spain a couple weeks ago, and they were on their honeymoon. And he said—the young man from Spain—said, 'we've gone everywhere in the United States, we've been out in California—and the only place *she* wanted to see, in the whole trip, was Orchard House, in Concord, Massachusetts. So we had to come here.' (2013).<sup>2</sup>

It's usually all about loving *Little Women*, that's my experience, the people who come here on kind of a pilgrimage, they're usually the people that—mostly women—that grew up loving *Little Women*, seeing the movies, loving the story, and really connecting to the story for whatever reason. (Newton 2013).

'I have found [...] that people come here to hear about *Little Women*: 'Little Women, I love *Little Women*, I can't believe I'm here, my name is Josephine after Jo in *Little Women*, my name is Elizabeth after Beth,' you know, you hear that all the time [...] [T]hey'll say, 'my name is Amy, after Amy in the book, my mother loved it so much she named me Amy' [...] it's such a family book that people love it because of that. Family values, you know [...]. (Cody 2014)

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<sup>2</sup> This guide opted not to be identified by name.

The exact reasons people appreciate *Little Women* remain vague in staff descriptions (“they identify somehow;” “for whatever reason”), recalling fictional Jo March’s musings when her book about the family succeeds commercially: “[S]omething got into that story that went straight to the hearts of those who read it” (1869: 340). Visitors are not a homogenous group—even if most ‘love’ *Little Women*, they will appreciate slightly different things about the story, favor different characters, and relate to the story in idiosyncratic ways. Comments to do with visitors’ experiences of the story are more concrete—associations with family members, the book passed down from a loved one, or play-acting as children.

Motivations for visiting, as reflected in the guides’ descriptions of pilgrims, are not dissimilar from motivations of any literary tourist: to discover the origins and conditions of production of a loved text, to affirm that the imagined place really exists, or to feel as if one is inhabiting a fictional setting. In addition to these phenomenological experiences, visiting the site exposes the fan to new facts and interpretations. Some of these interpretations will be disclosures of what the writer liked and what the writer was like—revealed through the material record of her possessions—and others will be the “deeper truths of the places they have self-selected to experience” (Beck and Cable 39). What ‘deeper truths’ are transmitted on a particular day have been determined by guides, institutional mandates, visitor receptiveness, and a number of other factors, including historical precedent.

Each tour group unites a unique assemblage of people who will never come together with that guide, in that space, again. For example, a single tour of Orchard House in 2014 included residents of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Michigan, Colorado, Texas, and Birmingham, UK (site observation 2014). Interacting with visitors day in and day out, museum staff get to know the types of tourists their site attracts and adapt their interpretations to what they perceive to be

visitor needs.<sup>3</sup> Their interpretations may be revised, ever so slightly, depending on who's on the tour, who's giving the tour, and what movie they might have watched over the weekend.<sup>4</sup> Guides present the Alcotts and Orchard House in ways that they believe will be meaningful to visitors, adapting to visitor feedback, questions, and comments.

According to Nicola Watson, works of literature cue and shape subsequent tourist practices through “the sensibilities implied by texts [...] which readers then endeavor to recapitulate through the protocols of tourism” (2006: 12). Choices made by Louisa Alcott in the composition of *Little Women* established what would become defining themes of her legacy at Orchard House: the idealized fictional March family, nostalgia, and feminine becoming through self-discipline. The following examines each theme in turn, the ‘sensibilities’ implied, and their present manifestation in Orchard House interpretation today.

These three themes can be discerned from the earliest days of her commemoration. In 1912, the house where Alcott wrote and set her famous novel opened to the public as a museum, under the auspices of the not-for-profit Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, a committee of the Concord Women's Club (CWC) incorporated in 1911 (West 60). Inspired by the domestic comforts and family values that *Little Women* represented for readers, founders envisioned Orchard House as a shrine to the fictional March family's 19th-century, Anglo-American way of life. The early 20th century was a transformative time of mass immigration and urbanization, and both of these social trends were sources of anxiety for the museum's founders. Focusing on values compatible with their conservative agenda, the museum's founders ensured that the

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<sup>3</sup> Historic home tours are ephemeral transactions, unrepeatable and largely unrecorded. Because I could not observe the several thousand tours that take place in a given year, I instead interviewed staff about their experiences interacting with visitors (how visitors say they feel, what visitors want to know) and their personal tour philosophy (what should be covered, how they talk about the Alcotts). A dozen interviews with guides and other staff were conducted at Orchard House.

<sup>4</sup> Weather is also different every day; shifting most dramatically with the seasons. Though climate is influenced by the production/consumption dynamics of human culture, daily weather cannot be construed as intentionally ideological. It is, however, an important factor in the appearance and experience of a historic site.

memory of Louisa May Alcott manifested primarily as appreciation of the fictional March family. The museum was in fact funded through appeals describing the pitiful physical condition of the house<sup>5</sup> and its significance as home to cherished Marches. Goals to conserve the physical structure were overlaid with goals to conserve a traditional domesticity as consensus (West 67).



**Figure 2: Since its founding in 1912, Orchard House has been known as the 'Home of Little Women.'**

**Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

In her monograph on the founding of significant early American house museums, historian Patrician West writes that the museum founders “reinvented” the narrative of Orchard House as the March family home and ‘suppressed’ the reality of the Alcott family’s lives. “The fact that the public meaning constructed for Orchard House designated it as the home of Alcott’s ‘little women’ highlights its invented quality” (West 84). This interpretation of the house as ‘Home of *Little Women*’ would overshadow the Alcott family’s radical beliefs throughout the museum’s early history. West explains:

By identifying Concord’s modern elite with a mythologized Anglo-American history, and by encouraging immigrants and their families to do the same, they [the founders] authenticated their role as cultural leaders, using their new social

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<sup>5</sup> In 1877, following her mother’s death, Louisa Alcott and her father had moved to 255 Main Street in Concord (once the home of Henry David Thoreau and, subsequently, Louisa’s sister, Anna Alcott Pratt). This house is currently a private residence.

power to create institutions like the Orchard House museum. For them, *Little Women* and Orchard House were emblems of the virtuous and ostentatiously traditional domesticity that could establish a reassuring stability as they entered the new world of the twentieth century. (65)

The house's sparse furnishings and interior decoration reflected the poverty of the family, represented 19th century 'shabby genteel' style, and exemplified the post-/anti-Victorian, honest American efficiency and function the museum founders wished to promote. As visitors today enter the 'new world' of the twenty-first century, they may be interested in the historic furnishings, approximately 80% of which were owned by the Alcotts, but they are unlikely to adopt its outmoded domestic style.

Visitors are still drawn to visit by their love of the Marches, but the home's famous real-life inhabitants now take priority over its fictional ones. Guides transfer love for the Marches to love for the Alcotts, interpreting various family members as role models worthy of emulation. For literary pilgrims—those fans of the story of *Little Women* (via book, film, stage production, or other media), a visit to Orchard House is guided as a (her)itage experience that combines nostalgia for past femininities (personal, fictional, and historical) with provocation to adopt attitudes, habits, and wisdom of Louisa Alcott and her family members.

### ***The Beloved March Family***

Despite moderate success as a writer of sensational short stories (published pseudonymously) and an account of her service as a Civil War nurse, titled *Hospital Sketches* (1863), Louisa Alcott had yet to earn a dependable income as a writer. When her publisher Thomas Niles saw a potential market for girls' books, Alcott delayed, writing in her journal: "I don't enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters" (165-166). Eventually, she sat down at the half moon desk in her Concord bedroom and began writing vigorously. Referring to her own journals for details of family life, she created the March family,

headed by capable matriarch Marmee, who keeps watch over her four daughters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, while Mr. March is away serving as chaplain in the Civil War. Alcott drew from her childhood memories of life with her own mother, Abigail, and sisters Anna, Lizzie, and May, giving the character ‘Jo’ her own place in the family, as well as her own aspirations, phenotype, and character traits. Instead of a historical milieu consistent with the time period of her childhood, she set the action of the novel in the present day, and used her family’s present home—Orchard House in Concord, Massachusetts—as its setting. Numerous parallels can thus be discerned between Alcott’s life story and the literary story of the Marches in *Little Women*.

Alcott shrewdly revised certain details of her life to create a heart-warming domestic narrative. The architectural shortcomings of the house she derisively nicknamed ‘Appleslump’—the dismally sagging joists, leaking roof, and skewed angles—would have metaphorically undermined the solid, secure ambiance of the fictional March family home.<sup>6</sup> The March family finances are modest but adequate, whereas the Alcotts lived in poverty and debt throughout Louisa’s childhood, relying on the kindness of extended family and friends for loans and gifts. Fictional Beth March passes away peacefully and willingly in Part Two of *Little Women*, whereas Louisa’s own sister Lizzie wasted away slowly of scarlet fever, experiencing severe pain in the days leading up to her death (Matteson 2007: 235-236). Hardly a poster family for stability, by the time the Alcotts settled at Orchard House, where they resided for almost twenty years, Louisa had moved homes an average of once every two years, changing addresses with her father’s changing fortunes (Matteson 232).

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<sup>6</sup> In fictionalizing it, Alcott set the stage for its conservation, first, at the time of the museum’s founding. More recently, the plight of this national landmark attracted the attention of former First Lady Laura Bush, who debuted as Save America’s Treasures’ honorary chair in 2002 (“A Visit from the First Lady”) with a visit to Orchard House to announce a grant in support of site restoration.

In *Little Women*, Mr. March is mostly absent, though his voice provides the book's title and a lens through which to visualize the March sisters. He hopes that when he returns from the war: "I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women" (Alcott 1868: 17). Louisa's own father, transcendentalist philosopher Amos 'Bronson' Alcott, was a forward-thinking educator who encouraged students in the various independent schools he set up to think for themselves, rather than merely memorizing and repeating lessons. Throughout his life, he was known for being a gifted conversationalist (Matteson 7), but many of his attempts to put his ideas into writing failed. His successful lecture tours and out-of-town visits to his philosophical social network often coincided with times he was needed at home. He was an idealist, disdainful of financial transactions, content to survive on meager earnings or the charity of others. Louisa, who felt obligated to take up the role of breadwinner for her family, and who had herself served in the Civil War as a nurse, builds the March family patriarch from her own life experiences.<sup>7</sup>

Family shaped Louisa Alcott in positive and negative ways, her life story as told through journals and letters reveals. Humphrey Carpenter points out the contradictions between what *Little Women* seems to be about, and the reality upon which it was based:

The book seems at first glance to be no more than a series of sketches of life in a rather saccharinely portrayed but otherwise unremarkable family. The casual reader might suppose the Marches to be really quite conventional. Yet a second look shows that the story is a veiled account of all that Louisa had suffered, and at the same time a kind of celebration of the fact that she had survived. It castigates family life for imposing suffering, and yet asserts that only in the family can sanity be found (Carpenter 93).

'Sanity' is stressed over 'suffering' in the Orchard House narrative, for which the supportive, unified, and loving family remains the dominant motif. Facts that might undercut the

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<sup>7</sup> Biographer John Matteson suggests that Bronson Alcott resisted gender norms of the day as much as his strong-minded daughter Louisa did. His interest in dietary reform led him to assist at times with cooking. His on-again, off-again career as an educator lent itself to an interest in child-rearing, and he spent copious amounts of time observing and interacting with his young children (141, 148). Matteson concludes that Bronson "may not have been manly enough to find a place in an ideal fictional family. His gentle nature [...] and his rejection of the masculine world of commerce made him more of a second mother to his children than a traditional father" (343).



family unity narrative are less likely to be mentioned, such as the story of how the Alcotts were nearly torn apart by Bronson's experiment with chaste 'consociate' living at the Fruitlands commune (Francis 2010), or the fact that Louisa frequently ran away from home as a child (Matteson 82), and as an adult, rented a room in Boston to work, away from the demands and distractions of her family once it was financially possible. Yet the family's unity is re-affirmed by the eventual failure of the Fruitlands experiment, and by Louisa's commitment to write and earn the money her parents and siblings so desperately needed, even if it meant secluding herself in the city away from them. Other than some intra-sibling squabbles, the Marches had a much easier time as a loving family than the Alcotts. The resilience of sentiment about family unity at Orchard House Museum today exemplifies David Lowenthal's notion that "what is celebrated becomes immune to conscious revision" (1998: 18).

When a life story forms the basis for a literary story, and the literary story is taken as basis for a legacy story, the plots of these layered narratives diverge as often as they intersect. Most visitors arrive more familiar with *Little Women* than with the Alcott family, so all tours must tease fact away from fiction. This is the case at most heritage sites, but at writer's houses moreso, since the line between life and literature has probably already been blurred by the writers themselves when they drew upon their life experiences for their fictional worlds, characters, and plots. Orchard House guides are accustomed to correcting false assumptions with which visitors arrive: "I've definitely experienced people feeling unsettled [...] that Louisa in real life didn't have the happy ending that she gives her alter ego in the book," a guide confides. "But along with that disappointment that you see even from adults who really love the book, they realize that they have new reasons to love this book" (Newton 2013). The facts of how Alcott's and Jo's fates differ—that Alcott never married, as Jo had, that Laurie and Professor Bhaer are

composite creations—are promptly addressed. Visitors are encouraged to embrace the revisions Alcott made to her life story, and to appreciate the Alcotts as much, or more, than the Marches.

Orchard House interpretation in the early 21st century builds upon the fictional *Little Women* by using the visitor's interest in the Marches as a foundation for generating interest in the Alcotts. According to executive director Jan Turnquist, every tour covers the basics: that *Little Women* was written in the house and that there are connections between Louisa Alcott's family and the characters in the book, but that the book was not purely autobiographical (2013).

Orchard House tour guide Lily Newton interprets Alcott's compromise in the depiction of the Marches as cause to appreciate the book more: "I think that people who come off my tours have a better understanding of [her motivations] and a better understanding of why the book is wonderful" (2013).

### ***Nostalgia for Childhood***

Louisa Alcott does more than depict a heart-warming account of family life as events unfold in the fictional March home. She also instructs her reader's response to these events through the novel's secondary focalization, a narratorial voice inflected with adult nostalgia. Children's books are frequently written from the perspective of a child protagonist. Events, feelings, and ideas are focalized through that child. Yet, children's literature scholar Perry Nodelman notes that child-focalized stories are rarely written as strictly first-person accounts. Rather, they are supplemented with the voice of a secondary focalizer, a narrator who explains to the reader what the child is thinking and feeling, and annotates the protagonist's limited perspective with additional information for the reader. This narrator guides the reader—even if that reader is a child—to interpret events in a more sophisticated way than the protagonist is able to (2008: 20-33).

Secondary focalizations in children’s books “invite the reader both to see with the eyes of innocence and to see beyond that innocence at almost exactly the same time” (Nodelman 25). In Alcott’s *Little Women*, the narrator is unabashedly nostalgic, an adult woman recalling past times she shared with her family. Passages such as this one express her mature, nostalgic point of view: “There was a great deal of laughing, and kissing, and explaining, in the simple, loving fashion which makes these home-festivals so pleasant at the time, and so sweet to remember long afterward[...].” (22). It is not the joyful voices of the child-participants who narrate this vignette, but the melancholy voice of an adult narrator looking back. At the time Alcott was writing *Little Women*, her sister Lizzie (the inspiration for Beth March in the novel) had already passed away, and Anna (Meg March) had already married and moved from the family home. Alcott’s nostalgia for her childhood when all her sisters were together comes across as an aching grasp for lost times. By focalizing the story in part from a nostalgic adult perspective, the author models nostalgia for her readers and guides them toward a ‘preferred reading’ (Hall 1973). This nostalgic secondary focalization instructs the reader to perceive the Marches as existing in a past, lost, better time—pre-death, pre-growing up. Visitors familiar with the story of *Little Women* arrive at Orchard House with a pre-existing emotional investment borne of this authorial sensibility combined with their own personal childhood nostalgia related to *Little Women*.<sup>8</sup>

Guides at Orchard House are adept “being aware of [visitor] perspectives, knowledge, and past experiences” (Beck and Cable 15), listening empathically as visitors talk about the

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that it is impossible to ‘read’ the house in another way; certainly there will be checklist tourists who have never read the book that happen to visit during a trip to Concord, ‘accompanying husbands,’ or researchers (wink) who experience the site in resistant or alternative ways. Anne Trubek recalls in her ‘skeptics’ survey of writers’ homes a man on her Orchard House tour who occupied himself with examining the undersides of the furnishings to see how they had been constructed (2011: 62). This way of appreciating the house was echoed by a visitor I spoke with, who, on a church mission trip twenty years earlier had ‘recruited’ her service group of hobbyist woodworkers, mostly men, to accompany her on an Orchard House pilgrimage after building a church in a nearby town: “They enjoyed it,” she recalled, “they enjoyed seeing how things were laid out and how poorly constructed the house was” (site observation 2013).

significance of Alcott's work. By guide accounts, an important part of a visitor's pilgrimage experience is sharing their personal story, and the ways visitors express their nostalgia varies:

Sometimes they can be quiet. Smile a lot. Listen. And then they will share at the end of the tour. [...] And I've had other people come in, often they don't say anything prior, like I said, smile, respond, ask a few questions, [then] usually it's after I've done the tour that they'll come up to me" (Halleran 2014).

For others, nostalgia for their past experiences with *Little Women* is expressed more ebulliently: "Reading the book, and not just having it be a book that they read, but having it be a book that influenced them somehow, at some moment in their life, they're the ones that come and say 'Oh my God, I can't believe I'm finally here!'" (Sousa 2014). Nostalgia is the theme that requires the least professional interpretation; it is something visitors are feeling spontaneously.

### ***'Becoming' By Overcoming***

As this chapter's opening anecdote demonstrates, for guide Jessie Robinson, *Little Women* represents triumph over hardship. "I love books where women are banding together and finding a way to survive," Robinson remarks. "[T]he girls are not perfect, their relationships are not perfect, they are not happy throughout the book [...]. And maybe that's one reason why she wrote, to show real people having real problems" (Robinson 2014). The social verisimilitude of the book and the realness of the girls makes them easy to relate to. Another guide comments, "It's pretty powerful to read it as a young girl, [...] it still reads well as an adult. But when you read it as a girl, here's a young girl [Jo] you really admire but she's so imperfect. She really gets herself into trouble, she has a temper, she does things that you might do too, but you shouldn't. She works her way through this, and I think that has a strong impact. [...]" (Zirpolo 2013). The March sisters crave moral lessons and imagine being 'good' as defined by their parents, yet their true nature as 'normal' girls causes them to fall short of this ideal:

If [Jo] had been a heroine of a moral story-book, she ought, at this period in her life to have become quite saintly, renounced the world, and gone about doing good in a mortified bonnet, with tracts in her pocket. But you see Jo wasn't a heroine; she was only a struggling human girl, like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross, listless, or energetic, as the mood suggested. (339)

This section examines how several guides interpret the theme of becoming-by-overcoming. The self-discipline the Marches/Alcotts sought to cultivate is presented to visitors as an opportunity to “measure the fictional behavior against what [s]he imagines [her] own character and conduct, under such circumstances, would be” (Tilden 38), resulting in a call for visitors to emulate the Alcotts.

Rather than repeating a memorized script to each group, guides at Orchard House read widely about the Alcott family, building a store of knowledge that they can draw upon to customize each tour from the vast historical record of journals, letters, and published works this prolific family left behind. “We’re allowed to create, we’re allowed to craft our own tours, we train each other, we shadow each other’s tours, [...] we’re always reading,” explains guide Lily Newton. Newton wrote her undergraduate thesis on Louisa’s artist sister May Alcott, so she tends to include extra information about May on her tours. Guide Nancy Halleran has a personal fondness for Louisa’s mother, Abigail May, which comes through in her interpretations of the events that occurred in the house. In interviews, guides also spoke of approaching the tour content through one or more themes that resonated with them personally, among them, ways the Alcotts were role models for coping with personal struggles or misfortunes.

*Little Women* is an explicitly pedagogic text for girls, but unlike its predecessors, which featured perfect, angelic girls, *Little Women* addresses the challenges faced by the striving, not-yet-perfected feminine subject through themes of self-regulation and self-improvement.

Humphrey Carpenter describes the shift in girls’ books from parental discipline to self-discipline

inaugurated by Alcott in *Little Women* as “a subversive attitude to the old structure of the family” (Carpenter 87). In *Little Women*, Marmee instills discipline by guiding the girls toward being able to discipline themselves. Contemporary readers don’t relate to preachy edicts, nor does the contemporary museum visitor. Freeman Tilden advises that provoking the visitor to better herself is “a delicate job, requiring great discretion. The [tourist] on holiday does not wish to be lectured” (Tilden 152-153). Orchard House guides, following Marmee’s example, offer suggestions of how visitors might discipline themselves, with the Alcotts conveniently furnishing ideas of what such self-discipline might entail.

Visitors are encouraged, directly and indirectly, to not complain, to make the best of difficult situations, and to selflessly aid others. “Interpretive messages must be interesting to capture attention, meaningful so that people care, and compelling so that people no longer think or act the same after hearing them,” Beck and Cable advise (13). The guides interviewed sometimes concluded “compelling” anecdotes about the family with a subtle moral or lesson meant to influence how the visitor would “think or act.” A common theme of these lessons is that one could become a better person by overcoming hardship through self-discipline. Louisa Alcott’s sense of duty to her family is well-suited to this theme, expressed through a number of examples, usually related to Bronson Alcott’s inability to support his family, and Louisa’s felt obligation to earn money for her mother and sisters in his stead. “She understood the role she had to take. And that’s something that I tend to emphasize on my tours,” Newton asserts (Newton 2013). Guide Nancy Halleran, who structures her tour to educate visitors about her favorite Alcott, Louisa’s mother Abigail (known in real life and in the novel as ‘Marmee’), presents Marmee as a role model for Louisa (and for the visitor): “Marmee came from wealth,”

Halleran states, “She never ironed a day in her life. But she had to iron to earn money for the family because Mr. Alcott was not bringing in any money” (Halleran 2014).

Guide Jennie Johanson believes the Alcotts can teach people about “being a person of good character and determination.” On her tours, Johanson tells the story of Louisa Alcott’s physical struggles:

I’ll mention how she taught herself to be ambidexterous because she had a lot of pain in her joints, so when one hand would stiffen up and it would be too hard for her to continue to write she would just switch to the other hand and keep going, instead of like, ‘Oww, that hurts too much.’ [...] [T]oday, we’re used to comfort. [...] [T]he littlest setback, it seems like ‘Oh it’s the end of the world,’ and people complain so much [...]. (Johanson 2014)

When Louisa Alcott was volunteering as a nurse during the Civil War, she came down with a near-fatal case of typhoid and was treated with mercury-based calomel, which is thought to have robbed her of good health for the rest of her life. Nancy Halleran recounts this somber story beneath a portrait of Louisa that hangs in the dining room, in which her blotchy skin and dull eyes depict the toll her decision to help others has taken. Visitors are prompted to admire Louisa Alcott’s resolve and to empathetically consider what their response might have been to similar hardship when Halleran asks rhetorically, “Did she sit around and feel sorry for herself?” Halleran provides the answer: “Never. Because that was a waste of energy. She always felt she was put on the earth to take care of her family and make their life easier” (Halleran 2014).

Explicit didacticism is tempered by the interpreter, who suggests, as Marmee might have, *voluntary* emulation of the exceptional Alcott women.

Vibrant pink tee shirts emblazoned with the motto ‘Little Women Grow Up to Be Great Women’ sold in the Orchard House museum store affirm ‘becoming’ as the resonant core of the novel. The ‘Little Women’—the Marches, and by extension, the Alcotts—are elevated as role models for becoming ‘great.’ Chapter IX of *Little Women* features an exemplary vignette of the

struggles of the becoming woman. Meg March goes to stay for a fortnight with the fashionable and wealthy Moffat family. In the company of well-to-do but vapid young girls, Meg gradually absorbs their “airs and graces” (72), amid conscious attempts to steel herself against feelings of “envy, vanity, and false pride” (73). Embarrassed by her modest attire and seduced by the glamour of fancy clothing the girls offer to lend her, Meg allows herself to be painted and primed in preparation for a ball:

They crimped and curled her hair, they polished her neck and arms with some fragrant powder, touched her lips with coralline salve [...] they laced her into a sky-blue dress, which was so tight she could hardly breathe, and so low in the neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror. (76)

Meg is vulnerable to mixed messages about what she should ‘become’—she knows her family would not approve of her attire, yet the beautiful clothes and attention from the party guests give her pleasure. Positive feelings about her superficial transformation are promptly curtailed by the arrival of Laurie, proxy for the March family values she has strayed from. Meg later confesses to Marmee and Jo, “I drank champagne, and romped, and tried to flirt” (83)—transgressions that will seem rather tame to a 21st century reader.





**Figure 3: ‘Little Women Grow Up to Be Great Women’ tee shirt in the Orchard House museum store.**

**Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

What girls are encouraged to become today recalls, in some respects, the thing Meg escapes becoming at the Moffats. Postfeminist popular culture promotes anxieties about physical appearance, relationships with friends and lovers, and career through a constant barrage of advertising and advice. (Her)itage evoking the Alcott women can be seen as responding to anxieties and weaknesses of character prompted by the egoistic and materialistic foci of postfeminist becoming. Considering that Marmee pronounces the Moffats “worldly, ill-bred, and full of [...] vulgar ideas” (83), one can’t imagine she would have anything positive to say about the content of 21st century women’s media. Alcottian (her)itage—emulating the values of the Marches/Alcotts—can be seen as an antidote to the way feminine becoming itself has ‘become,’ that is, how girls growing up are guided by mainstream, postfeminist popular culture.

Individual people—the readers now visiting and the girls on the pages of Alcott’s novel—‘become’ women in messy, hopeful, joyous, and laborious vignettes. Retail manager and

former guide Sally Cody comments on the ‘Little Women Grow Up to Be Great Women’ shirts: “people look up to the Alcotts. [...] they think of them as a resourceful, close, hard-working.” She continues, “times are tough for us, just like the Alcotts, but we’ll make it” (Cody 2014). Literary critic Sarah Elbert argues that readers across the decades have been attracted to “Alcott’s depiction of the woman problem, the conflict between domesticity and individuality” that makes itself known on the cusp of womanhood (152). The resonant challenges of becoming women under the competing influences of family, peers, and culture has been the inheritance of every generation of American women since Alcott’s novel was published; only the details have changed.

Twenty-first century visitors to Orchard House may relate to the March sisters’ struggles to articulate their own femininities within, or against, socially defined standards for physical attractiveness, ‘good’ behavior, and ‘appropriate’ aspirations, but Louisa Alcott’s concerns about women in society reached well beyond the domestic sphere. In the tour excerpts above, her family’s poverty and her unwavering efforts to support them outshadow the actions she took on behalf of society as a whole. Along with her socially-minded family, Louisa campaigned for broad spectrum social change, from abolition of slavery and suffrage for blacks and women to coeducation and temperance.

### **‘A Funny Match’: Radicalism And Nostalgia**

Part One of *Little Women* was published in 1868 to great acclaim, and letters from readers began pouring in. Louisa Alcott appreciated the attention her work was receiving, but balked at her young fans’ obsession with heteronormative destiny: “Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman’s life. I *won’t* marry Jo to Laurie to please any one” (*Journals* 1 Nov 1868). Though Alcott would have preferred for her

fictional counterpart to reject marriage altogether (as she herself ultimately did), she settled on a compromise, asserting her authorial autocracy by making for Jo what she termed ‘a funny match.’ Jo marries Professor Bhaer, an older, German educator with whom she founds a school and bears two sons in the second part of *Little Women*. This compromise exemplifies Alcott’s struggle to balance her own will as an artist with the popular tastes of the readers whose continued financial support she desperately needed to care for herself and her aging parents. This section considers another ‘funny match’ that attends Louisa Alcott’s legacy, the values of the nostalgia inspired by the novel and the radical social agenda pursued by the Alcotts during their lives.

A key point covered on most tours today, according to executive director Jan Turnquist, is that the Alcotts “were so progressive [...] what we would today call social activism was really a hallmark of their entire lives [...]” (Turnquist 2013). To explicitly state the importance of progressive thought to the Alcott family represents a major shift from 1912’s conservative site narrative described by Patricia West. Added later, as it was, the theme of the Alcotts’ radicalism contributes to their worth as role models but doesn’t come forward as something to emulate, for two reasons. First, the specifics of the Alcotts’ interventions are temporally distant enough to seem already resolved, and, second, encouraging visitors to support social reform in their own time is a bit riskier for the institution, as it brings up not only a complicated past, but a complicated present.

Anne Trubek colorfully describes the Alcotts as being “to most of middle-class mainstream America, a bunch of weirdo radicals, who supported John Brown, progressive education, and women’s rights. [...] In other words, the Alcotts were anything but the idealized American family enshrined by the founders of the Orchard House museum” (56-57). The

Alcotts' 'weirdo radical' ideas fail to upset today's 'middle-class mainstream' visitors because most of their progressive visions have reached mainstream saturation. Coeducation is an accepted norm now, and temperance a quaint artifact of an earlier time. Abolition and women's suffrage are the social issues identified most frequently as examples of Bronson, Abigail, and Louisa's progressive politics. Abolition of slavery—a synecdoche for racial equality—and women's suffrage—a synecdoche for gender equality, were achieved in the decades following Alcott's death. David Lowenthal has noted how heritage discourses alter the past, "making the past better than it was (or worse, to attract sympathy)." The notion of a 19th century America of slavery and disenfranchised women seems archaic when compared to the less visible discriminations of the 20th and 21st centuries. Heritage discourses also tend to "anachronistically [read] back from the present qualities we want to see in past icons and heroes" (1998:12). Modern-day visitors to Orchard House can admire Louisa Alcott for espousing positions that eventually came to fruition, imagining how it must have been to live in that earlier, less enlightened time, perceiving her legacy of social reform as a story whose book is long since closed. In this then-versus-now model, the passage of time can easily be mistaken for the agent of change. But social change is a living process driven by committed activists and citizens like the Alcotts, even if the specifics of the issues today look different than they did in the 1860s.<sup>9</sup> The tendency to admire Alcottian radicalism as an ending forecloses opportunities to see it as an opening.

The Harriet Beecher Stowe House and Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut, furnishes an interesting comparative study. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) is an American author best known for her abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Laden with Christian sentiment and

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<sup>9</sup> For example, ongoing issues such as human trafficking, disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities, racially motivated police brutality, and de facto discriminations and microaggressions offer ample, sobering evidence that the social issues of concern to the Alcotts abide in ever-evolving forms.

didacticism, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a well-crafted and vivid depiction of enslaved and free blacks, and white Americans who supported and resisted ownership of slaves. Stowe was an inspiration to Louisa Alcott (Elbert 1984: 91) and eventually a mentor, and they shared a social reform agenda (Abate 2006), yet these writers' legacies evolved in distinctly different ways. The Hartford house in which Stowe spent the last twenty-three years of her life is one of several known residences where she is commemorated. Stowe's grandniece Katharine Seymour Day (granddaughter of suffragist Isabella Beecher Hooker) founded the Stowe Center in 1941 as a private foundation and set to work amassing an extensive archive of manuscripts and other artifacts related to Stowe. The museum opened to the public in 1968, a few years after Day's death.



**Figure 4: The Harriet Beecher Stowe House in Hartford, CT.**

**Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

The Stowe museum was founded to promote social change—not social preservation. Executive Director Katherine Kane describes the institution as “a grassroots community group *and* an international tourist attraction,” providing programming for school groups, house tours

(mostly for tourists),<sup>10</sup> book talks, and other events for the greater Hartford public. At ‘salons,’ conversations are facilitated by experts on a contemporary topic, for example, racial microaggressions, and engage the community per the institution’s mission to encourage “vibrant discussion.” The Stowe Center’s provocations probe serious, significant issues while remaining sensitive to visitor reception. Kane explains:

What we really want [visitors] to do is leave understanding that Stowe is a particular example, knowing a little bit about what she did, and hopefully that inspires them to get engaged [...]. To think, well, she could do that in that time, and her life was threatened, it was physically dangerous for her and her family to do what she did. What’s the big deal with me helping out at the local senior citizen club, or taking a leadership position in an organization I care about? (Kane 2014)

The site celebrates Stowe’s literary and abolitionist achievements “to encourage social justice and positive change,” acknowledging that the world’s problems are far from solved.

What the Stowe House exemplifies is what Beck and Cable call “the courage to look for trouble” (44), that is, to raise issues related to the cultural resource that may discomfit visitors.

But Kane says there’s no alternative:

We don’t have a choice. [...] [W]e’re talking about 19th century slavery and people as property, and Stowe’s role in that, whatever you think of it, and we’re talking about a racial slur. And so just by the historic content, if we’re doing our job, we’re talking about complicated American history. [...] We know from our focus groups and from our experience that [...] it doesn’t have to be simplified. [...] [T]hey want the whole thing, they don’t just want the pretty pictures” (2014).

The Stowe House is not constrained as Orchard House is by precedents of visitor nostalgia.

Reading *Little Women* makes people feel good. Reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is “deeply painful” (Kane 2014). The Stowe House’s mission makes its activist agenda inevitable, but it is the lack of nostalgia for Harriet Beecher Stowe and her characters that make it possible.

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<sup>10</sup> Two thirds of visitors come from outside Connecticut and 10% are international (Kane 2014).

Adapting Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' to a museum interpretation context, Beck and Cable state that "settings that are effective in advancing learning and promoting optimal experiences are characterized by the absence of anything that might induce anxiety or stress" (147). It is understandable that so few historic sites probe the more contentious present day topics with which the history they interpret might be associated, but the Stowe House staff are finding ways to provoke visitors without causing unnecessary anxiety. A number of new interpretive products being tested in 2014 demonstrate this process. Kane describes the pilot interpretations as "dialogue-based experiences" that get people together and then "provoke them a little bit." For example, an anteroom to the house is plastered with large photos of famous people from the past and present, alongside quotations from each about Stowe's impact. Abraham Lincoln, Laura Bush, and Phylicia Rashad share wall space. Stowe's far reaching influence is demonstrated as visitors are encouraged to browse the quotations and comment aloud on any that seem especially evocative. Kane says, "If you put up what other people said about Stowe, famous people, they get it, and we don't have to say anything. They understand in a whole different way than if it's just some interpreter telling them" (2014).

In the parlor, visitors sit on fabric draped chairs arranged in a circle as a guide circulates laminated fascimiles of historical documents—advertisements for the capture of runaway slaves, an abolitionist 'Alphabet' booklet written for children, and some sheet music with anti-slavery lyrics. Visitors speak in hushed tones to their companions or join in a discussion facilitated by the guide. The last stop on the tour is the kitchen, where visitors are prompted to write on the paper covered table "an issue important to you" as abolition of slavery was important to Stowe. While it is unlikely every visitor to the Stowe House will be provoked to substantively oppose present-day social inequalities as a result of these dialogic experiences, the museum is

interpreting the past in a way that provides openings for visitors to think about and verbalize their own reactions to contemporary issues.

The desire to behave “like the Alcotts would have” is a theme that recurs on Orchard House tours. But how to enact a temporary inhabitation of Alcottian values is a more nebulous endeavor. While examples from the book—like Meg’s embarrassing airs at the Moffats—might be read as applicable to historically specific anxieties promulgated by postfeminist women’s media, the call to emulate the Alcotts also furnishes broader ‘self-help’ exemplars for women coping with inevitable and historically nonspecific challenges including financial misfortune, illness, and familial obligations. In order to preserve the feel-good nostalgia most visitors bring to the site, Louisa Alcott’s legacy is bifurcated into ‘Alcottian Values to Admire’ (commitment to radical social change) and ‘Alcottian Values to Emulate’ (personal tenacity, commitment to family).

David Lowenthal quotes a ‘Scottish custodian’ who believes the purpose of heritage to be “not that the public should learn something but that they should *become* something” (emphasis in original, 1998: 19). Writers’ houses commemorating Stowe and Alcott both promote emulation of a woman from the past in order to better oneself and foster positive relationships with other people. At Orchard House, it’s about self-discipline in overcoming hardship and devotion to family no matter what; at the Stowe Center it’s about social activism that benefits a population beyond the family unit. Orchard House, by its nature and constraints of precedent, is not capable of being as radical as the author it memorializes, because Orchard House museum was founded to celebrate something settled and cherished. The Stowe House and Center were founded to celebrate the unsettling of unjust social norms. An opening exists, via the Alcotts’ reformist beliefs, to adopt a more vigorous social agenda at Orchard House, but because the public foci of



Louisa Alcott's legacy since the publication of *Little Women* has been the domesticity of March family, nostalgia, and feminine becoming, it's harder to develop that fourth strand of radicalism.

Archaeologist Kim Christensen, recounting her work on the Matilda Joslyn Gage House in Fayetteville, NY, examines the pitfalls of “nostalgic, apolitical domesticity” (155) that attend house museums commemorating 19th century activist women. She compares the “largely empty” Elizabeth Cady Stanton house in Seneca Falls, where Stanton's ideas and works are the focus of interpretation, with the “fully period-furnished” Orchard House, where an “idealized domestic world” distracts from the “iconoclastic ideas” of the home's inhabitants (161). Citing interpretative techniques at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, she optimistically argues that “it is more than possible to utili[z]e household material culture to deal with contentious and difficult historical subjects, link microscale histories with larger concepts, and prompt museum visitor engagement with contemporary social issues” (164). While it is an encouraging notion that the presence of domestic material culture does not altogether negate opportunities to present “a politically-informed, community-enhancing institution” (164), the nostalgic tenor of interpretation at Orchard House issues not from the mere presence of domestic material culture, but from a much wider sphere of literary and historical precedents.

Though the literary March family narrative—mainstream and acceptable—initially took precedence over the less idealized Alcott life story, Patricia West suggests that “the nonverbal nature of the memorial” in its early days allowed for readings against the grain of “the museum's generally conservative message” (82). Interpretive precedents, like recipes, define parameters for how people talk about writers and books of the past, but (her)itage is made fresh, like bread, each day, changing in flavor and texture with the permutations introduced by each maker. One Orchard House guide speaks to the subjective nature of visitor interpretation: “the way I view it

is that people get out of it what they take to it, and I want people to be able to bring from the Orchard House some sort of fulfillment of their expectation, going in, and that's different for every single person." (Johanson 2014). In the 21st century, the complexities of the Alcott family story almost certainly omitted a century earlier are disclosed, yet visitors still have options: revel in the comforts of personal nostalgia, admire the goodness of the Marches, emulate the personal traits of the Alcotts, celebrate Alcottian radicalism, or a number of other interpretations. Visitors to Orchard House who admire Louisa Alcott as a feminist likely identify as feminists themselves; those who arrive with sentimental feelings about the conservative family values of the Marches are unlikely to be converted to pursue radical social change when they learn of the Alcotts' subversive beliefs. The option to focus on the Alcotts'/Marches' tenacity, hard work, and support of each other is a position that maintains nostalgia without negating its 'funny match,' radicalism.

## CHAPTER TWO—Playing ‘Anne’: Red Braids, Green Gables, and Literary Tourists on Prince Edward Island

Visitors arriving on Prince Edward Island (PEI) by car from mainland New Brunswick experience twelve minutes anticipating arrival as they traverse the Northumberland Strait via the eight mile-long Confederation Bridge.<sup>1</sup> Though the high walls of the bridge hinder attempts to gaze at the sea, the island’s famous red cliffs slowly materialize in the distance ahead, fringed with lush green vegetation. Upon reaching land, the visitor is greeted by the Gateway Village retail plaza,<sup>2</sup> a 29-acre development featuring “a turn-of-the-century PEI streetscape” comprised of restaurants, an ice cream parlor, candy store, liquor store, park, souvenir shops, visitor information, and other amenities. The Tourism PEI website describes Gateway Village for vacationers from outside the province as a place to be “introduced to the history and culture of the Island.”<sup>3</sup> Such a welcome would be incomplete without an introduction to the Island’s most famous fictional inhabitant, the eponymous child-heroine of Island author Lucy Maud Montgomery’s 1908 novel, *Anne of Green Gables*.

L.M. Montgomery’s first novel follows the introduction of an exuberant, redheaded orphan named Anne Shirley into the staid lives of spinster Marilla Cuthbert and her shy, bachelor brother Matthew. These elderly siblings plan to adopt an orphan boy to help with farm work but

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<sup>1</sup> According to Hennessey et al, during the 12-month period July 2007 through June 2008, more than 77% of pleasure visitors to the province arrived via the Confederation Bridge (158). Visitors can also reach the island via ferries from Nova Scotia or Quebec’s Magdalen Islands and flights into Charlottetown airport. Day visitors arrive via cruise ship throughout the late summer and autumn. Over 1 million visitors vacation on this island annually, supplementing a year-round population of approximately 140,000.

<sup>2</sup> Constructed following the June 1997 opening of Confederation Bridge. Gateway Village occupies a former rail yard.

<sup>3</sup> [www.tourismpei.com](http://www.tourismpei.com)

a female child is sent by mistake. Anne's effusive chatter about nature and imagination, and her deep desire to belong to a family charm Matthew. Stern Marilla requires more convincing, but eventually relents and agrees to raise Anne. Prone to misadventures, eleven-year-old Anne remains resilient and committed to her imagined ideals for herself and others. She eventually wins over the stodgy adults of small-town 'Avonlea' and thrives intellectually and emotionally in the Cuthberts' care.

Though L.M. Montgomery published over 20 novels (including seven *Anne* sequels),<sup>4</sup> over 500 short stories, an autobiography, and a book of poetry, *Anne of Green Gables* is by far her most famous work, having sold more than 50 million copies. The novel has been translated into thirty-six languages, garnering a global fan community.<sup>5</sup> Stage and screen adaptations (in Canada, the United States, Japan, and elsewhere) have entertained audiences of readers and created fans of those who had never read the novel. As the book is passed down through generations of women and its story retold in alternative formats, the fictional 'Anne' has become more than ever a "consumable commodity" (Bhadury 2011: 215) and a popular culture 'brand,' surpassing author Montgomery's own celebrity (Lefebvre 2010: 199).

Gateway Village may be a forty-minute drive from the setting of L.M. Montgomery's novel, but it introduces the Island's identity to new arrivals: this small province is the place to see Anne and 'be' Anne. At the Cavendish Figurines gift shop, Anne costumes—dress, pinafore,

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<sup>4</sup> *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), *Anne of the Island* (1915), *Anne of Windy Poplars* (1936), *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917), *Anne of Ingleside* (1939), *Rainbow Valley* (1919), and *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921).

<sup>5</sup> North American fans are often surprised to learn of the strong Japanese affinity for *Anne of Green Gables*. The novel was translated in 1952 by Muraoka Hanako and Kakegawa Yasuko and added to Japanese school curricula in the post-WWII period, guaranteeing widespread exposure to the text. A number of theories have been advanced to explain the Japanese attraction to the text, including the translators' incorporation of literary motifs resonant with Japanese aesthetics, Anne's attention to the beauty of the natural landscape, her resilience as an orphan and successful acquisition of a loving family (at a time when many Japanese children had been orphaned by war), and her sacrifices as an adult to care for Marilla. See Baldwin (1993) for more on theories about Anne's popularity in Japan.

and straw hat with attached red braids—are rented for \$2.00 CAD.<sup>6</sup> ‘Bring your camera... / We supply the costume’ a sign advises. The walls are plastered with images featuring people of diverse ages, sizes, and nationalities who have sent a copy of their snapshot back to the shop for display. Several men appear in the Anne costume, grinning widely at their own silliness. Some images feature two women together, both dressed as Anne. Some participants have chosen to be photographed next to a statue of Anne outside the building. The photo display invites participation by demonstrating that the practice of playing ‘Anne’ is not only encouraged, but a popular (and perhaps perfunctory) tourist experience.



**Figure 5: ‘Anne’ tourist snapshots at Cavendish Figurines, Inc., Gateway Village, Borden-Carleton, PE.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

Further down the shopping strip, outside an Anne of Green Gables Chocolates shop, a wooden panel provides another photo opportunity, this one free of charge. A life-size illustration of ‘Anne’ standing in front of the Green Gables house is printed on plywood. An oval opening

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<sup>6</sup> Fee to dress up as Anne increased to \$3.00 CAD in 2014.

has been cut where Anne’s face ought to be. Any face, any visitor, may fill the oval and become Anne. When no tourists are present, the figure’s face becomes a void filled with blue sky, a partial signifier, waiting to be made whole by tourists.



**Figure 6: ‘Anne’ cutout, Anne of Green Gables Chocolates, Gateway Village, Borden-Carleton, PE.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

The invitation for tourists to play ‘Anne’ features prominently in a ‘Welcome PEI’ promotional video listing 150 reasons to visit Prince Edward Island in 2014. The spot shows a group of women and men, clad in ‘Anne’ costumes, striding across the Green Gables lawn.<sup>7</sup> The actors wear nearly identical Anne hats and an assortment of calico dresses in green hues.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5qGFqV98uA>>



**Figure 7: Screen capture from a promotional video by Welcome PEI, 2014.**

Rather than promoting Anne tourism by showing an actress dressed as Anne skipping across the lawn, this advertisement turns tourists, men and women both, into the ‘Annes’ who belong at Green Gables.

Decades of artistic renderings and interpretations of Montgomery’s written descriptions have resulted in countless visualizations of ‘Anne’ circulating in popular culture—none of them created by L.M. Montgomery (Lefebvre 2010: 193).<sup>8</sup> Though the faces of these real, animated, and illustrated girls vary widely, the ‘Annes’ that have appeared in films, plays, anim , parodies, promotional brochures, and heritage programming share the character’s defining feature: her red hair. Tourists playing ‘Anne’ on PEI frequently employ a particular artifact, a mass produced straw hat with a green satin ribbon band and attached synthetic ginger hair braids tied with green ribbons. This hat is a ubiquitous souvenir, widely available at shops catering to tourists, particularly in Cavendish and the provincial capital, Charlottetown. Opportunities to play Anne are found at various locations around the Island, but because Anne’s arrival at Green Gables is a

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<sup>8</sup> Though multiple Annes coexist, some representations appear more frequently across Anne products than others. Rights to American artist Ben Stahl’s book cover portrait of Anne Shirley were purchased by the Heirs of L.M. Montgomery, Inc. and reproduced widely at the time of the novel’s 2008 centennial as the ‘quintessential’ representation. This image was used on commemorative postage stamps and collectible coins minted for the celebratory year.



dominant theme of these charades, I focus on tourists playing Anne at Green Gables Heritage Place, a historic site operated by Parks Canada,<sup>9</sup> where ‘Green Gables’ is recreated materially in the actual house upon which Montgomery claimed to have based her fictional setting.

While for some, the act of wearing the Anne hat is merely a superficial bit of silliness perpetrated by vacationers, for others it is symbolic of Anne’s own moment of arrival on the Island, which they, as tourists, recreate. Recalling Watson’s conclusion that works of literature cue and shape subsequent tourist practices through “the sensibilities implied by texts [...] which readers then endeavor to recapitulate through the protocols of tourism” (2006: 12), I show how the tourist’s arrival fantasy—embodied in the practice of playing Anne—is derived from Montgomery’s account of Anne’s arrival at Green Gables.



**Figure 8: Souvenir Anne of Green Gables hat for sale in a gift shop.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

Anne’s first conversation with Matthew Cuthbert introduces themes that extend into tourist interpretations and practices on the Island today: the desirable natural beauty of the

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<sup>9</sup> The name Parks Canada is used throughout to identify the federal agency that oversees Green Gables Heritage Place and the Prince Edward Island National Park. From the time of its founding in 1911 through the 1998 designation of the current name, Parks Canada has been known as Environment Canada Parks Service (ECPS) as well as other names.



Island, which cues tourism; the literary focalization of Anne's appreciative yet appropriating gaze, which frames the PEI landscape in Anne's terms; and Anne's preoccupation with her red hair as her defining attribute, which becomes the consumable visual symbol of her character. I examine each of these themes in turn on the way to Green Gables Heritage Place, the heart of 'Anne' tourism. I argue that, for the adult women who come to the Island on a literary pilgrimage, playing 'Anne' is a way to connect with a feminine identity of the past that is on the cusp of becoming, while reflecting on personal memories of girlhood caregivers, reading/viewing experiences, and fantasies of visiting Green Gables. Through the playful tourist practice of playing Anne, (her)itage takes the form of temporary inhabitation of the 'idealized body' of Anne Shirley (Stewart 1993) at her youthful moment of arrival in a safe, beautiful place, offering the tourist temporary escapist pleasures grounded in fictional (Anne's) and personal (the tourist's own) past girlhoods.

### **Anne's Journey from Bright River: Anticipation of Arrival**

The reader is introduced to Anne Shirley in Chapter Two, waiting on a train platform. As the chapter title indicates, "Matthew Cuthbert Is Surprised" to find a girl waiting for him instead of a boy. Shy and withdrawn, Matthew opts to take the girl home ("she couldn't be left at Bright River anyhow" (Montgomery 64)) and let his sister Marilla sort out the misunderstanding. The buggy ride from Bright River to Green Gables is significant for its high expository yield, and, as Canadian studies scholar Alexander MacLeod has noted, "many of the novel's most lasting and influential lines are uttered during this interval" (2010: 141). Among these are themes and quotations that literary tourists would delightedly rehearse year after year.

As Anne explains on the buggy ride, she has had a difficult life leading up to this point. The journey from Bright River is the last leg of her transitional journey to what she believes will

be a better life; this is the moment she vocalizes the real potential for flourishing that being adopted promises. She enters the buggy a hapless and homeless orphan and exits it certain she has arrived ‘home’ in a place and a family to which she will belong. The novel that unfolds from this scene is an account of Anne’s challenges and triumphs as she advances toward this very end. For tourists, however, playing Anne almost always represents the moments just before her arrival at Green Gables. The buggy ride covers a distance of eight miles (incidentally, the same length as the Confederation Bridge by which more than three quarters of the province’s pleasure visitors arrive on the Island).<sup>10</sup> Anne’s anticipation of her arrival at Green Gables easily translates to a kind of touristic sensibility of anticipation—and a joy upon ‘arrival’ which is replicable by the tourist.<sup>11</sup> The journey from Bright River introduces three themes central to Anne tourism as it would develop: the desirability of the Island’s natural beauty, an appropriating gaze that construes the Island as the arriving outsider needs/desires/imagines it to be, and a preoccupation with the child’s red hair.

### *The Desirability of the Island’s Natural Beauty*

“This Island is the bloomiest place,” Anne effuses as some cherry trees come into view, “I just love it already, and I’m so glad I’m going to live here. I’ve already heard that Prince Edward Island was the prettiest place in the world, and I used to imagine I was living here, but I never really expected I would (66).” Montgomery scholar Elizabeth Epperly admires the power of Montgomery’s descriptive prose: “Montgomery’s Romantic nature descriptions in the fiction often make rural Prince Edward Island sound exquisite, almost exotic. Early evening beaches or fields are orchestrations of colour and metaphor. To millions of readers all over the world,

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<sup>10</sup> See Hennessy, in the first note for this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Arrival’ is replicable by the tourist, whereas joining a local family as a new citizen of Cavendish is not—though some literary tourists do move to the Island permanently. An ‘Islander by Choice Alliance’ facilitated new resident adjustment through social events and other support activities from 2010-2012. A number of expats hail from Japan.

Montgomery's [word-] pictures of Prince Edward Island *are* Prince Edward Island" (Epperly 2002: 97, author's emphasis). The reader can savor these word-pictures on the drive to Green Gables, when Anne observes a pond in which the water was "a glory of many shifting hues—the most spiritual shadings of crocus and rose and ethereal green, with other elusive tintings for which no name has ever been found," "a dark church spire [...] against a marigold sky," and "in the stainless southwest sky, a great crystal-white star [...] shining like a lamp of guidance and promise." The natural beauty of the Island looms large in Montgomery's telling of Anne's arrival.

A number of scholars have attributed the popularity of a PEI pilgrimage to Montgomery's evocative descriptions of the Island setting. Nicola Watson argues that "no author or text can be successfully located to place unless their writings model or cue tourism in one way or another" (12). Montgomery did not write her first novel with the intention of creating a commercial tourism industry in Cavendish,<sup>12</sup> but the setting of *Anne of Green Gables* is specific, locatable, and tantalizingly described. Montgomery scholar Janice Fiamengo notes rhetorical similarities between Montgomery's descriptions and those in the early tourist guides about eastern Canada written by George Monro Grant. Both Grant and Montgomery describe the landscape using feminine metaphors, and describe though a "discourse of revitalization and repose" behavior that the landscape invites (Fiamengo 2002: 229-231). Popular press stories from the early 20th century praising Montgomery's prose coincided with efforts to raise interest in the Island as a tourism destination. E. Holly Pike examines the synergistic forces of Montgomery's growing literary celebrity and the Island's burgeoning popularity with tourists. Pike quotes several reviews of Montgomery's works that make mention of the province, including one from 1909 stating there is "no better advertisement" for provincial tourism and

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<sup>12</sup> The farming community of Cavendish is renamed 'Avonlea' in Montgomery's novels.

another predicting, “We fully expect to see Prince Edward Island a favorite summer resort for American travelers, just because of her presence and her stories” (2002: 247). Pike concludes, “by choosing to participate in the commodity marketing of her books, Montgomery [...] gave her fictional world an independent, commercial existence” (250).

Like Anne, many visitors arrive at Green Gables filled with wonder and appreciation, and interpretation at the site reinforces these feelings: the short orientation film shown in the Visitor Reception Centre was described by one staff person as presenting “what this place is about and why you are so lucky to be here.” Anne’s awe at the natural beauty of the Island landscape she views on the buggy ride to Green Gables continues to contribute to the reputation of Prince Edward Island as a bucolic tourist utopia.

### *Anne’s Appropriating Gaze*

Montgomery’s compelling descriptions of the Island landscape are delivered through the focalization of her charismatic, newly arrived protagonist. Diane Tye notes that, as an outsider herself, “Anne is a particularly apt guide” (1994: 128). Anne arrives from ‘elsewhere’ (nearby Nova Scotia) and rhapsodizes over the landscape in ways a smitten tourist might. Anne further ‘sells’ the location through her conviction that Green Gables is to be the place where she will at last experience a sense of belonging and a kind of flourishing that readers may themselves crave. Montgomery’s focalization of the novel through Anne Shirley’s eyes begets the tourist inclination to view the Island through an appreciative, consuming gaze.

Anne’s appreciation of the landscape combines gratitude with a compulsion to rewrite the place for herself, to make it what she needs it to be. As she reimagines herself there, Anne embraces the natural landscapes of the Island as her future home, but after asking Matthew the names of places, rejects local names and replaces them with her own. For example, when

Matthew identifies a particular road lined with blossoming trees as ‘The Avenue,’ Anne announces that she will call it ‘The White Way of Delight.’ MacLeod points to the broader implications of Anne’s revisions: “Just as Anne, the character, rewrites Avonlea to make the landscape correspond with her pre-existing romantic ideals, so her story initiates an identical and equally problematic cycle of geographical transformations that continue, literally, to ‘take place’ in the real world of contemporary Cavendish” (McLeod 2010: 138). Anne’s easy dismissal of the place’s history prior to her arrival is echoed in local repercussions of tourism, from the expropriation of farms in the 1930s to form Prince Edward Island National Park to the replacement of agricultural landscapes around Cavendish with bungalow camps and tourism infrastructure (see MacEachern 2001).

Considering Anne’s vivid imagination, one might expect visitors ‘playing Anne’ to engage in personal creative acts of renaming and rewriting her story to meet their individual needs. Anne’s text, however, remains dominant. For literary pilgrims at Green Gables, to visit Anne’s world is to see things through an Anne-filter. Fans arrive well-versed in Anne’s names for places and refer to those places by Anne’s names. “Where is the Lake of Shining Waters?” they ask. They would likely consider it a travesty to call the pond at Park Corner by any other name. Tourists emulate Anne not by being creative and imaginative, as she was, but by rehearsing familiar scenes and quotations attributed to her by Montgomery.

### ***Hair ‘As Red As Carrots’***

Montgomery introduces Anne, waiting for Matthew at the Bright River train station, with a physical description: “She wore a faded brown sailor hat and beneath the hat, extending down her back, were two braids of very thick, decidedly red hair” (63). The fact of Anne’s red hair seems insignificant until Anne confides to Matthew during the drive that, despite the beauty of

the Island and her delight at being there, her hair color prevents her from feeling “perfectly happy” (Montgomery 68). Anne’s red hair is the one of her greatest childhood woes and the catalyst for her most embarrassing impulsive acts, including breaking a slate over Gilbert Blythe’s head after he calls her ‘carrots’ (Montgomery 154), and unsuccessfully attempting to dye her hair black (it turns green instead).

Literary critic Juliet McMaster contextualizes Anne’s own understanding of the meanings of red hair as derived from the classic literary works she voraciously consumes. Walter Scott, Tennyson, and James Fenimore Cooper’s pairings of blonde and raven-tressed heroines provide precedents for Anne’s original narrative about Cordelia Montmorency and Geraldine Seymour; Thackeray is cited as exemplary of the Victorian equation of red hair with ugliness—physical and moral (2002: 59-62). Red hair had been associated with bad temper since the Elizabethan era (McMaster 62), and Anne’s tempestuous outbursts when her pride is wounded bear this symbolism out. By the time of the novel’s publication in 1908, however, red hair had taken on more positive connotations, no longer “emblematic of deviance and evil” (Banner 2005: 254). Lois Banner, social historian of American beauty norms, dates a new fashion for sensual and vibrant red hair to the 1890s, noting its popularity among society women and musical comedy ingenues by the early 20th century. The historical social meanings of red hair during the period of novel’s setting and publication help to illuminate Anne’s relationship to her own hair and Montgomery’s reasons for giving her protagonist this physical attribute, but for the present day tourist, the semiotics of Anne’s red hair that matter most is that this is *Anne’s* hair.

The red braids are established so firmly by Montgomery as Anne’s defining feature that they function as a visual shorthand immediately comprehended by anyone familiar with the story. Some souvenir producers eschew assigning a unique face to their representations of the

character by showing only the braid-trailed back of Anne’s head. Disembodied red braids attached to hats are sold in Island gift shops in miniature form as magnets, brooches, and other souvenirs.



**Figure 9: Anne hat & braids souvenir magnets.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

For a tourist hoping to annotate her own body with some symbol of Anne, the character’s red braids are a visually striking and portable accoutrement to don. McMaster’s close reading of Anne’s hair reveals multiple layers of symbolic import:

If we remember nothing else about Anne of Green Gables, we remember that this garrulous orphan girl has red hair, that the red hair troubles her sorely, and that it also gets her into trouble. Anne’s flaming red hair is her visible and identifying sign: it is what gives her her mythopoetic power [...]. (McMaster 2002: 58)

McMaster goes on to explain how Anne’s red hair represents not only the trials of the individual, but foreshadows Anne’s consequent belonging to her adoptive home: “her red hair connects her deeply with the island of her adoption. [...] We are meant to recognize a propitious kinship between Anne’s red braids and Prince Edward Island’s red roads [...]” (63). So iconic is the symbol of Anne’s red hair that it is not uncommon for visitors to arrive at Green Gables Heritage

Place with hair colored red, or braided in the style of popular illustrations of Anne Shirley as a child.



**Figure 10: Visitor with ‘natural’ braided Anne hair, Green Gables Heritage Place. Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

For tourists not naturally endowed with hair to dye red or to braid, souvenir hats effect a speedy transformation. Though by no means do the majority of tourists don Anne hats, the commonness of red braids on tourists is illustrated in this exchange overheard at Green Gables Heritage Place: a guide comments to a forty-something woman wearing an Anne hat with attached braids, “That’s some pretty fancy hair you have there!” The woman responds, “doesn’t everyone have it?” (site observation 2011). The mass-production of Anne hats, inspired by something tourists were already doing, establishes the wearing of Anne’s hair as symbolic of the tourist’s “propitious kinship” with Anne and with her island.

George Campbell, owner of the Anne of Green Gables Museum at Park Corner and the ‘Anne of Green Gables’ retail shops, estimates that he has been manufacturing Anne hats a little less than twenty years, though he places the origins of Anne hats as a tourist commodity around 1985. Without soliciting personal testimonies from past tourists and tourism workers, it is



difficult to judge when tourists began regularly donning Anne hats on Prince Edward Island, but it is not a coincidence that the commercial market for Anne hats increased following release of the award-winning and widely watched Sullivan Entertainment adaptations of the story and its sequel, which aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation network (CBC). Among the highest rated dramas to air on network television in Canadian broadcasting history, the films were subsequently aired in the United States and released theatrically in Europe, Japan, and Israel. *Anne of Green Gables* (1985) and *Anne of Avonlea* (1987)<sup>13</sup> were developed and directed by Kevin Sullivan and starred then-unknown actress Meghan Follows as Anne Shirley. Though tourists' interest in Montgomery began soon after the first Anne novel came to fame, these miniseries (hereafter referred to as 'the films') resulted in a massive surge of new interest in the story and its setting.<sup>14</sup>

Not only did the films' success bring droves of new tourists to PEI, their immediacy and visual specificity convincingly argued that this was what Anne, Gilbert, and Green Gables<sup>15</sup> really looked like. Melanie Fishbane (2012) has shown, for example, that actor Jonathan Crombie's image still dominates online discussions, Pinterest boards, and Google searches for Anne's love interest Gilbert Blythe. According to education scholar Holly Blackford, who interviewed girls about their reading habits and motivations, visual images of girls and women

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<sup>13</sup> This second miniseries was retitled *Anne of Green Gables, The Sequel* when released in the United States. Both miniseries aired on PBS in the United States. A third miniseries, titled *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story* was released by Sullivan in 2000. Digressing significantly from Montgomery's works and rife with distortions of plot and character, this third installment is considered a travesty by Montgomery fans, did not achieve nearly the same viewership and cult following of the first two films, and is thus omitted from further discussion here.

<sup>14</sup> Concurrent to the surge in popular interest brought on by the Sullivan films, the publication of Montgomery's journals in 1985 and 1987 sparked the creation of the academic field of 'Montgomery Studies' (Gerson 2002: 18-19). Formation of the L.M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI) at the University of Prince Edward Island in 1993 led to the publication of numerous volumes of collected scholarly essays on her work, some published in connection with the LMMI's biennial conferences.

<sup>15</sup> I spoke with a visitor from Germany who stood a long time in the kitchen, scrutinizing her site map. When I asked if I could help her locate something, she said, "Where is the porch? The *real* house has a porch." After confirming that she was basing her ideal, 'real' image of Green Gables on the house from the films, I explained that the porch she sought was hundreds of miles away, near Toronto.

represented in film, television, and music videos inspired stronger identification in their young audiences than written descriptions in books. Blackford's informants could 'inhabit' any character in a novel—male or female—but with visual forms they tended to compare themselves to, or mimic, the women shown. The Sullivan films, with their compelling dramatizations of Anne's memorable scenes, seem to have intensified the desire of female viewers to 'become' Anne, to imagine themselves in her moment of arrival, to marvel at the beauty of the Island, to claim the place for themselves as she did, and, by some means, to wear red hair.

Dollar-wise, the Anne hat ranks among Cambells' top five bestselling items,<sup>16</sup> with hats sold numbering "in the low 1,000s" annually (Campbell 2013). Though there are markets outside the province, the hats are sold mainly on Prince Edward Island. The Green Gables Heritage Place gift shop, overseen by an incorporated division of the not-for-profit Parks & People Association, sold over 1,000 hats in 2012 and the years prior, a number shop manager Trudi Walker calls "significant" compared to sales figures for other items (Walker 2013). Reading these manufacturing and retail estimates together, it appears that most Anne hats sold on the Island are sold at Green Gables Heritage Place.

Playing 'Anne,' however, does not require the purchase of a \$15.99 CAD hat. Some visitors color and braid their natural hair, or devise their own costumes. Anne enthusiasts desirous of snapshots can borrow a costume at Avonlea Village, or rent one at Cavendish Figurines. At Green Gables Heritage Place, a 'loaner' hat is always available by request in the cafe, or hanging on the buggy parked in the barnyard. Some tour guides carry their own hats for clients in their parties to wear for photos. One guide for a motor coach tour company removed the shiny synthetic hair from the souvenir hat she'd purchased, replacing it with plump braids of

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<sup>16</sup> The hat is a top seller dollarwise due to its \$15.99 price tag, making it one of the more expensive souvenirs, surpassed only by collectible porcelain Anne dolls. Unit-wise, Campbell reports that a 2.5" hanging Anne doll (\$4.99 CAD) is his top seller.

bright orange yarn. I asked about her customized hat, which I observed her carrying on several visits. “The book says Anne’s hair is red as carrots. Well this,” she asserted, brandishing the tasseled end of a yarn braid for emphasis, “is the color of carrots” (site observation 2011).<sup>17</sup> The availability of hats for loan—either for a small fee, or for free, means that participation does not require financial investment; it also means that a greater number of people are wearing a hat for a quick photo than sales figures for the hats can capture.



**Figure 11: Tourist wearing altered hat with yarn braids.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

Anne’s red hair was her bane, among the first of her afflictions to be enumerated on the drive to Green Gables from the Bright River train station. Despite her broad imaginative capacities, she “cannot imagine that red hair away” (68). The single flaw that Anne cannot imagine away is the feature her fans embrace in their own acts of imagination. Hat manufacturers may be capitalizing on tourists’ sentimental regard for Anne’s red hair and their proclivity to buy novelty goods, but souvenir straw hats with attached braids complement an activity tourists are already doing—imagining themselves arriving at Green Gables as Anne did. Worn for several

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<sup>17</sup> Yarn braids also conjure images of homemade cloth dolls and a homespun tactility, whereas the slick, artificial texture of shiny synthetic hair is reminiscent of modern, mass-produced vinyl dolls. Anne’s hair, however, is also described as ‘glossy,’ which the vinyl doll hair of the Anne hats more closely approximates.

hours or several seconds, mass-produced, hacked, or home-grown, red braids advertise the bearer's affinity for Anne and her worldview.

### **Anne's Land: Arrival at 'Green Gables'**

Anne is associated with the Island (and Canada) as a whole, however the Anne tourist industry is located primarily in commercial pockets around those sites historically linked to Montgomery. Tourists can visit the sites of Montgomery's birth, childhood, employment, marriage, and burial; the home sites of her maternal (Macneill) and paternal (Montgomery) grandparents, and of her Campbell cousins. They can shop at Anne-themed private retail businesses such as the Anne of Green Gables Store, Anne of Green Gables Chocolates, and Avonlea Village, an open-air entertainment and retail attraction interspersing newly constructed buildings with a church Montgomery attended, a manse she lived in, and a schoolhouse she taught in.<sup>18</sup> Each site makes its own claims to authenticity through unique artifacts and stories of what Montgomery thought of the place, often citing her own written works as evidence.<sup>19</sup> These sites comprise a complicated map of real and imaginary places inhabited variously by Montgomery, 'Anne,' and the tourists who follow in their stead.

This section focuses on the core site for Anne tourism—Green Gables Heritage Place, a Historic Site of Canada operated by the federal government under the auspices of Parks Canada. Located in the north shore region identified on visitor maps as 'Anne's Land,'<sup>20</sup> Green Gables Heritage Place remains the longest operating and, visually, the most iconic. A century after the

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<sup>18</sup> In Ontario, the Leaskdale Manse, where Montgomery lived from 1911 until 1926 following her marriage to Ewan MacDonald, and where she wrote eleven of her books, is a National Historic Site and a museum. Bala, Ontario, where Montgomery vacationed in 1922, is commemorated at Bala's Museum as the site that inspired the only novel she wrote with a non-Island setting (*The Blue Castle*, 1926).

<sup>19</sup> See Fawcett and Cormack (2001) for a comparative analysis of different 'truth claims' made at Green Gables Heritage Place, The Site of L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish Home, and The Anne of Green Gables Museum at Park Corner.

<sup>20</sup> Images of Anne also proliferate in the provincial capital city, Charlottetown, and businesses serving tourists, such as the Gateway Village at Borden-Carleton, without much mention of her creator.

novel's publication, 150,000 visitors tour Green Gables Heritage Place annually.<sup>21</sup> Most visits are once-in-a-lifetime and most visitors travel to the site from outside the province.<sup>22</sup> The literary pilgrim following in Anne's footsteps rehearses the themes (rather than the route) of Anne's passage from Bright River train station to Green Gables, admiring the scenery, seeking landmarks named by Anne, and wearing red braids while doing so.

The farmhouse that came to be known as 'Green Gables' was never Montgomery's own residence, which causes some confusion in visitors expecting a conventional writer's house museum. Following her mother's death and her father's relocation to Saskatchewan not long after her birth, Montgomery was raised by her grandparents in Cavendish. She left temporarily to attend college and held three teaching posts elsewhere in the province before returning to care for her grandmother. During these years of caregiving she worked on numerous writing projects, modeling one fictional setting, which she called Green Gables, after the real, and, in her words 'notoriously untidy' nearby farm that was owned by her maternal grandfather's cousins, siblings David and Margaret Macneill.<sup>23</sup> A multi-million dollar redevelopment completed in 1997 added several outbuildings in the style of the original farm, theaters showing two interpretive films,

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<sup>21</sup> Visitation peaked in the years following the release of Kevin Sullivan's highly acclaimed miniseries adaptations *Anne of Green Gables* (1985) and *Anne of Avonlea* (1987). Parks Canada estimated 164,124 visitors in 1985; by 1987 this number climbed to 285,726. Peak visitation is thought to have been in 1994, when 375,785 visitors were recorded in a single year ("Business Case Analysis" 1996: 11).

<sup>22</sup> According to a visitor study conducted by Parks Canada, three quarters of visitors in Summer 2008 were on a first-time visit. The majority of visitors (69%) are Canadian, but only 2% come from Prince Edward Island (Parks Canada 2008). Thanks to staff of the Parks Canada Prince Edward Island Field Unit for permission to publish this data.

<sup>23</sup> This house would eventually be inherited by their niece, Myrtle, and her husband Ernest Webb, who operated a tea room and guest house for early literary tourists seeking 'Green Gables'. When land along the island's north shore, including the farm that inspired Green Gables, was expropriated by the government to form the Prince Edward Island National Park, the farm's pastures were converted into a golf course designed by landscape architect Stanley Thompson, initially with a green located on the house lawn. The golf course was re-routed in the 1980s to restore a more domestic setting to areas adjacent to the house. Two interpretive trails—Balsam Hollow, created in the late 1970s, and The Haunted Wood, created in the early 1980s—recount Montgomery's life as a writer growing up in Cavendish and describe the inspiration she drew from nature. A short length of 'Lovers' Lane' featured in *Anne of Green Gables* is located at the trailhead for Balsam Hollow Trail, behind the house, and the 'Haunted Wood' trail, so named for its mention in the novel, begins in front of the house. These small, rare patches of old-growth forest represent a physical link to Montgomery's love of nature and, in the case of the oldest trees, the period of her lifetime.

exhibits on farm life in Cavendish in the 1890s, sheltered space for craft demonstrations and costumed performances of scenes from the novel, and a visitor reception center exhibiting Montgomery family photos and some personal effects.<sup>24</sup> Interpretation delivered by films, exhibit panels, trail panels, maps and site staff provide education about Montgomery's life.

Anticipation of arrival at Green Gables is built into the site plan. If visitors follow the recommended route and do not, say, bypass the orientation film, they will pass through no fewer than eight doorways in order to get to the intimate core of the Green Gables house interior. The Green Gables house is strategically hidden behind a large replica barn, building visitor anticipation and preventing roadside viewing of the house prior to paying site admission.<sup>25</sup> Having learned about Montgomery's life first, the visitor steps through the barn and enters the recreated setting of the novel. Spatial cues reinforce the boundaries of fact and fiction: as visitors exit the orientation film theater and approach the barn, the large barn door, folded open like a book cover, reveals the iconic Green Gables, framed as if it were an illustration on a page.



**Figure 12: The transition from history to fiction occurs in the barn.**

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<sup>24</sup> Length of visit increased due to the variety of interpretive products on offer. Time spent in the house, previously the sole attraction, decreased, alleviating threats to its continued preservation. Visitor comfort was improved by enhanced picnic areas, a cafe, a large gift shop, and additional washroom facilities.

<sup>25</sup> Before 1995, admission fees were not charged.

**The house is at first hidden by the massive replica building, but as one approaches, the barn door, folded open like a book cover, reveals the iconic Green Gables house, framed as if it were an illustration on a page. Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

The house that came to be known as Green Gables exists both inside and outside Montgomery's texts. A heritage presenter greeting visitors at the house's front door explains, "Before everything else—before the books—this house stood here." One or two guides are available to answer questions about artifacts and the historical period, to explain the relationship between the Green Gables house and Montgomery's own home site nearby,<sup>26</sup> and to offer a brief history of the MacNeill and Webb families who built and inhabited the house. The house has been furnished to depict the 1890s-era Green Gables ("the house is decorated the way she imagined the house in the novel," a guide explains), with bedrooms staged to represent each fictional inhabitant.<sup>27</sup> Memorable scenes in the novel are referenced with recognizable objects positioned throughout the house: Marilla's amethyst brooch, Anne's broken slate, and the dress 'with puffed sleeves' elicit cries of recognition from visitors. Live potted plants, the warm glow of hurricane lamps,<sup>28</sup> and replica vegetables and baked goods in the kitchen and work rooms suggest that Marilla has just stepped away for a moment, or that Anne could come skipping through the door at any time.<sup>29</sup> The lifelike staging of Montgomery's fictional Green Gables, from the storybook reveal through the barn doors to the significant props displayed in the house,

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<sup>26</sup> The Site of L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish Home, where *Anne of Green Gables* and several other novels were written, consists of an excavated house foundation, a small bookshop with exhibits, and trees and paths interpreted with quotations from Montgomery's writing. This site was restored in the 1980s and opened to the public by owners John and Jennie MacNeill, descendants of Montgomery's Uncle John, who inherited the house following her grandmother's death. The site remains privately owned, but was linked commemoratively with Green Gables Heritage Place in 2005 to form the L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish National Historic Site of Canada.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to descriptions in the novel, curators drew upon archival sources such as period wall paper sample books and the extensive collection of amateur photos of Island homes taken by Montgomery during her Cavendish years.

<sup>28</sup> Wired with modern electricity to ensure the safety of visitors and artifacts.

<sup>29</sup> During the height of the summer season, student staff dressed as Anne and her friends reenact scenes from the novel and interact with visitors.

creates a compelling materialized imaginary. Unique among children’s literature tourism sites, Green Gables commemorates, above all, an imagined place.



**Figure 13: Green Gables Heritage Place.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

### **Playing ‘Anne’ as (Her)itage**

George Campbell, owner of the Anne of Green Gables stores and manufacturer of numerous Anne commodities, describes his pleasure at the sight of little girls playing with the Anne hats he sells: “I get a great charge out of it. They’re in business whenever they put that hat on. They *are* Anne of Green Gables” (speaker’s emphasis 2013). It is not uncommon for young children to engage in imaginative play involving costumes, and the classic stories of children’s literature can be the basis for such play. Shelby Anne Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath, editors of *The Braid of Literature*, describe “Heath’s own young daughters as readers, documenting the many ways they integrated favorite books into their lives. [...] The girls often spoofed their language, characters, and situations. They felt compelled not only to reread favorite stories but to enact them with their bodies. Such play represents a testing of alternative identities” (Jenkins 1998: 28). Though many first encountered Anne as children, the adult women wearing Anne hats



are not play-acting the role as children might, nor are they testing “alternative identities.”

Folklorist Beverly Gordon writes that “when tourists purchase or wear Mickey Mouse T-shirts they are pretending to be other than serious, working adults—they show they are (or have been) on vacation by stressing the playful and the humorous” (Gordon 138). Tourist souvenirs follow suit, often reflecting the “childish or child-like” moods of tourists. Miniature figurines or snowglobes, for example, are almost toy-like: “they allow adults to act more childlike and playful than they ordinarily would” (Gordon 142). The Anne hat similarly furnishes a moment of ‘pretend’ through whimsical age regression (and possibly gender inversion).<sup>30</sup>

Photos are almost always taken to capture spontaneous moments of wearing the Anne hat. Exemplifying the not-everydayness of the tourism experience, these photos “emphasize leisure and playfulness” (Gordon 140). The adult women who mildly transgress ‘adult’ occupations by posing in doll-like braids are mimicking a literary heroine they admire as part of a “child-like” or “playful” tourism experience that may remind them of their childhoods. Because opportunities to play Anne are often staged as the moments before Anne’s arrival at Green Gables, when she is full of anticipation and enthusiasm on the buggy ride from Bright River, a buggy is positioned in the Green Gables barnyard for visitor photos (weather permitting). There is no sign inviting them to touch or climb on the buggy, yet visitors of all ages are attracted to do so (site observation 2011). An Anne hat lent from the Butter Churn Cafe nearby is frequently left hanging on the buggy, and for certain if the Anne hat is there, visitors will make use of it for their photos. The opportunity to be photographed in the Anne hat, to

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<sup>30</sup> It is impossible to know what wearing the hat means to individuals; some seem to take the moment more seriously. For example, early in my 2011 fieldwork, I observed a Japanese man wearing the hat and braids. He wore this hat throughout his visit—touring the house and walking on the trails. For several hours he sat in his hat at a picnic table, looking pensively toward the Haunted Wood.

reverse the gaze and see oneself as Anne, seems of the utmost importance, even more so than the first-person embodiment of her that may be felt by the person wearing the hat.

Adult women do not dress like ‘Jo March’/Louisa Alcott or Beatrix Potter for photos at Orchard House and Hill Top, but they do seek ways to temporarily inhabit these writers’ lived spaces. They pose for pictures in front of their houses, which shows them not only emplaced at the sacred site but also enacting a symbolic, temporary possession. Orchard House visitors “would love to have one [a photo] inside with Louisa’s desk but we don’t allow photos” guide Jessie Robinson explains. The house facade is the default location for personal photos “because then they can see the whole house behind them” (Robinson 2014). In the case of Potter, the most commonly struck pose is a recreation of a photograph taken of the author by an American visitor in 1913 (photo reprinted in Denyer 2000: 45). The middle-aged Potter stands just outside the slate-enclosed Hill Top front door. She holds her hat in front of her body. Visitors to Hill Top replicate her posture on this spot, in her footsteps. According to Hill Top house steward

Catherine Pritchard:

Everybody, *everybody* has their picture taken at the front door. It’s like, it’s their cottage, their memories, that’s their place, and a lot of people say ‘I’ll take your photo,’ and they say ‘stand where she stood.’ So they all want to stand there, and she’s got her hands sort of [demonstrates Potter’s hands in front of her body, holding the hat] and so they hold the guidebook in the same place, they haven’t got a hat so they hold the guidebook. Nearly *everybody*. (speaker’s emphasis, Pritchard 2014a)

Acts of ‘rephotography’ by tourists evince dual impulses. First, there is a kind of ownership of, or belonging to, the place that comes through in tourists’ preferred compositions. To assert the site as not a personal possession, but as possessed within one’s personal narrative. To be emplaced and to belong, if only temporarily, and to capture that moment for future contemplation. The second impulse is to insert oneself into a larger, familiar narrative as it is

popularly visualized. To place oneself in Beatrix Potter's pose as an homage to Beatrix Potter, or to stage one's arrival at Green Gables in a buggy, as Anne Shirley did.

Susan Stewart describes the tourist photograph as “[...] the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction of physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of a narrative” (1993: 138). Photographs represent a sustainable way for the values, memories, and comforts the cultural resource evokes for the visitor to be ‘consumed’ without the actual resource being ‘used up.’ To be photographed in the milieu and pose of the ‘idealized body’ of the writer or character one has come to pay homage to is to personalize the souvenir photo. Susan Stewart notes that tourists insist on taking their own photos despite the availability of professional images available for purchase (1993: 137), and photos featuring oneself emplaced in a sacralized space are the most valuable compositions of all. Over time, as identical compositions of visitors to consecrated places proliferate (and, in the 21st century, are shared widely online), positioning oneself in these pre-conceived ‘photo op’ spots situates one within a collective tourism history. Pierre Bourdieu writes of how “popular photography is trying to consecrate the unique encounter (although it can be experienced by thousands of others in identical circumstances) between a person and a consecrated place, between an exceptional moment in one's life and a place that is exceptional by virtue of its high symbolic yield” (Bourdieu 1965: 36). To pose in these places, in these ways, is a souvenir of the encounter for oneself and proof for others that one has ‘done’ the site properly.

Playing ‘Anne,’ while certainly a different experience depending on whether one is a little girl, an adult woman, or an adult man, is a widely practiced performance of tourist identity for visitors to Prince Edward Island. Some don red braids to broadcast their affinity for the text,

others do so to signal their whole-hearted immersion in the popular identity of the place they are visiting. For pilgrims, however, arrival at Green Gables may be occurring after years of longing.

The tourist's linking of Anne's arrival with their own fantasies of arriving on PEI is demonstrated through an analysis of visitor comment cards. Visitor comment cards offer a glimpse into the range of motivations and feelings with which visitors arrive at Green Gables.<sup>31</sup> Each offers a "ineluctably human [...] subjective kernel" (MacCannell 2011: 5) within the mass of annual visitors. If, as museum studies scholar Lois Silverman says, "the visitor's active role in creating meaning in a museum experience [occurs] through the context he/she brings [...]" (1), these heartfelt declarations by grateful pilgrims blend the imaginative/literary symbolic of Montgomery's novels and their own idiosyncratic life experiences and memories to express highly personal meanings. Mary and Erin of Detroit, Michigan, write: "Hearing, reading, and watching the stories since we were little girls, this trip is truly our pilgrimage!"<sup>32</sup> These fans have encountered Montgomery's story repeatedly, and in multiple formats. A visitor who identifies as 'R.' titles the card "My Bucket List" and concludes, "Dream for me to come." Another visitor writes, "When I was very small, my mum and I read the 'Anne' books. I always wanted to visit but never thought it would be possible. It's taken over 50 years to make it[.]" An Australian visitor called Alex, who was seven when introduced to the books in the 1950s says, "I have wanted to come for 57 years." Netta, who borrowed the book from her primary school library in Scotland, didn't yearn to visit because she "never imagined" she "would ever see Green Gables."

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<sup>31</sup> Visitor comment cards were posted to a bulletin board in the Visitor Reception Centre in response to a simple sign, created by interpretation coordinator Elizabeth DeBlois, inviting visitors to share how they first learned the story of *Anne*. In this space, individuals from around the world have annotated (if temporarily) the commemoration of L.M. Montgomery with their own memories of why her work matters. Thanks to Chantelle Macdonald for permission to reprint quotations from cards written by visitors in 2011 and 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Religious language is not uncommon in reference to Green Gables, which, like other intensely revered literary tourism destinations, has long been considered a kind of tourist mecca. Holly Pike, for examples, cites W.A. Stewart's 1926 reference to Cavendish as a 'literary shrine' for 'pilgrims' and Montgomery herself described 'worship' by fans (Pike 2002: 249).

Reading is a form of ‘armchair tourism’ that conveys insight into other subjectivities and places. Holly Blackford, who studies how girls use literature, finds that books permit them to “take a break from and move beyond themselves” (2004: 19). Though the imperative to visit a fictional setting may be “a deeply counter-intuitive response to the pleasures and possibilities of imaginative reading” (Watson 2006: 1), visitors who express a longtime desire to visit Green Gables see this external milieu as complementary to, and even a culmination of, the internal experience of reading. Melinda from Toronto posts a note saying, “[...] It’s always been my dream to visit PEI & be in the world of Anne.” An anonymous visitor writes: “I had my wish at last, to visit and see where my favourite story was made [...].” Another writes, “[...] my dream has come true. I am finally at this beautiful island [...].” These examples show a range of framing tendencies that visitors use to make sense of their trips. Melinda’s comment implies a desire to be immersed in a storybook setting. The second commenter is more focused on the production context of a beloved story. The final commenter does not specify Green Gables (the setting) or Cavendish (where the book was ‘made’), but refers to the entire Island as an attractive, long-desired destination to which Montgomery’s books were an invitation. The memories of growing up while yearning to visit an imagined—perhaps mythical— Prince Edward Island landscape figure significantly in visitors’ perceptions of their arrival on the Island.

For many, the book, and by extension, the visit, conjures personal memories of family members, usually mothers and grandmothers. Sabrina of Toronto remembers her father reading *Anne of Green Gables* to her when she was nine years old. Mona, from Nova Scotia, now age 77, remembers being introduced to Anne by her mother. Suzanne, from Athens, Georgia, describes how four generations of women in her family have read *Anne of Green Gables*, beginning with her mother, who was born in 1911, through the present day and her own teenage granddaughters.

She concludes by saying, “To see the Lake of Shining Waters, walk the Haunted Woods, and see Green Gables itself links me to all of them, over a century now!” This visitor perceives a foreign landscape as already invested with intergenerational transaction, personal nostalgia, and her family’s shared appreciation of a text and its author. The cards are evidence that temporally and spatially complex personal memories and longings play a large part in how fans interpret a visit to Green Gables Heritage Place.

Despite sequel novels in which Anne grows up, marries, and bears children of her own, it is the child-Anne of the first book who remains at the iconic center of this extraliterary universe. Montgomery scholar Benjamin Lefebvre, analyzing the ‘Anne’ brand, asserts that the first book “possessed a brand power that Montgomery’s later books lacked” (Lefebvre 2010: 199). It is the eleven-year-old Anne, as she first arrives at Green Gables, grateful, curious, and imaginative, braids as red as carrots, to whom today’s literary tourists relate. When Anne bemoans her red hair as a barrier to normative physical attractiveness, neighbor Rachel Lynde equates it with childhood, consoling her that it will turn ‘a handsome auburn’ once she matures. Yet, the longer Anne stays at Green Gables, the less her red hair seems to matter. After her disastrous attempt to dye it, Anne announces that she has been cured of her vanity and rarely mentions her red hair again. Toward the end of the first book, when Marilla is looking at Anne just short of her 14th birthday, she perceives her as a “slim, gray-eyed girl” (Montgomery 271) and later, as “a tall, serious-eyed girl” (284). As Anne matures in later books, she becomes “an almost regular citizen” (MacLeod 2010: 147), and, not incidentally, her hair color becomes less vivid.

The conventional, adult Anne seems less captivating, less true to the potentials of her child-self: “It is a sad thought 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’” (Thomas 1992: 28). In her analysis of Anne commodities, Jeanette Lynes notes “the most privileged consumable images of Anne depict her at her most childlike [...]. The preponderance of dolls in the Green Gables market-place enshrines the female child as perhaps the key commodity of the Avonlea mythology” (278). Costumes available for playing Anne follow suit, comprised of the pinafores, long braids and straw hats of a vivacious young girl, aged eleven. The floor-length skirts and auburn chignons of adult Anne, as represented on covers of later books in the series, are absent from tourist Anne-play.

Though readers returning to a text at different ages may make new interpretations (Jenkins 1996: 16), Montgomery’s written descriptions of this girl and this place remain stable and unchanging upon the page. The stability of the Anne character is a comfort, a bulwark against feelings of loss typically associated with nostalgia for people, places, times, and selves of one’s childhood. In an interview with folklorist Diane Tye, Jennie Macneill, owner-operator of the Site of L.M. Montgomery’s Cavendish Home, reflects on tourists: “It’s as if they’re seeking something that they found in her books and they come here to find it ... and I mean these are adults you know who come here searching, it’s as if they have lost something they want to find” (Tye 127). As visitor comments attest, that longing for a lost ‘something’ could be a beautiful rural landscape, a sister, mother, or grandmother—or it could be oneself, before becoming an adult, when first encountering the story, in a time of girlish aspiration and potential. Green Gables Heritage Place and other tourism venues on the island extend permission to dabble in a childlike femininity that recalls one’s girlhood reading experiences and the desire to *arrive*, hailing from diverse backgrounds, at the place where Anne’s happy childhood began.

Playing ‘Anne’ reflects, on one hand, a deep desire on the part of adult fans of Montgomery’s text to perform a kind of continuity between their adult and girl selves, resisting

the Romantic separation of childhood and adulthood children's literature scholar Perry Nodelman blames for the frustrating nostalgia many adults feel when they remember their "agonizingly enticing" childhood freedoms (1992: 37). Visitor comments suggest that through a visit to Green Gables, one's girlhood self can be temporarily recaptured; a visitor from Binghamton, New York, writes on a card in the visitor reception centre, "at the age of 27, I feel like a child as I take this opportunity to explore the site that inspired my favorite books." Playing 'Anne' is not about *being* a child, but about *feeling* like a child, or, more accurately, recalling one's own girlish feelings and aspirations.<sup>33</sup> As a (her)itage activity, wearing an Anne hat is not an attempt to recreate a real or fictional past, "but a means of connecting with the past and producing new memories and comfort through practice" (Hollows 193). For women who read the book as children and related to Anne, the visit to PEI and the hat permit the fantasy of 'playing' that character in that setting while still experiencing the site as a leisure tourist who retains the identity she arrived with.



**Figure 14: Tourists at Green Gables Heritage Place.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2011.**

Anne's arrival represents permanent escape from hardship, the fantasy that in the right place and circumstances, one can finally belong, succeed, be happy. The fantasy of finding the

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<sup>33</sup> Though the hat is a visible, material marker of affiliation with or affinity for Anne, many visitors will feel a resonance with the protagonist while foregoing the trappings of the Anne hat.



right place—and in a gentle, natural landscape, no less—provides welcome contrast to the contemporary postfeminist present, in which identity is premised on mobility and consumerism. Tourists inspired to recollect their childhoods through literary tourism in ‘Anne’s Land’ experience not only that “rare moment of communion” with what the attraction stands for, and their place among millions of others who have visited and will visit (MacCannell 2011: 79-80), they also commune with their own pasts and memories of the loved ones they associate with the story, finding a sense of stability in personal and literary pasts.

### CHAPTER THREE—Hill Top Farm, Neofeminist Cinema, and the Empowerment of Beatrix Potter

*“Beatrix Potter has existed in every child’s life in every country of the world. She’s just there, and part of growing up.”*  
--Barbara Flynn, actress

*“She’s got a huge appeal that doesn’t seem to have any boundaries in terms of age or anything.”*  
--Hill Top Staffer

*I have never been able to understand what is the attraction of the book [The Tale of Peter Rabbit], but it continues to sell.”*  
--Beatrix Potter Heelis to Anne Carroll Moore, 1925<sup>1</sup>

In February 2013, *The Westmorland Gazette* published in Kendal, UK, featured the story of a local couple who had recently become engaged at Beatrix Potter’s Lake District holiday home, the National Trust-managed Hill Top Farm. Jason Birch, a garden center manager, planned the trip to surprise his girlfriend, Vicky Boyes. “She watched *Miss Potter*, the film about Beatrix Potter’s life, quite often so I had the idea to go to Hill Top to propose on Valentine’s Day,” he said. The couple later learned that Beatrix Potter had become engaged to solicitor William Heelis a century earlier, on Valentine’s Day 1913. Birch said: “We didn’t realise it was the centenary of Beatrix Potter’s own engagement and marriage until after, but it makes it all that bit more special.” The groom-to-be expressed plans for a summer holiday in the Lakes, and possibly a permanent move there. Reporter Hannah Upton concludes the piece with a nod to the

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<sup>1</sup> Flynn, who portrays Beatrix Potter’s mother Helen in *Miss Potter*, comments from “*Miss Potter: The Making of a Real-Life Fairy Tale*,” *Miss Potter* DVD Special Features (2007); Hill Top staffer who opted to remain anonymous (2015); Beatrix Potter Heelis private correspondence reprinted in Morse (1982).

fervor of Potter fans, writing, “In carrying out the most romantic act of his life, Jason has committed himself not only to Vicky but to a lifetime of Beatrix Potter.”

Jason and Vicky’s story exemplifies the typical blurring of boundaries between an author’s life, literary, and legacy stories. Vicky’s passion for Beatrix Potter is evidenced in the article by her repeat viewings of the film *Miss Potter* (2006), rather than repeat readings of Potter’s works. The couple’s ignorance of the date of the Potter-Heelis betrothal indicates that they are not Beatrix Potter buffs who’ve read biographies or attended Beatrix Potter Society conferences. Rather, a visit to the Hill Top historic site is a logical extension of Vicky’s interest in the life of Beatrix Potter as portrayed in popular film, with Beatrix Potter and her husband William Heelis existing as extensions of film characters played by actors Renee Zellweger and Lloyd Owen. Birch tells the reporter that Vicky “has been listening to all the songs from the film since we got back”—songs written for the film with no direct connection to Potter’s life—“and she wants to see more of the places where it was filmed in the Lakes,” though a number of shooting locations do not coincide with the real-life landscapes of Potter’s life. The story of Jason and Vicky’s betrothal demonstrates how the film *Miss Potter* and Hill Top Farm might appear to be contiguous interpretations of the life of Beatrix Potter.

Vicky and Jason are two among the tens of thousands of tourists who have been motivated to visit Hill Top after viewing *Miss Potter*. Hill Top visitor numbers, previously stable at 50-60K per year, doubled to 100-110K following the release of *Miss Potter*, and spike coincident with re-airings of the film on television.<sup>2</sup> Some of these new visitors may have been intending to visit already but needed a push; others will be doing film tourism, having never read

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<sup>2</sup> A 1971 ballet adaptation of Potter’s stories choreographed by Frederick Ashton and variously staged at Covent Garden, televised, and released on video, had a similar effect on visitation. Prior to the ballet, attendance had plateaued at 48-53K annually; the next year it rose to 93,000 (Pritchard 2014a). The numbers dropped again the year following the ballet, however, they’ve stayed steadily elevated in the years following the release of *Miss Potter* (Hudson 2013).

a Beatrix Potter book. Whether adaptations of a writer's works or a new biography of her life in print or on screen, intertexts that retell or reference classic works of children's literature drive new visitors to historic sites where writers' lives are interpreted and reshape the interpretations that take place at those sites, influencing the ways living people (visitors and staff) relate to the past. For example, an unflattering biography of Louisa May Alcott's father, Bronson, was cited by several guides at Orchard House as perpetuating misconceptions and predisposing the visitor to view the Alcott family with a bias against its patriarch:

I notice quite a difference in the way people think of Bronson Alcott, they used to think very highly of him, but after Martha Saxton's book<sup>3</sup> I notice people [would say], 'Oh, he's just despicable.' [...] [P]eople would stiffen up when I said his name. And I would say 'did you just read Martha Saxton's book,' and they would say 'how did you know?' But it was just very clear, it changed [the way people viewed Bronson Alcott]. (Turnquist 2013)

This example, with its intersecting interpretations by guides, visitors, and the creator of an intertext (a biographer), shows how multiple perspectives on one person create dialogue within the space of the museum. It also illustrates that interpretations ultimately lead to value judgments—in this case, about whether Bronson Alcott's actions were admirable, merely justifiable, or “despicable.”

Acknowledging the important role that makers of derivative texts play in shaping public attitudes toward an author's life and works, this chapter compares narratives of personal empowerment in two different interpretations of the life of Beatrix Potter. Screenwriter Richard Maltby, Jr., and director Chris Noonan's neofeminist interpretation of Beatrix Potter's life in the 2006 romantic drama *Miss Potter* infantilizes Potter in order to frame her gradual independence from her parents as a belated 'coming-of-age.' I contrast the film's depiction to the dialogic, impressionistic interpretation of Potter's conservation legacy presented to visitors at her Hill Top

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Saxton's *Louisa May Alcott: A Modern Biography* (1977).

Farm in Near Sawrey, UK, the “cosy, welcoming and quirky” (Moffatt et al 2014)<sup>4</sup> literary tourism site Potter herself co-authored. Both the film and the site present Potter as becoming increasingly independent (financially and romantically) through her creation of literary works and sizeable charitable bequest during an era in which it was unusual for a woman to exercise such agency. Each, however, highlights different aspects of Potter for the viewer/visitor to emulate, and a different take on what her legacy means. Comparing commentary from filmmakers about their interpretations in the film with commentary from museum staff about the interpretations offered at Hill Top, I argue that this historical female subject is evoked for the public in two very different—yet linked—cultural productions based on how two different sets of interpreters identify and imagine the past to serve their own agendas.

After introducing Beatrix Potter and her works, I analyze these museological and cinematic interpretations of her legacy. Part One visits Hill Top, Potter’s Lake District retreat, where interpretation focuses on her life from the time she bought the farm (1905) until the date of her marriage to William Heelis (1913),<sup>5</sup> inspiration she drew from those environs for her little books, her subsequent achievements as a farmwoman, and her sizable bequest to the National Trust. Part Two analyzes the infantilization of the author in the feature film *Miss Potter*, closely reading the filmmakers’ modifications to the chronology of Potter’s biography, which minimize her notable achievements by attributing them to childhood creativity and encouragement she receives from older men in her life. The final section compares the different ways filmmakers and historic site staff frame Potter’s legacy.

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to John Moffatt for permission to quote from this internal National Trust document, and to Catherine Pritchard, Liz Hunter MacFarlane, and Clare Perry for making it available to me.

<sup>5</sup> Though Beatrix Potter preferred to be addressed as Mrs. Heelis following her marriage in 1913, she continued to publish under the name Beatrix Potter. For clarity, she is referred to by her unmarried name throughout the chapter. All materials quoted from Potter post-1913 are listed in the bibliography under Heelis, with the exception of her books.

### **‘Little Books’ with Large Appeal**

Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) entered the transatlantic canon of classic children’s literature in the early 20th century with ‘little books’<sup>6</sup> she wrote and illustrated. The tales are recognizable for their anthropomorphized animal characters and quaint rural settings, rendered in delicate watercolor and ink. Though Potter and her stories were decidedly English, her work appealed, from the beginning, on a global scale. Her twenty-three little books (aka ‘the tales’) have remained continuously in print. One hundred fifty million copies of *Peter Rabbit* (in thirty-five different languages) have been sold globally since 1902 (Lodge 2011). Between 1902 and 2000, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* sold over 9 million copies in the United States, making it the second-bestselling hardbound children’s book of all time there (Jacobsen 1996: 75, Roback and Britton 2001). Characters from Potter’s tales appear on predictable licensed products such as toys, baby clothes, nursery decor, and tea sets and on unexpected goods such as Jelly Belly™ jelly bean packages and Barbie™ doll dresses. The 2013 announcement that Prince William and Kate Middleton had selected Beatrix Potter motifs as the theme for Prince George’s nursery and first birthday party (Ingham 2014) came as no surprise, considering wallpapers, feeding sets, plush toys, and other infant products have been popular in the UK and abroad since Potter’s lifetime, when she herself designed a number of dolls, wallpapers, and other products featuring her characters (Lear 2007: 172-175). Over 450 different categories of licensed merchandise featuring Potter’s artwork are sold worldwide.

Potter’s admission that she didn’t understand the appeal of her most famous work is countered by the diverse opinions expressed by scholars, enthusiasts, and the general public.

World Heritage Advisor and former National Trust employee Susan Denyer calls Potter’s

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Little books’ is the widely used collective term for Potter’s twenty-three tales published by Frederick Warne, Ltd (now part of Penguin Group). The term derives from the 5.75” X 4.25” size of the typical hardcover edition, which is, literally, quite small. From this point forward I will forgo the use of quotations marks around this phrase.

drawings of interiors “simultaneously practical, magical, and quintessentially English, possessing the power to cocoon their inhabitants against the terrors of the wider world” (2000: 22). One Hill Top docent speaks of Potter’s skill at “mixing fancy with reality” (Maggs 2013). A Hill Top staff person comments that, “the world is changing, but the books are still applicable” (Pritchard 2013). Children’s writer and critic Eleanor Cameron detects in Potter’s tales “a kind of faint irony of expression, a wonderful pithiness, dryness, toughness, which are quite astonishing qualities when you consider the youth of her readers” (qtd in Jacobsen 1996: 79). A longtime resident of the Lake District retrieves a complete set of ‘little books’ from her spare bedroom and recounts her daughter’s love of Potter’s tales: “[Potter] didn’t pander to children,” she recalls, paging through one of the texts. “She used sophisticated vocabulary. I remember [my daughter] Leila, playing in the garden, going on about how she was ‘affronted,’ just like Tabitha Twitchit” (Platt 2013). Cultural geographer Shelagh Squire, who interviewed 600 Hill Top visitors in summer 1990, spoke with “numerous interviewees [who] claimed that they could not imagine childhood without Beatrix Potter. [...] [E]ven adult interviewees who had never read the books were adamant that they were integral to child-life and experience” (1996: 82). While actress Barbara Flynn’s assertion that “Beatrix Potter has existed in every child’s life in every country of the world” may be an overstatement, Potter’s characters are certainly familiar, if not cherished, within a broad geographic spectrum of middle-class to upper middle-class households.

### **A Visit to Hill Top**

An easy drive from William Wordsworth’s Grasmere and John Ruskin’s Coniston, Hill Top<sup>7</sup> sits nestled within a region of rich literary reputation. Hill Top is located in Near Sawrey, a

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<sup>7</sup> Hill Top is the primary site where Potter is commemorated, but her legacy is evident throughout the region and is interpreted at several National Trust sites. The Beatrix Potter Gallery occupies her husband William Heelis’s former law offices in Hawkshead. Here, Potter’s original artworks and personal effects are displayed in coordination with the Trust’s annual Potter interpretive theme. For example, the 2013 theme was the Potter-Heelis nuptials, so the

snug cluster of buildings west of Lake Windermere in the English Lake District. Narrow lanes lined with dry-stacked stone walls constrict traffic; only one motorcoach tour can be scheduled at a time since buses must tediously reverse to exit the drive (Hudson 2013). Consistent with Beatrix Potter's wishes, the property—and most of the village—has not been changed substantially since her lifetime.<sup>8</sup> No street lights or sidewalks have been installed, and electric lines were concealed underground in the 1970s (Pritchard 2015). Subtle wayfinding signs, a miniscule car park, and throngs of camera-slung outsiders betray the landscape as a tourist destination, but are rendered less noticeable by competing views of distant fells, rolling green hills, gamboling lambs, and historic lime pebble and slate structures. The centerpiece is the late 17th-century Hill Top farmhouse, constructed of local slate, coated in pebbly lime mortar and thin white limewash, and embroidered with vines of reddish-pink Japanese quince and cascades of white wisteria. The house, enlarged in the 18th and 19th centuries, reached its present and final form following Beatrix Potter's own addition of a wing in the 20th century (Denyer 2000: 28-29).

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couple's wedding hats were displayed along with other items of clothing; the centenary of *The Tale of Pigling Bland* that same year warranted display of that tale's original illustrations. Wray Castle, the site of the Potter family's first Lake District holiday, includes a 'room' for Potter interpretation within a larger tour that covers the home's history and architecture. These sites, all operated by the National Trust, present different aspects of Potter's life and change annually to appeal to locals as well as tourists from elsewhere in the UK and abroad. An enterprising literary tourist with a car could seek significant properties donated by Potter, including Tarn Hows, the Monk Coniston estate, and Troutbeck Park Farm—a total of 14 farms, 20 houses, and 4,049 acres (Denyer 2000: 137). Beatrix Potter papers and artworks are also held in closed collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum's Blythe House facility in London. Non-Trust commemorations include the World of Beatrix Potter attraction in Bowness-on-Windermere, an indoor staging of scenes from the little books created variously in life-size and miniature by a company specializing in theatrical sets.

<sup>8</sup> The three farms purchased by Potter in Near Sawrey remain in the possession of the National Trust, maintained, per her wishes, as working farms. Approximately half of the total buildings in the village are owned by the Trust and the others are strictly regulated within the conservation area planning code. Only one building has been added since Potter's lifetime (a 1960s bungalow); zoning ordinances have been tightened since then, and are anticipated to become stricter in the event that the Lake District is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the future (Pritchard 2015).





**Figure 15: Beatrix Potter's cottage at Hill Top Farm in early spring.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

Potter purchased Hill Top with royalties from her first five little books combined with a small inheritance. Intent on maintaining the property as a working farm, she added a wing to the house for the tenant farmer and used the original farmhouse as a holiday home to which she retreated from her parents' family home in London when possible (Denyer 1992: 205). At no point did she reside full time at Hill Top. After her marriage to William Heelis in 1913, the couple set up residence in nearby Castle Cottage Farm (a larger house). Hill Top remained a dear and useful place to Potter, serving as a studio, study, and reception venue for visitors, many of them American (Taylor undated 11; Morse 1982).



**Figure 16: Castle Cottage Farm in Near Sawrey, residence of Beatrix Potter 1913-1943.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

Beatrix Potter assumed her literary and charitable achievements would be commemorated at Hill Top when she bequeathed it, along with other properties, to the National Trust. Section 3.i of her will reads: “[...] it being my wish that the rooms and the furnishings used by me at Hilltop [sic] Farm House may be kept in their present condition and not let to a tenant and it is my wish that any other objects of interest belonging to me in any other of my cottages and farmhouses may be preserved therein” (Heelis “Last Will”). In January 1944, shortly after Potter’s death, William Heelis writes, “I shall have to have a straight talk with the ‘National Trust’ and try to get them to maintain ‘Hill Top’ Farmhouse as a permanent ‘memorial’ together with all the furniture[,] pictures (and original drawings for books) and everything she was most interested in to be preserved there” (Heelis 1944). In addition to instructions in her will,<sup>9</sup> Potter attached tiny

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<sup>9</sup> I offer here an extended excerpt from Beatrix Potter’s instructions for the disposition of her personal property to illustrate the level of detail with which she envisioned the arrangement of Hill Top: “The Looking Glass with ivory knobs which belonged to my great-grand mother Alice Hayhurst Crompton, together with the small Chest of Drawers which it stands on, I wish to be put in the north bedroom at Hill Top (over Parlour). The modern furniture in that room to be got rid of. I would like certain favourite pieces of furniture to be kept for Hill Top (in the event of its seeming likely that my rooms there are preserved) namely the Chippendale glass fronted bureau at present in the Library here (the first piece of antique furniture I bought) and the Chippendale 3 single chairs [here she has drawn the chairs to aid identification] in the dining room here and the pair of Shield back chairs and 2 green velvet covered in this dining room with bowed legs. [...] My good China to go into the bureau & corner cupboard at Hill Top. [...] The Sampler opposite my bed to hang in the oak room at Hill Top between the fourposter & the fire place. [...]”

handwritten annotations behind picture frames and under chairs, indicating where an object should be placed, outlining its provenance, or explaining its significance to her. Hill Top House Steward Catherine Pritchard explains:

[S]he was very dogmatic about how the house was to be presented, how things were to be and in the last seven or eight years she spent hours and hours going through the house writing about things, what it cost, what estate it came from, what she thought about the artistic style of things, all these little bits of information and memories. (Pritchard 2014a)

Hill Top is Potter's autobiography, "a work in its own right, a drawing made manifest" (Denyer 2000: 36), composed of her mementos, curios, and furnishings, bound between thick stone walls.



**Figure 17: Tourists wander the streets of Near Sawrey, UK. In observance of Beatrix Potter's wishes, the village is maintained to look much as it did in her lifetime. Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

Admission to Hill Top is by timed ticket (maximum eight people admitted per five minutes) to control crowds and assure preservation of the building and artifacts (Pritchard 2013). Very little artificial lighting is employed in the house; on dark days, it is dimly lit inside. The entry room fireplace takes the chill out of the air and lends an earthy, old-fashioned crackle and smoky scent. Unlike Orchard House, where tour groups are moved together through each room while listening to a comprehensive spiel, or Green Gables Heritage Place, where velvet ropes and

plexiglass channel visitors through downstairs rooms and upstairs hall, Hill Top permits a more freeform experience. Docents in each room answer questions, volunteer information about objects, and vigilantly guard against taboo behaviors such as touching and picture-taking. ‘Little books’ lie open to pages flagged for their depiction of architectural elements or objects in each room drawn from life by Potter. The 1785 oak longcase clock from *The Tailor of Gloucester* (1903) sits in the entrance hall. The Jubilee tea pot from *The Tale of the Pie and the Patty-Pan* (1905) is displayed in the parlor corner cupboard. Hill Top garden and its picket gate appear in *The Tale of Tom Kitten* (1907). Hill Top staircase landings are featured in *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* (1908/1926) (Taylor undated 22-32). An interpretive booklet written by Potter biographer Judy Taylor is available for purchase (£4/\$6 USD) at the ticket desk, inside the house, and in the gift shop. Some visitors read the book as a preview before entering the house, some read the booklet aloud to themselves as they move from room to room, some focus on the rooms and information from docents inside the house then purchase the book upon departure. Still others “don’t buy a book at all—but often mention that they will Google something of relevance when they get home” (Pritchard 2014b).

While there is an interpretive theme for each year,<sup>10</sup> there is not a single, cohesive interpretation of Beatrix Potter that is being advanced by guides. Rather, visitors are presented with interesting facts about Potter in each room as volunteered by a docent or raised in response to a visitor inquiry; visitors are largely left to create their own interpretation of what those bits of information add up to. “Each room evokes different things for different nationalities and different ages. We also have such a wide variety of such very special volunteers of all ages and

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<sup>10</sup> Interpretation themes of recent years include: the centenary of *Tom Kitten* being published (2007), centenaries of *Samuel Whiskers* and *Jemima Puddleduck* (2008), centenaries of *Flopsy Bunnies* and *Ginger and Pickles* (2009), centenary of *Mrs. Tittlemouse* (2010), centenary of *Timmy Tiptoes* (2011), centenary of *Mr. Tod* (2012), centenary of Beatrix Potter’s wedding and publication of *Pigling Bland* (2013) and *Holidays* (2014-2015) (Pritchard 2014b).

backgrounds [...] it is a deliberate policy to let volunteers be guided by the person asking the question. This is then answered within National Trust guidelines, subject matter and personal knowledge and individual research that many of them have done” (Pritchard 2014b). The multi-sensory, immersive experience of a visit to Hill Top yields a mosaic of impressions, feelings, and sensations, rather than any one singular interpretation. In contrast, the narrative of the film *Miss Potter* streamlines Potter into a narrowly defined character type in order to advance a coherent interpretation of her as a child-like woman who at last comes of age.

### **The Girling of *Miss Potter***

*Miss Potter* is a 2006 biopic starring American actress Renee Zellweger as Beatrix Potter, Ewan McGregor as Norman Warne, her publisher and secret fiance who tragically dies before their engagement is announced, and Lloyd Owen as William Heelis, her eventual husband. Zellweger (referred to dismissively by several people I interviewed as “that American actress”) portrays Beatrix Potter as a child-like woman struggling stubbornly for a career as a writer, independence from her parents, and a forbidden marriage to a ‘tradesman.’ The screenplay by Richard Maltby, Jr. retrofits certain events of Potter’s life to suit generic conventions of millennial neofeminist romance genre, leading Potter aficionados to describe it as “totally inaccurate” and “absolute twaddle.”<sup>11</sup> Despite its historical inaccuracies, the film proved quite popular<sup>12</sup> and fueled a significant uptick in visitation to Potter’s Lake District farm, Hill Top.

The film fixates on Potter’s childhood as the wellspring of her creativity, attributing the successes of her adult life—career, romantic, and philanthropic—to early experiences and influences. Though Beatrix Potter would be approximately thirty years old at the start of *Miss Potter*, director Chris Noonan explains, “we [...] homed in on [...] the most [...] dramatic section

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<sup>11</sup> Names withheld.

<sup>12</sup> Worldwide box office \$35M (US gross of \$3M and UK gross of \$13.2M) according to Box Office Mojo.

of her life, when she was breaking away from her family, and falling in love [...] it's a sort of coming of age story [...]" (DC 2007).<sup>13</sup> The writer's lingering girlhood is communicated initially through flashbacks to young Beatrix age 11, which illustrate the adult writer's formative experiences. The use of flashbacks in the film is consistent with Potter's own account of her detailed and early memories of childhood; in an essay published in the *Horn Book* in 1949, Potter counts among her inspirations "a peculiarly precocious and tenacious memory" (qtd in Schafer 1999: 44). According to Director Chris Noonan, flashbacks were necessary to show how "Beatrix developed her artistic skills and her story-telling skills" while still a child (DC 2007). In flashback, we see young Beatrix engaging enthusiastically with wildlife at the family's holiday accommodations, pursuing a brown rabbit through a vegetable garden in a scene recalling *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, watching a frog reminiscent of Jeremy Fisher surface in a pond, and observing and drawing a curious hedgehog nosing around flower pots, ostensibly the inspiration for Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle.

Flashbacks comprise a mere ten minutes of the film's total running time, however, they significantly imply that Potter's famous stories were imported, whole cloth, from her girlhood. In flashback #2, Beatrix declines a bedtime story from her governess, preferring to tell herself a story. Softly, she begins, 'Once upon a time' and proceeds to 'compose' the first lines of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, which is then intercut with scenes of adult Beatrix telling the story to Norman Warne as they review her illustrations for the book his family's press is publishing. At times, child and adult Beatrix's voices overlap, reciting verbatim, in unison, the text that would appear some twenty years later in the printed book. Historians who have traced the origins of Potter's tales through the vast archive of her journals and letters know that *The Tale of Peter*

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<sup>13</sup> Special features found on the 2007 North American DVD release of *Miss Potter* are abbreviated herein as follows: DC = Director's Commentary and MP: MRLFT = *Miss Potter: The Making of a Real-Life Fairy Tale*.

*Rabbit* was composed in 1893 as a ‘picture letter’ written to cheer young Noel Moore, a son of Potter’s former governess. Throughout her life, Beatrix sent picture letters to children she knew personally. The three tales referenced directly in the film as her first are *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *The Tale of Jemima Puddleduck*, and *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*.<sup>14</sup> While a flashback shows *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* being performed for an audience of Beatrix’s brother and governess with pet mice and the well appointed dollhouse in the Potter children’s nursery, the actual inspiration for the setting was a dollhouse built by Norman Warne for his niece, Winifred. The miniature food, including the infamous plaster ham, was not given to child-Beatrix by her father, as shown in the film, rather, Norman Warne sent the toy food to adult-Beatrix to sketch for the book’s illustrations (Lear 2007: 176-178).

Literary critic John Goldthwaite critiques with incisive humor the tendency to conflate inspiration with invention where Potter is concerned:

A word often associated with Potter is inspiration. In almost everything that has been written about her it is said that she found inspiration for this or that tale in one of her pets or in the countryside—I suppose we are to assume while strolling along the hedgerows. It is all left very vague, as if it were a self-evident fact that if you have a pet, or a hedgerow to stroll beside, a story will naturally ensue. [...] Part of the problem may lie in a general tendency to confuse the idea of inspiration with the process of invention, by which works of art actually get made. [...] Her work is a manifestation not of sudden burst of insight but of painstaking invention, that process of trial and error by which new things are always made. A page of Potter is the work of days, weeks, and the revisions of more days and weeks in some following year until the thing comes right. [...] Inspiration in Potter is no sudden happening into print but an evolution of thousands of tiny decisions as one idea suggests its successors and her instinct tells her which succeeding line or phrase best serves the sequence. (Goldthwaite 1996: 297)

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<sup>14</sup> The film conveniently skips nine books published in between these three in order to highlight her more recognizable tales.

In *Miss Potter*, adult Beatrix is depicted as easily capitalizing on stories she made up as a child, which diminishes—erases, even—her considerable creative labor as an adult writer.<sup>15</sup>

The film's treatment of her inspiration also shifts her motivation inward, away from a desire to entertain young children—initially those with whom she was personally acquainted and later, the children of England (and the United States, and elsewhere). The film depicts young Beatrix as virtually isolated and friendless aside from her parents, governess, and brother, composing stories to fill the void. As her books are published in the film, Potter's personal gratification takes center focus; no scenes show a child enjoying the tales, or writing a letter to Potter, or playing with a Peter Rabbit toy. Potter is the child of the piece, motivated solely by personal gratification.

In order to emphasize young Beatrix's exceptional faculty of imagination, the film also neglects the cultural milieu in which she was embedded, and the ways her books built upon and expanded tropes and characters from earlier works. Flashbacks show her drawing and storytelling, but never *reading*. Her early experiences as a reader—'exposures' as biographer Linda Lear calls them—guided Potter's maturation as an artist and storyteller (2007: 32-37). Victoria & Albert Museum curator Anne Stevenson Hobbs identifies several direct borrowings from books Potter is known to have read. For example, orphan Tom's descent down a chimney in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1862) is echoed in Tom Kitten's fall down a flue (1988: 29). Ruari McLean notes the influence of Randolph Caldecott, who "endow[s] animals with human habits and characters, while not losing their own essential animal nature," as Potter would later do (1988: 13). Potter's nursery library included 'nonsense' writers Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll (Hobbs 1988: 29), but a favorite of hers was American Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* tales, published in England in 1881. Potter was fond of Harris's Br'er Rabbit, a

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<sup>15</sup> The film's focus on Potter as an illustrator rather than a writer has been noted by Josie Dolan (2009).



trickster character, and created her own original illustrations of several key scenes from *Uncle Remus* (Lear 2007: 131). Later, she borrowed language from Harris into her own works, being amused by phrases such as ‘rabbit tobacco’ and ‘lippity-lippity.’ The physical format of her little books echoes that of Helen Bannerman’s *Little Black Sambo*, an 1899 bestseller for children, which it has been suggested was the inspiration for the first revision and mock-up of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* a year later (Stevenson 2003: 13-14).

Humphrey Carpenter fully attributes Potter’s success to the influences and resonances of traditional nursery rhymes and folktales (146). John Goldthwaite similarly calls out her tendency to borrow: “I think it is fair to say that Potter never told a wholly original tale in her life. Every plot she used was someone else’s plot, and more scenes than would seem plausible were other people’s scenes in paraphrase. [...] To remark on it does not deny, it only serves to define, her originality. [...] Potter was an eclectic reader of the world of story, a gatherer and a translator” (Goldthwaite 1996: 298). These examples add up to the fact that Beatrix Potter did not compose in a fanciful vacuum of her own imagination, as the film depicts.

Omitting the facts of Potter’s composition process—that she was well-read with a well-stocked nursery library—permits the film’s fantasy that her stories were generated from nature and self alone, unmediated by culture. To situate Potter as a mature writer who read widely and drew inspiration from diverse sources might suggest her success as replicable by a contemporary writer with similar resources and dedication. The intense connection to her younger self, the imaginative genius who develops the stories she then simply regurgitates, verbatim, as an adult minimizes the time, work, and thought required to produce what would become world-famous works of children’s literature and frames Potter as exceptional, even magical.

Throughout the film, Beatrix receives validation from older men who deem her talented, or who introduce the notions that lead to her later achievements. In a pivotal scene, Beatrix's father recounts the positive comments he's heard at his club about her books and how he paid his shilling and to buy his own copy. He says: "I owe you an apology, Beatrix. When you showed me your books, all I saw was my little girl, bringing me clever drawings for me to comment on. You're not a little girl anymore. You're an artist. [...] I'm proud of you, Beatrix." The speech comes in the midst of Beatrix's conflict with her mother Helen regarding Beatrix's desire to invite Norman Warne and his sister to the Potters' Christmas Eve party. Insecure in her status as a nouveau-riche hostess, Helen objects to the Warnes' social position. Beatrix's father, however, says, "I don't see any reason why we cannot make a little social effort to welcome the gentleman responsible for this blessing into our home." This statement, while giving Beatrix the permission she seeks, subtly retracts his proclamation of her achievement. Norman, two years older and representing masculinity, maturity, and business acumen, is credited with "blessing" the domestic space of the Potter home with Beatrix's success.

Even more significant is the critical (entirely fictional) early role William Heelis plays. Beatrix Potter was already a popular published author of several books when she met her eventual husband. The decision to introduce William Heelis during Beatrix's childhood in the film is one of the most noteworthy revisions made to her life story. In the 'official guide' to the film published by F. Warne & Co, author Garth Pearce admits that certain changes were made to Potter's biography for "practical and artistic reasons." Though there is "no evidence" that Potter met future husband William Heelis when she was still a child (Pearce 13), a past is invented for Heelis, in which he is the son of a groundsman at the Potter family's Lake District holiday property. In the film, Beatrix recalls to Norman Warne that this older boy was always

interested in her stories. In a flashback, eleven year old Beatrix shows Heelis a drawing of a duck. “Not bad, Miss Beatrix” he compliments her. Back in the present, she tells Norman, “He encouraged me to take my writing seriously.” It is during the summer of her secret engagement to Norman that Beatrix re-encounters Heelis as he is posting a ‘for sale’ sign in front of Hill Top Farm—a farm she would eventually buy.

According to director Chris Noonan, “The early friendship between Beatrix and William Heelis [...] is one of the few areas where we’ve really bent the true story for the sake of emotionally satisfying storytelling. [...] We thought that by establishing a relationship from long before, there would be a greater logic and a truer emotional satisfaction then, when William and Beatrix finally got together.” Motivated by concern that the later Heelis romance might appear to be a “kneejerk reaction to the death of Norman” (DC),<sup>16</sup> this decision serves to further infantilize the character of Beatrix Potter. Her eventual husband becomes yet another encouraging, sympathetic *older* man—even though, in real life, Beatrix Potter was five years older than William Heelis.

Furthermore, Heelis is conflated with another influential figure in Beatrix’s life, one likely omitted for brevity. Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, who co-founded Britain’s National Trust, was a writer, conservationist, historian, and clergyman who encouraged teenage Beatrix in her artistic endeavors as well as her burgeoning interests in geology and archaeology (Battrick 27-29). We see the first merging of William Heelis and Hardwicke Rawnsley in a flashback of young Beatrix and young Willie Heelis walking together on a sun-dappled hillside. Beatrix says she would like to paint the scene, but isn’t very good at landscapes. Heelis replies, “Wait too long and it won’t be here *to* paint, Miss Beatrix [...] The large farms are being broken up into

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<sup>16</sup> The eight years that passed between Norman Warne’s death and Potter’s marriage to William Heelis were condensed in the film.

small plots and sold off.” Eleven-year-old Beatrix replies, “I say, beauty’s worth preserving.” Beatrix’s pronouncement, spurred by Heelis’ ominous observation, foreshadows her later devotion to land preservation and her sizeable bequest of 4,000+ acres of property to the National Trust, the non profit conservation agency co-founded by Hardwicke Rawnsley.

Both William Heelis and Hardwicke Rawnsley were tremendously important to Beatrix Potter. In the film, however, Heelis gets credit for prompting Beatrix in the two endeavors she became best known for: writing children’s books, and conserving land in the Lake District, neither of which the *real* William Heelis can claim credit for. It is as if, in order to achieve “emotionally satisfying storytelling,” Beatrix Potter’s core passions—ones that had nothing to do with her love life—needed to be grounded in her relationship with the man she would eventually marry.

The girling of *Miss Potter* can be traced to the vision of scriptwriter Richard Maltby, Jr. In *The Making of Miss Potter*, Maltby explains he was fascinated by a biographical sketch on one of Potter’s books indicating that she “published virtually no more stories” after marrying in 1913. “Why,” he asks, “when a writer finally marries happily does she give up writing. One would expect the opposite, that she would write as never before. I was intrigued” (Pearce 47). Maltby’s further research revealed “the story of a woman who leaves a fantasy world of her imagination to enter the real world, where she encountered love, great joy, and immense tragedy, and who ultimately chooses to live in reality, with all its harshness, over the safety of her fantasy world” (Pearce 47-48). Potter produced four additional tales and five other books after her marriage,<sup>17</sup> and continued corresponding with fans and receiving visitors at Hill Top for the

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<sup>17</sup> Tales published by Frederick Warne & Co following Potter’s marriage: *Appley Dapdly’s Nursery Rhymes* (1917), *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918), *Cecily Parsley’s Nursery Rhymes* (1922), and *The Tale of Little Pig Robinson* (1930). Other publications: *Tom Kitten’s Painting Book* (1917), *Jemima Puddleduck’s Painting Book* (1925), *Peter Rabbit’s Almanac for 1929* (1928), *The Fairy Caravan* (1929) and *Sister Anne* (1932).

remainder of her life. Maltby's assumption that Potter's reduced literary output later in life was due to the resolution of childhood issues through marriage to William Heelis<sup>18</sup> assumes a clean break between unmarried child (full of imagination and stories) and married (or soon-to-be married) adult (no more interest in drawings or stories).

Successful children's authors have long been subject to conjecture regarding their intellectual and sexual maturity, often accused of using their writing to resolve late in life what 'normal' people have handled in the process of growing up. Humphrey Carpenter describes this as a common stereotype of Golden Age writers:

He or she is supposed to have been a lonely, withdrawn, introverted individual, scarcely able to achieve normal human relationships, only capable of communicating his or her deepest feelings by talking to children or writing books for them. The creation of children's literature by such a person is, in other words, interpreted largely as an act of therapy for a damaged personality. (138)

Access to a childlike perspective is framed positively in *Miss Potter* as the wellspring of adult romantic and career success, channeled productively and profitably through male influences. *Saving Mr. Banks*, a 2013 Disney film about the life of Mary Poppins series author P.L. Travers, more explicitly evokes Carpenter's trope of "therapy for a damaged personality." The joyless Travers (played by Emma Thompson) is depicted as a stunted child whose flashbacks to her girlhood in Australia illustrate her unresolved issues with her well-meaning, but ill-fated alcoholic father. Plans for the 1964 Walt Disney film version of *Mary Poppins* become the catalyst for Travers' painful recollections of her father.

Though petulant and self-involved, Travers is depicted as generally mature, independent, and self-assured. When she encounters a jumbo Mickey Mouse plush doll left on her hotel bed as

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<sup>18</sup> Potter prioritized different interests upon purchasing Hill Top and additional farms in the Lake District. Involving herself in day-to-day operations, she learned about animal husbandry, rural economics, and farm management (Taylor undated 13). She did not require income beyond what her little books continued to generate in royalties. In a letter to the Denver Public Library dated 12 July 1936, she states, "I cannot think of any more tales to write. There is no sense in going on writing stories when I have nothing more to say" (Heelis 1936). As she aged, her eyesight weakened, which hindered any attempts at detailed drawing late in her life.

a gift, she murmurs with disgust, “How old does he [Walt Disney] think I am? Five years old.” She places the rejected doll on the floor, facing a corner. A few days later, in a moment of emotional vulnerability triggered by a discussion of the character ‘Mr. Banks,’ whom she based on her father, she retrieves the plush mouse to cuddle. Travers rejects the revisioning of her story by Walt Disney (played by Tom Hanks) and returns to London without having signed over the film rights. Disney promptly shows up on her doorstep. He confesses to her his suffering as an eight-year-old boy with an abusive father. His story sounds at first like a play for solidarity, but by the end of the story, it’s clear he believes he has overcome his issues, whereas Travers has not. Treading a thin line between sympathetic and patronizing, he asks, “Don’t you want to let it all go and have a life not dictated by the past?”

The postfeminist ‘girling’ of mature women has been studied by feminist scholars in the context of the films of Diane Keaton. As an older romantic heroine, Keaton is depicted as vital and sexual—her age does not negate her innate girliness or availability for heterosexual romance (Radner 2011). The ‘girling’ of Potter and Travers, however, is not the sexualized girling of a romantic comedy heroine, but a chaste and infantilizing girling, a stunting in the process of ‘proper’ maturation and becoming. In both the Potter and Travers films, stunted girliness is evidenced by a lack of interest in heteronormative coupling. Potter initially rejects numerous suitors brought before her by her mother, and confides to confirmed spinster friend Millie that she does not intend to marry. As she breaks free of her mother’s influence and ‘grows up,’ she eventually falls in love and accepts a marriage proposal. Travers was bisexual—a detail omitted from her portrayal as a frigid spinster in the 2013 Disney biopic (Lawson 1999: 182). A disinterest in men and an interest in cute animals (cuddly Mickey or whimsical drawings of rabbits) are presented as further evidence that these women are, psychologically, still girls,

whose desire to disrupt the status quo issues entirely from their failure to be mature, obedient, unambiguously heterosexual adult women. In popular texts like *Miss Potter* and *Saving Mr. Banks*, childish egoism and disobedience are celebrated as expressions of feminine agency, but it is only through collaboration with and approval from powerful men that financial success is ultimately obtained.

### Two Interpretations of Potter's Legacy

In any biographical film, some simplification, usually in the form of condensation and abridgment, is required. *Miss Potter* translates a period of approximately fifteen years (not including flashbacks) into a one hundred minute film. In her discussion of the viewer-acclaimed Sullivan Entertainment film adaptations of the first two books in the *Anne of Green Gables* series, Brenda Weber proposes that adaptations ought not be judged against primary texts, but seen and critiqued as discrete artistic productions that “have a right to stand by themselves, with full integrity, as texts *inspired by* a set of narratives written in the early part of the twentieth century but *constructed for* a set of consumers with late-twentieth-century interests” (author’s emphasis, 53). Similarly, *Miss Potter* should be understood as *based* on real people, but designed by and for contemporary audiences as an artistic product rather than historical reportage.<sup>19</sup> It is futile to critique *Miss Potter* by cataloguing its historical inaccuracies, but productive to ask what effect—what interpretations—those inaccuracies might promote. What do divergent interpretations of Beatrix Potter’s achievements in *Miss Potter* and at Hill Top offer for women

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<sup>19</sup> Allowances may be made to consider the sources available at the time of writing. First circulated in 1992, Richard Maltby’s script predates the many new sources on Potter that have come out since then, some of which would contradict aspects of the film. For example, the most recent major Potter biography, written by historian Linda Lear, contextualizes the story of Potter’s life within her engagements with the natural world, including her mycological illustrations and research. Lear’s volume was released concurrent with the film. It seems likely that the screenplay was based primarily on Potter’s own account of her inspirations published in *The Horn Book* and an early biography by Margaret Lane (1946). There is much debate as to the tenor of Potter’s early years—isolated and lonely, or filled with stimulating adults and holidays? I focus my analysis on deviations that explicitly, and by the filmmakers’ own admissions, depart from known sources at the time the screenplay was written.

today? How are they valued and construed? The final section of this chapter examines the reasons for these different interpretations of Potter, which intersect at the point of literary tourism, and what the claims each makes about Potter's historical significance reveal about Potter's usefulness to the interpreters themselves—the artists involved in the making of *Miss Potter*, and National Trust staff at Hill Top.

“A lot” of Hill Top visitors have commented on the infantile portrayal in *Miss Potter* and for those visitors, “this is their view when they first enter the house—especially if their only contact with Beatrix Potter up until then has been the film” (Pritchard 2014). This is not necessarily a problem; Beck and Cable advise, “those who believe myths are not necessarily unteachable. Knowing a myth in itself is often an indication that a person has an interest in the subject. We should take advantage of that interest” (105). Though every docent interviewed was well-versed in the timeline of Potter's life, unless a visitor explicitly states an inaccuracy, guides are unlikely to mention the filmmakers' revisions. “If they say something like, ‘wasn't it lovely, meeting as children they got together later’ then I'll go in and I'll say, in actual fact that's one of many things in the film that wasn't accurate’ and tell them a little bit about it” (Pritchard 2014a). Even without explicit correction, “we all make sure that by the time they leave they have a much greater understanding of the woman [she] really was” (Pritchard 2014a). The astute visitor may note that the child-adult binary so important in the film is softened into a gradual, realistic transition at Hill Top. The house depicts the period 1905-1913, from the time Potter purchased the farm to the time of her marriage to William Heelis.<sup>20</sup> House Steward Catherine Pritchard explains:

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<sup>20</sup> Contrary to the film's depiction of her moving clean out of Bolton Gardens to live alone after Norman's death, Potter actually used Hill Top as a holiday home, and did not move to the Lake District full time until she married. Space being limited at Hill Top, she and Heelis set up house in nearby Castle Cottage Farm. Potter continued to use Hill Top as a studio and reception place for visitors for the remainder of her life.



[E]xcept for a couple of months of that time she was Beatrix Potter, she wasn't Mrs. Heelis, however, [...] it's difficult to make the distinction, when you're talking to visitors, you can go from talking about little books to talking about the land, and suddenly you're talking about Mrs. Heelis and not Beatrix Potter. So yes, she got married, on such and such a date and that's a demarcation in a way, but there's almost no mental demarcation; it just flows from one to the other. (Pritchard 2014b)

Hill Top has remained relatively static in its visual appearance since 1944, yet the impressionistic presentation of Potter's life and legacy allows multiple voices to blend and a fragmented, complex portrait to emerge. A visitor may learn that Beatrix Potter was at various times encouraged by her father, by Hardwicke Rawnsley, and by a host of other learned men, including artist Sir John Everett Millais and naturalist Charles McIntosh. A guide may reference her personal writings, which recount the support and encouragement that both Norman Warne and William Heelis provided. But unlike the film's simplified portrayal, Beatrix is a mature woman, not a little girl delighting in the approval and validation of the men in her life. The focus on Beatrix Potter's interpersonal relationships and belated coming-of-age in the film is likely to be overshadowed by her achievements as a collector and conservationist as they are showcased at National Trust sites throughout the region.

Setting is the realm where the site and the film most harmoniously align: the sublime fells, idyllic farms, and shimmering tarns of the English Lake District. Garth Pearce optimistically predicts, "for the most part, Potter devotees will embrace both the sense of atmosphere and authenticity in the film version of her life" (11). Atmosphere, in the form of Lake District landscapes, is a memorable element of the film. Establishing shots of 'chocolate box'<sup>21</sup> scenery—Tarn Hows, Lake Windermere, and others—seem straight out of a tourism brochure. The rich visual presentation of the region in *Miss Potter* is perhaps the most

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<sup>21</sup> 'Chocolate box' is a British idiom used to describe scenic landscapes. Chocolates and biscuits in the United Kingdom are commonly packed in cartons and tins printed with scenic landscape images and sold as souvenirs and gifts.

compelling reason a trip to the cinema inspired approximately 50K more tourists than usual to visit Hill Top the year the film was released.



**Figure 18: View from Wray Castle, where 16-year-old Beatrix Potter spent her first Lake District holiday.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

Authenticity, however, may be a trickier matter; mainstream feature films are not known for their complex representations of women’s lives. Rosenzweig and Thelen found in their large scale survey of how Americans engage with the past that films depicting historical people and events rated low in perceived trustworthiness. They admit surprise upon learning that “visits to museums and historic sites made respondents feel extremely connected to the past” (32). Their American informants trusted firsthand encounters at museums and historic sites where ‘real’ materials were preserved, perceiving these exhibited materials as less mediated than books and films shaped by authorial bias. Hill Top Farm and several other National Trust properties all provide alternative ways of accessing information about Potter’s life and works via firsthand interactions with the landscapes and material culture most cherished by her.<sup>22</sup> Historic sites also

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<sup>22</sup> For those skeptical of commercial film depictions of the past, more rigorously researched information about Beatrix Potter is readily available: The Beatrix Potter Society holds annual meetings and publishes a journal,

put the visitor in contact with other people, presenting openings for dialogue and debate where facts, assumptions, and fantasies might be articulated, contemplated, and contested.

Though the film depicts feminine agency at a micro level—one woman’s struggles—director Chris Noonan extrapolates Potter’s significance to a macro level for promotional purposes. The metaphor of the girl coming of age is mapped onto the larger history of women’s desire for equal rights. His vision for the film, as he articulates it in interviews, is to elevate Beatrix Potter as a champion of women’s rights who overcame ‘Victorian’ repressions and social norms represented by her mother, Helen. On DVD special features, cast and crew promote this vision, arguing for Potter’s broader historical significance. Beatrix Potter was “ahead of her time” (Emily Watson, MP:TMRLFT) and “a standard-bearer for women’s rights” (Noonan, qtd in Pearce 57). Ewan MacGregor, who plays Norman Warne, says in an interview, “In the story of what’s happened with women in the last hundred years, she’s an important player.” None go so far as to call Beatrix Potter a feminist; the only person to utter the f-word on the DVD special features is actress Emily Watson, who plays Norman Warne’s sister Millie. She describes Millie as “a sort of feminist character” (MP:MRLFT). A confirmed spinster who sports masculine neckties, Millie provides an classic ‘foil’ girlfriend who represents the romantic protagonist’s path not taken. The film’s prioritizing of heterosexual romance over female solidarity is demonstrated when Beatrix nervously confides that Norman has proposed marriage and that she wants to accept, but that it feels like a betrayal of her friendship with Millie. As a ‘feminist character’ Millie Warne is ambivalent at best; when Beatrix confides that Norman has proposed, Millie sputters, “If someone came along who loved me and whom I loved, I would trample my

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biographies such as Linda Lear’s *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* explore the complexity of Potter’s varied achievements.

mother.” Feminism, if that is indeed what Millie Warne represents, is not a political position in the film, but the fate of women who have failed to marry.

It is Beatrix Potter’s mother who ultimately gets ‘trampled,’ metaphorically at least, as Beatrix ‘comes of age,’ gaining financial autonomy, and, with it, the confidence to choose her own spouse. “It’s the process of her deciding that her ideas should dominate her life rather than her mother’s ideas that is [...] the central conflict in this story,” Noonan explains (DC). Noonan et al call Beatrix Potter exceptional for forging her own way in the world and for being successful at it. The central conflict of the film, however, is interpersonal—the generational differences between mother and daughter. Beatrix Potter did a number of pioneering things uncommon for a woman of her time. Studying fungi to make detailed drawings, she became interested in their symbiosis and hybridization, writing a paper that was presented by proxy to the all-male (until 1905) Linnean Society in 1897 (Lear 106-107, 122-125).<sup>23</sup> Her interest in local Herdwick sheep led to her entering specimens from her flocks into competitions (taking prizes for Herdwick ewes at numerous regional shows from 1930 to 1938), becoming a judge, and ultimately being elected as President of the Herdwick Sheepbreeders’ Association (she died before taking office) (Denyer 2000: 124). Her decision to be cremated (at Carlton Crematorium in Blackpool) was motivated by her aversion to gravesite pilgrimages common to other Lake District authors (especially Wordsworth) but for her time, it was “quite unusual and forward

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<sup>23</sup> In 2014-2016, the National Trust adopted the theme of ‘Holidays’ in its interpretation of Potter. Catherine Pritchard reports that visitors have been intrigued by the scientific objects and drawings featured: “[W]e’ve got a lot of scientific stuff out upstairs, fossils, and minerals, and things like that, and the reaction has been absolutely amazing. I would say 7/10s of people haven’t a clue about the mycology or the archaeology. Nearly everybody knows that she did stories about little animals. [...] [T]his year it’s been very very marked, particularly when we show the microscope slides upstairs and we bring out about the butterflies, and boiling up the animals and so forth. People have been amazed, they didn’t realize. And when you say, with the mycology, she really could have been Dr. Beatrix Potter—they didn’t know that” (2014a: Pritchard).

[Note on ‘boiling up the animals’: Interested in animal anatomy, Beatrix and her brother, Bertram, would boil the carcasses of small mammals in order to study their skeletal structures (Lear 2007:38). Beatrix’s close, scientific observation of nature contributed to the accuracy of her animal illustrations.]

thinking” (Pritchard 2014a). In *Miss Potter*, interpersonal conflicts are privileged at the expense of other achievements (and conflicts) that would have been more useful for remembering Potter as a pioneer for women’s advancement.

Feminism—collective political action that brings about systemic change—is conflated in the grand themes of *Miss Potter* with what Hilary Radner calls ‘neofeminism.’ In feminism, agency is desired for women collectively. In neofeminism, the focus is on “the individual woman acting on her own, in her best interest, in which her fulfillment can be understood as independent of [...] the predicament of other women” (11). The two overlap in their aims (and rhetorics) of empowerment—the ability to act, to choose, to determine the course of one’s life and to achieve financial autonomy—but as Radner explains, feminism “advocate[d] [...] self-fulfillment [...] within a climate of social responsibility and state intervention” (Radner 9). Neoliberalism—and its cousin, neofeminism—celebrates the individual’s personal escape or achievement, which is what the plot of *Miss Potter* recounts.

Filmmaker commentary could imply that Beatrix Potter was a suffragette, activist, or directly involved in social movements for women’s rights. In fact, she “actively opposed [votes for women] if the topic came up” (Pritchard 2014). John Goldthwaite colorfully describes Potter as “a girl who believed [...] that a woman’s place was beside a man and that women’s suffrage was a craze of the lunatic fringe” (1996: 293). Well-acquainted with the facts of Potter’s biography, Hill Top guides would be unlikely to discuss Potter as a feminist, “although if the visitor really wanted to push this then the volunteer wouldn’t argue [...] in front of other visitors and would let them run with their opinion” (Pritchard 2014). There isn’t a lot of time on a Hill Top visit for interpretations with such tenuous links to Potter’s identity: “Because Hill Top is presented for the period 1905-1913 and is so focused towards the little books, farming, her

developing love of the area, and [marriage with] William Heelis, there isn't much room for an ardent southern feminist that sets out to change the Cumbrian farmers' world," Pritchard observes (Pritchard 2014b). Potter was a pioneering woman, boldly engaging in traditionally male occupations like scientific inquiry, fell farming, and land preservation. Her achievements, though driven more by personal interest than by a desire to improve the situation of a women collectively, could be recognized as disrupting gendered norms in small but significant ways. In today's academic parlance, Potter could be considered an ecofeminist for her efforts to conserve natural areas and the symbiotic cultural traditions of fell farming, but such nuance is not useful to the promoters of a feature film.

Comparing commentary from filmmakers on the interpretations offered in the film and commentary from site staff about the interpretations offered at Hill Top, agreement emerges on the point of Potter as a visionary—yet with distinctly different ways of using that point. Noonan seeks to pigeonhole Beatrix Potter as an important figure in women's history in order to promote a neofeminist film he wishes to market to an audience of 'empowered' 21st century women; Hill Top seeks to promote Beatrix Potter as an important figure in conservation history in accord with the National Trust's land preservation mandates, which Potter personally endorsed. The film is an interpretation located within the genre of women's popular culture. The site is an interpretation situated (literally) within the four thousand acres of land Potter donated. To emulate the Beatrix Potter of *Miss Potter* is to defy authority figures and pursue personal gratification through career and romance choices—a familiar and marketable course of action for neofeminist film heroines. To emulate the Beatrix Potter of Hill Top is to appreciate the history and culture of Cumbria and to financially support its ongoing preservation—a course of action beneficial to sustaining the National Trust.

Though they rely upon similar materials—biographical data on Beatrix Potter—the purposes, goals, and effects of the film and the site are essentially different. A major motion picture, *Miss Potter* is about capitalizing on someone else’s life, work, and continuing name recognition. A not-for-profit historic site, Hill Top is maintained to interpret an author’s life. The comparison of interpretations of Beatrix Potter in Hill Top and *Miss Potter* demonstrates that the subjects of postfeminist nostalgia present multiple opportunities for emulation. Among these possible emulations are those aligned with the subject’s values (as a donation to the National Trust might represent) or those motivated by the familiar plots and stereotypes of neofeminist filmmaking (as striving to achieve romantic and career success might represent). Whether films that retrofit history to marketable Hollywood conventions are a hindrance to understanding the past, or an *amuse-bouche* provoking deeper engagement depends on the interpretations and critical analysis skills of the viewer. Ideas about who an author was, how she created her art, and what motivated her, as they are promoted through tourist sites, consumer goods, popular films and other texts reflect the aims of their producers, but, perhaps more importantly, reflect patterns of thought circulating at the time of their production. *Miss Potter* is not necessarily formulated along the lines of what film audiences *want*, but along the lines of what they are used to.

The *Miss Potter* DVD continually features among the top thirty products sold at the gift shop at Hill Top, selling hundreds of copies per year. A representative from the Hill Top shop explains that the film has been “a steady contributor” in support of Potter’s conservation agenda, not only in profits from DVD sales, but in bringing visitors to Hill Top (2015). National Trust staff assisted filmmakers with on-location filming, including the ‘recreation’ of Hill Top at Yew Tree Farm, another property Potter owned. The Trust facilitates film tourism with pages on its website devoted to FAQs about the film and shooting locations (Nationaltrust.org.uk). There is a

kind of compromise in this tacit overlooking of the film's historical inaccuracies because films such as *Miss Potter* prolong popular interest in an author (and tourism sites associated with her memory). Feature films have contributed significantly to the continued viability of all three literary tourism sites analyzed in this project.



**Figure 19: Visitors hoping to glimpse ‘Peter Rabbit’ in the gardens at Hill Top. Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

All life histories, whatever form they take, are interpretations—by historians, descendants, docents, or enthusiasts. Competing versions of Beatrix Potter appeal to different types of consumers—those who want Beatrix Potter to fit a mold they understand, and those who are delighted to learn that she doesn't. “Some people like the idea of her always being a child at heart,” Catherine Pritchard observes, “while others want her to be an ardent feminist buying land and saving the Lake District, while yet others want her to be a dear old lady wandering around Sawrey [...] keeping an eye on the old and ill so that the district nurse she sponsored could go and call on them” (Pritchard 2014b). Potter's resonance for contemporary women comes from her polysemy and adaptability to a range of audience needs. If a visitor wants to style her as a feminist, openings to do so exist in the film, which advances an empowerment narrative that *sort*



of looks like feminism, or at the site, which advances an achievement narrative that could be construed as feminist if a visitor wants to look it that way, but doesn't alienate her if she doesn't. Taking a more personal slant, if a visitor doesn't care about Potter's achievements and simply wants to gaze upon picturesque landscapes and remember a beloved grandmother reading *Peter Rabbit* aloud, they can do that instead.

Reading *Miss Potter* alongside a visit to Hill Top—in a way recreating the sequence of interactions performed by numerous tourists—one discerns a mostly untroubled coexistence of divergent narratives about what Potter's choices stand for. The polysemy of postfeminist nostalgia for Potter as represented in these discrete cultural productions is an excellent case study for understanding (her)itage in the postfeminist era: the 'idealized body' of Beatrix Potter represents diverse feminine archetypes, from the feistiness of the activist resisting (certain) strictures of patriarchy and masculine domination of nature, to the passionate artist seeking self-fulfillment and personal sovereignty, to the childlike woman charmed by her own cute drawings of bunnies in jackets with brass buttons. These contrasting representations of Potter's life choices coexist harmoniously—no person, historical or otherwise, is ever just one thing. How contemporary people identify a past figure to whom they wish to relate, then imagine ways her life choices might inform or annotate their own, is guided by the official and popular interpretations vividly portrayed in films, museums, biographies, and other media.

## CHAPTER FOUR—Exit Through the Gift Shop: Identity and Consumer Culture at Three House Museums

*“I’d point out that it’s not compulsory to buy things from museum gift shops.”*  
*Anonymous parent to child, Tate Modern, London, April 2014*

*“We all have our own different experiences, not only walking into Orchard House, but walking out of Orchard House.”*  
*Nicole Sousa, Orchard House guide/educator, August 2014*

In her novel *Jo’s Boys*, Louisa May Alcott describes the fame Jo March, now in middle age, has achieved as a writer of children’s books. Literary tourists descend upon her home, demanding autographs. A group from a young ladies’ seminary camp plucks flowers from her lawn, and a family of four from Oshkosh help themselves to bits of notepaper and postage stamps from the study. One eccentric visitor requests permission to add to her collection of live grasshoppers obtained from writers’ gardens, then inquires as to any old garments the author can spare for her to weave into a rug alongside a vest from Emerson and a dress from Mrs. Stowe. The division of public and private space collapses for the harried Jo as persistent journalists and fans brazenly cross her threshold. The house itself suffers wear and tear; Alcott describes seventy-five pairs of muddy boots treading Jo’s halls during one visit. Expressing her frustration through her alter ego Jo (Brodhead 70), Alcott laments this “absurd and tiresome mania” that compels fans to wrest her time away from her work and family.

Souvenir procurement at sites of literary significance becomes more civilized once an author has passed away and her house has officially become a museum. With the advent of

museum stores,<sup>1</sup> tourists no longer had to behave quite so assertively in their quest for keepsakes, though the collection of metonymic, renewable souvenirs such as leaves, flowers, and pebbles remains common (grasshoppers, less so).<sup>2</sup> As the example of Jo March's brazen visitors demonstrates, mementos of the tourist's proximity to greatness through contact with an author or her home are an important part of the tourist experience, providing 'proof' to self and others that the pilgrimage occurred (Gordon 1986: 136). By presenting curated collections of objects for sale adjacent to the curated cultural treasures *not* for sale, museum stores offer *some* object to take home, ensuring the important cultural and natural resources remain for future visitors. As the anonymous museum visitor quoted above asserts, it is not compulsory to buy things from museum shops, but many tourists consider museum shopping an integral part of their experience—some even forego the museum entirely in favor of shopping.<sup>3</sup>

Museum stores proliferated from the 1980s onward, parallel to the rise of consumption-driven postfeminist culture. Museum shops range widely in square footage, price points, and aesthetics, catering to the interests of diverse consumers accustomed to expressing their taste and identity through purchased goods. Like museum administration and interpretation, museum store management is a thoroughly professionalized field. In the United States, the Museum Store Association offers annual meetings, a magazine, and continuing education webinars and certifications for members in the museum retail profession. Though subject to critique for

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Macdonald cites Wasson's (2005) dating of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City as one of the earliest museums to open a store, in 1908 (2012: 53). Nicola Watson dates some of the earliest commercially produced souvenirs of literary tourist pilgrimage to Shakespeare's Stratford-on-Avon during the 1760s (2006: 12).

<sup>2</sup> Organic souvenirs are renewable to an extent, but even natural resources must be protected in places that receive hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. Beverly Gordon calls these souvenirs 'piece-of-the-rock' because they consist of traces of a larger whole the tourist wishes to possess. Built environment features can also fit this category, such as the bricks plundered from walls at Mount Vernon by 19th century visitors (Gordon 1986: 141).

<sup>3</sup> At Green Gables Heritage Place, autumn cruise ship shore excursion tourists have limited time on site. Signed up to see 'highlights' of the Island by motorcoach over the course of a few hours, these tourists are often more interested in buying an item in the gift shop to prove they 'visited' Green Gables than in actually touring the Green Gables farmhouse (site observations 2011). Sharon Macdonald notes the "naughty" feeling one gets when visiting the museum shop without viewing the museum's exhibits (2012: 43).

placing priceless cultural objects, people, and ideas in uneasy proximity to the commercial sphere of financial transactions, profit-driven retail ventures at sites of cultural significance increasingly support operations as funding from private donors and government agencies diminishes. Museum store revenues are not restricted; they can be applied to electricity bills just as easily as preservation, interpretation, and display of a museum's collections. To alleviate the appearance of commercializing on cultural heritage, industry and scholarly literatures advise cautious curation of store inventory, with an eye to institutional mission and educational aims (Ackerson 2014; Brown 2013). The scant but growing academic research about museum stores is perpetrated mainly by social scientists aiming to prescribe best practices in support of increasing profits. This chapter examines museum retail from a humanistic, cultural studies perspective.

From a cultural studies perspective, museum stores represent yet another site for the interpretation of authorial legacy, extending the values of the museum and responding to the emotions and desires of visitors. At times, the museum store is a crucible of sorts, gathering the different interpreters discussed in the first three chapters. Guides at Orchard House advise visitors on purchases, and some even recommend a particular novel or biography during the tour (site observations 2014). *Miss Potter* DVDs are offered for sale alongside Potter's little books at the Hill Top shop. Discourses examined in Chapters 1-3 recur in the interpretation of a site's function, mission, and theme by retail professionals in the store. Museum store inventories facilitate expression of both institutional and visitor identities.



**Figure 20: An abundance of Anne hats at Green Gables gift shop.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

Museum stores are spaces where a confluence of interpretive discourses, from guides, tourists, and intertexts intermingle, and where institutional and consumer identities entwine, their points of intersection expressed in the meanings of goods sold and purchased. Synthesizing interviews with store managers and staff, analysis of museum retail spaces and inventories, and the secondary literature on museum stores and souvenirs, I show in part one of this chapter how the museum stores at Green Gables Heritage Place, Hill Top, and Orchard House represent the forces that shaped the museum itself: the specific history of the site; the attitude of the specific author toward commerce and the marketing of her works; and the specific museum's key themes.

Though their interpretive role is not as explicit as that of educators and guides, retail staff who plan, stock, and manage the museum store contribute to visitor experience in meaningful ways. Store offerings (determined by the factors discussed in the first part of the chapter) will shape, to some degree, the visitor's memories of the museum experience. The latter part of the

chapter argues that, as the visitor prepares to return to ordinary life, the museum store's souvenir offerings smoothe the transition away from the extraordinary exposures to other times and places offered by the museum. In these specific case studies, the visitor's reflection on the past femininities presented within the museum and the inspiration to emulate the values, behaviors, or aesthetics of the women commemorated will guide selections as she departs, transformed in some way by the liminoid museum experience. Retail narratives—how the store relates to the museum and how museum stores serve the visitor—extend the values of the institution, the themes of the visit, and the idiosyncratic meanings made by the visitor into the time and space beyond the tourism encounter.

### **Souvenirs and Institutional Identity**

#### ***'Come Play on Our Island': Souvenirs of Middle-Class Summer Holidays on PEI***

The vision of a particular site's founders and administrators, can linger throughout the history of the site, across decades. The store at Green Gables Heritage Place<sup>4</sup> is a large, purpose-built structure adjacent to the visitor reception centre, added during the extensive site redevelopment that was completed in 1997. Roomy and utilitarian, it was designed to accommodate large motorcoach tour groups and the 1,500+ visitors the site receives daily during the high summer season. Unlike the in-house operations at Orchard House and Hill Top, management of the Green Gables store changes periodically; a bidding process occurs every five years.<sup>5</sup>

Green Gables is the centerpiece of a national park developed with the aim of attracting

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<sup>4</sup> Not to be confused with the privately owned Anne of Green Gables Store locations at the nearby Avonlea Village attraction and in downtown Charlottetown.

<sup>5</sup> The store was operated from 2009 through 2014 by Parks & People Inc., an incorporated company affiliated with Parks & People Association, a not-for-profit entity who donate their proceeds to support programs and services within Prince Edward Island National Park. Due to the unfortunate timing of the bid process, Parks Canada was unable to provide access to a Parks & People representative to be interviewed for this chapter. Parks & People Association continue to operate the Butter Churn Cafe on site through a separate agreement (Macdonald 2015).

tourists, providing for their dining, lodging, entertainment, and shopping needs during the summer season. The Cavendish section of the park in particular was conceived primarily as a middle-class, family-oriented, seaside tourism destination with access to beach and boardwalk-style amenities (MacEachern 2001: 80-85). Many souvenirs on offer at Green Gables Heritage Place thus reflect a middle-class, family beach vacation aesthetic.

As a result of this specific history of the region's tourism development, the Green Gables gift shop is geared toward 'play' by families with children; a former Prince Edward Island tourism promotion tagline invites, 'Come Play on Our Island' (Russell 2009: 48). Tee shirts, hats, and tchotchkes such as pens, small toys, keychains and magnets are offered for children and adults, as well as tea cups, generic jewelry and Christmas tree ornaments. A small selection of candy and saltwater taffy complement locally produced chocolate-dipped PEI potato chips and brown sugar fudge. Bottles of 'raspberry cordial,' referencing the non-alcoholic drink Anne intends to serve her friend Diana when she mistakenly offers elderberry wine, are displayed in a small cooler.<sup>6</sup> Sets and singles of all eight *Anne* books including multiple editions of *Anne of Green Gables* (special editions and abridged editions for younger readers) line one wall. Montgomery adaptations and spinoffs produced by Sullivan Entertainment are available on DVD.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A raspberry-flavored soda, produced and bottled by the privately owned COWS, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> Three *Anne* miniseries, plus television series *The Road to Avonlea* and *Emily of New Moon*.



**Figure 21: Anne novels for sale at Green Gables gift shop.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

Shades of ‘gables’-green are evident on nearly every item sold in the shop; doll dresses, book covers, and hat ribbons share this palette. Chapter Two examined the iconicity of Anne’s red hair, that is, the power of the image of red braids as a ‘logo’ or visual shorthand for Anne. The ubiquity of Anne’s braids in the shop is matched only by the iconicity of the Green Gables house. White houses with dark green-painted trim and shutters appear on numerous items, with and without Anne represented. While souvenir representations of a white house with green trim unequivocally reference the Green Gables house as it appears today, most tourists are unaware that this iconic version of the house was an invention of Parks Canada personnel and not L.M. Montgomery. Alan MacEachern cites a letter written by parks surveyor R.W. Cautley in 1936, in which he states, “[...] the present colour scheme is not altogether suitable, and it would accordingly be desirable to repaint the building at an early date in order to emphasize the gables of the house, which should, of course, be green” (73). Though a green paint trimmed house did not “serve as inspiration for the setting of *Anne of Green Gables*” and was “based [...] partly on someone’s imagining of details nowhere mentioned in the novel,” this painting scheme, instituted in 1939, has been maintained as a Level 2 historic value of the site because “it created



the iconic image that remains in the public mind to this day of what the ‘Green Gables’ of the novel looked like” and “ it reflects [...] efforts to create an attraction that would bring tourists to Cavendish” (Parks Canada 2011: 19-20). Souvenirs are streamlined to reference the story through the familiar representations of person (red braids and hat) and place (white house with green trim).

A few comments collected during the 2008 visitor study criticized the store for being “too [...] tacky” (15) and “way overpriced” (13), and suggesting it could be made more relevant with “less tourist stuff” (14) (Parks Canada 2008).<sup>8</sup> Though a rationale for the playful souvenirs at Green Gables can be discerned from the site’s history, plastic goods mass-produced in China may detract from the site’s status as a National Historic Site of Canada. Tourism scholar Jane Brown notes that the more commercial a site (and especially its shop) appear, the less ‘worthy’ the institution seems (2013: 275). If the visitor follows the intended flow through the site, information about L.M.Montgomery encountered early in the visit may be diluted by the parting encounter with plastic lobsters and brightly colored rubber Anne magnets in the gift shop.

In contrast (and thus complementary) to the Green Gables gift shop, the bookshop at the nearby Site of L.M. Montgomery’s Cavendish Home offers a wide selection without the “tourist stuff” the above commenter rejected. One of the least commercial Montgomery sites on PEI, the home site is located a short walk from Green Gables Heritage Place and jointly recognized with Green Gables as a National Historic Site of Canada, though it remains privately maintained. Owned and operated by John and Jennie MacNeill and their descendants, this peaceful, minimalist site features the excavated foundation of the house where Montgomery lived with her maternal grandparents after her mother’s death and later in her adulthood. It was here that she wrote *Anne of Green Gables* and several other works. A brief interpretive spiel performed in the

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks to staff at the Parks Canada Prince Edward Island Field Unit for permission to publish this visitor data.

tiny shop mentions all of the books written at the house, balancing the *Anne*-centric theme of many other sites with an emphasis on Montgomery herself. In keeping with this memorializing aesthetic, the shop sells only books—Montgomery’s entire *oeuvre*, including lesser-known works, plus a selection of scholarly texts not available at the Green Gables shop.

Green Gables Heritage Place is likely the most prominent stop for an Anne pilgrim, but it is by no means the only place for education and shopping activities related to L.M. Montgomery. A visit to Green Gables is typically part of a multi-site itinerary. Each Montgomery site has some sort of retail area, most with postcards and dolls as well as sundry other items. Numerous gift shops selling comparable merchandise operate in areas that cater to tourists (Charlottetown, Cavendish, and Borden-Carleton primarily), including the privately owned Anne of Green Gables Store locations. Though Parks Canada does due diligence educationally, offering films, exhibits, and in-person interpretation teaching about Montgomery and Cavendish, Green Gables Heritage Place remains, for most, the materialized imaginary of ‘Anne’s house’—a fictional setting to be temporarily inhabited. Souvenirs emphasizing ‘play’ at Green Gables support this popular reputation of the site as a children’s book setting, a place of fantasy for adults and children alike.

***“If It Were Done At All, It Ought To Be Done By Me”: Souvenirs of Beatrix Potter’s Wishes at Hill Top***

The relationship of a gift shop to the identity of a historic site can also reflect the attitudes of the commemorated person to commerce in her own lifetime. In all three cases examined here, the women commemorated chose to write books, stories, and poetry and to enter the commercial sphere of publishing to share their product with consumers, for a profit. To buy a book—especially at a writer’s house—is a logical extension of the author’s own transactions with the publishing industry and with readers in her own time. In the case of Beatrix Potter, this rationale

extends to numerous products besides books.

Hill Top gift shop,<sup>9</sup> like Potter's famous books, is 'little.' The tiny one-room shop, purpose-built to relieve the house kitchen of its retail functions in 1982, is the last stop on a visit. The overall scheme is neutral ivory and wood, accented with the soothing blue tint of Peter Rabbit's jacket, since many of the 350 products sold in the shop bear his famous image. Individual copies of all twenty-three hardcover little books are available as well as a complete boxed set for £140 (approximately \$212 USD). Several biographies, a walking guide to properties Potter donated to the Trust, and a study of Hill Top and the local area round out the book selection. A collectible guide to the site, authored by Potter biographer Judy Taylor, is the shop's best-selling item. Full color photographs, informative text, and heavyweight construction make this a sturdy and convenient souvenir.<sup>10</sup>

The dominant motif on goods for sale is, of course, Potter's artwork.<sup>11</sup> Images originally appearing on the pages of Potter's books reappear in new contexts, in what Sharon Macdonald calls "relocated reproductions," adorning an assortment of functional and decorative three-dimensional objects (2012: 50). Porcelain tea sets in handsome floral and wicker cases, children's dinnerware sets, porcelain clocks and coin banks, woven cushions and book ends, all bearing images of Peter, Jemima Puddleduck, Squirrel Nutkin, Tom Kitten, and other characters fill glass cabinets. Among the top five bestselling items in the shop is a set of three English teas featuring Peter Rabbit, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle and Jemima Puddle-Duck, which signify

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<sup>9</sup> A large selection of Potter merchandise is also available in independent gift shops throughout the region and in the four privately owned Peter Rabbit & Friends shops located in Bowness-on-Windermere, Hawkshead, Keswick & York.

<sup>10</sup> Thousands of copies of the guidebook are sold each year. The guidebook is also available for sale at the ticket office and in the 'New Room' inside the house (Pritchard 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Plans for the 2015 season include capitalizing on the iconicity of the house with an exclusive line of new souvenirs featuring images of Hill Top, the gardens, and items inside the house. Local National Trust employees will provide photographs which will be featured on jars of seasonal chutneys and jams, jute shopping bags, tea towels, mugs, and magnets (Hill Top Retail Staff 2015).

“overarching notions of ‘Englishness’ and English heritage” summoned by the tales and the site (Squire 1996: 83), annotated with Potter whimsy. The quaintness cachet of “Potterabilia” (Goldthwaite 1996: 290) is noteworthy considering “there is nothing in the book [*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*] that can be described as whimsical beyond the fact that Peter is a rabbit with a boy’s name and a boy’s instincts” (Goldthwaite 1996: 295). For many fans, the pleasantness of Potter’s illustrations outshadow the dark, subversive, and ironic elements of her narratives.



**Figure 22: A display of tapestry cushions at the Hill Top shop.  
Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

National Trust insignia bags, keychains, and candies complement the Potter offerings.<sup>12</sup> Costlier items are kept under glass, and a greater number of costly items are offered here than at either of the other two stores examined in this chapter. The presence of goods costing, for example, upwards of \$100 USD is not a reflection of the site’s socioeconomically diverse visitorship so much as a reflection of certain standards the site staff wish to communicate. With higher price tags comes higher quality merchandise, and that quality is seen as a reflection on the

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<sup>12</sup> The shop is required to carry a selection of National Trust-branded souvenirs; decisions about Potter-related merchandise are made by site staff.

site and on the National Trust. But more importantly, in a symbolic sense, a well-made item will be long-lasting, a value important to Potter (Hill Top Retail Staff 2015).<sup>13</sup>

While the abundance of merchandise bearing licensed character images may at first seem like commercialization gone overboard, it is in fact a logical extension of the early spin-off products created by Beatrix Potter herself.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Louisa Alcott and L.M. Montgomery, whose works were commodified beyond book form eventually by outside interests, Beatrix Potter led the charge to capitalize on her famous animal protagonists. Spurred by spurious and “very ugly” (qtd in Lear 173) Peter Rabbit dolls coming out of Germany, Potter set to work designing a calico prototype that met her exacting standards. Patented in December 1903, Potter’s Peter Rabbit doll featured lead shot in his feet and tail to ensure proper posture for the toy (Lear 172). Subsequently approached by a ‘Mrs. Garnett’ who wished to produce a wallpaper border featuring Potter’s characters, Potter agreed that it would be “a popular nursery paper” but confided to Norman Warne in a letter, “if it were done at all, it ought to be done by me” (qtd in Lear 173). Taking her time to achieve proper colors and elevations, she completed the wallpaper in 1905, the same year she purchased Hill Top farm. Potter went on to create a board game and ‘painting books’ featuring her characters. A few years later, in 1909, Potter was collecting royalties from these items as well as china tea sets, figurines, a Jemima Puddleduck doll, and wooden rabbits (Lear 227). According to biographer Linda Lear, she “insisted that the quality of the original art be maintained in any adaptation, and maintained final approval for new merchandise” (174-175). Licensing protected the integrity of Potter’s original artworks and provided income in excess of book royalties.

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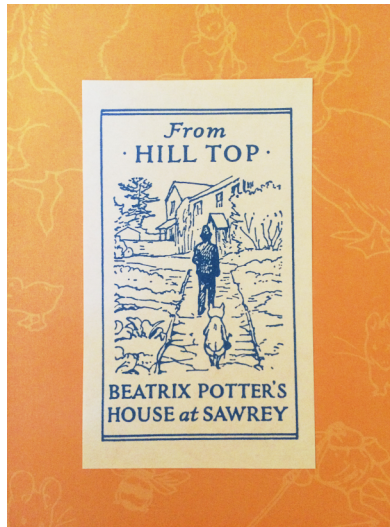
<sup>13</sup> This Hill Top retail staff representative quoted in this chapter opted not to be identified by name. This staff person provided all factual data about the shop presented here, unless otherwise attributed.

<sup>14</sup> A 2014-2016 exhibit at the Beatrix Potter Gallery in Hawkshead displayed examples of Potter’s early merchandising efforts.

Peter Rabbit dolls remain popular today, in fact, they are a top-selling item at Hill Top. The telltale blue jacket identifies the dolls as Peter Rabbit, but the dolls sold today vary in design and material from Potter's 1903 prototype; the latest design better meets safety standards and style expectations for contemporary plush animals sold for use by children. The fluffier modern materials add a certain affective quality as well: "He's very soft, the sort of thing you could cuddle," a staff person describes. "It reminds people of being a kid again. I think Peter Rabbit stands for that sort of thing for a lot of people" (2015). Unlike Potter's original Peter Rabbit design, conceived only a year after his literary debut, the 'cuddly' texture signifies the extraliterary cultural meanings the character has accrued in the intervening century, including his association with comfort, nostalgia, and childhood memories.<sup>15</sup> Other modern adaptations of Potter on offer include copies of *The Further Tale of Peter Rabbit* (2012), a sequel written by actress Emma Thompson and illustrated by Eleanor Taylor, and DVDs of the biopic *Miss Potter* (discussed in Chapter Three).

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<sup>15</sup> Potter consistently sought English companies to produce derivative products, a tradition which continues to some extent today. The tapestry cushion line, for example, is manufactured in the UK, whereas other products are designed in England but manufactured overseas. Fair trade suppliers are sought, and suppliers of custom items must hold a license to reproduce Potter's artwork from Frederick Warne, to whom Potter bequeathed the rights to her works.



**Figure 23: Custom bookplates add to the souvenir value of books purchased at Hill Top shop.**

**Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2014.**

A great deal of thought goes into the development of exclusive products for the shop that tie closely to the site's collections. "Where there's a good story, we want that story to be told, because it connects people to what they're seeing, what they're touching." An example is the new line of bags and iPad covers debuted in the 2015 season, developed by a local textile artist using mature Herdwick wool and chocolate-colored leather embossed with a logo taken from the original sheep branding iron used by Potter's farm manager Tom Storey. Herdwicks are a breed of sheep native to the region and central to the agrarian culture of fell farming. Potter was an ardent supporter of Herdwick preservation, and, despite their extraordinarily low profitability today, the National Trust continues to subsidize the breed's propagation in accordance with Potter's wishes. Herdwicks are born black, lighten to dark brown in their first year, and subsequently grow wool of the pale grey color being used for these new products. Using wool from the mature sheep means "putting emphasis on letting things age," a philosophy that resonates with Potter's affinity for antiques, from the historic farms she purchased to the 17th century oak chairs and sideboards she collected to furnish them.

The ‘Spirit of Place’ statement for Hill Top, an internal document, positions souvenir procurement as integral to a visit:

Hill Top is the start of an amazing legacy, of a worldwide following of people who love her stories and the place that she loved above them all—pilgrimages are made to see this small house. It was [...] the start of her personal commitment to look after the place, the people, the Herdwick sheep and the wider landscape. This is a commitment that we now continue, supported by her legacy of a very special place for so many people; a place they want to help look after, to create personal memories and *take home a permanent reminder of*’ (Moffatt et al 2014, emphasis added).<sup>16</sup>

Beatrix Potter’s Hill Top retreat today functions as a reminder of her commitment to landscape conservation in the Lake District. Potter wanted her farm at Hill Top to be preserved, and profits from the store assist in supporting her wishes. Frederick Warne Ltd, her publisher to whom she bequeathed the rights to most of her works, continues to profit from the sale of books and the licensing for (now 450+) products, but annually donates an undisclosed amount to the National Trust (Hudson 2013). Through direct profits and Warne’s contribution of some of the royalties for books and licensed products, the goods sold in the museum store support Beatrix Potter’s intentions for landscape preservation. While creation of spin-off products featuring Potter’s artworks can no longer ‘be done by [her],’ selections in the Hill Top museum store honor her precedents for how her work should be used (to the extent possible), and ensure some profits from her work be applied to the land preservation goals indicated in her final wishes.

### ***‘Hope and Keep Busy’: Self-Improvement Through Souvenirs at Orchard House***

Chapter One examined the interpretive theme of ‘becoming’ by emulating Alcottian self-discipline at Louisa May Alcott’s Orchard House, and store offerings at the site directly support this theme. The first and last interior space visitors encounter, the store occupies two erstwhile

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to John Moffatt for permission to quote from this internal National Trust document, and to Catherine Pritchard, Liz Hunter MacFarlane, and Clare Perry for making it available to me.



sheds added to the house by Bronson Alcott to protect the family's wood and winter vegetables. It is a longish well-lit room of exposed wood beams packed snug with goods for sale. Here, visitors can purchase tickets and browse while waiting for their tour, or linger to chat with their guide afterwards. The shop's size is constrained by the house's historic status, but this has not limited its success: "At one time, we were making three times as much money as you should in a space that small," Manager of Retail Sales Sally Cody recalls (2014).

Cody, who has been with Orchard House for thirty-six years, started as a guide when the site was a smaller operation, with only a few in-house produced pamphlets for sale. Around 1980, with the endorsement of then-director Jane Gordon, Cody set up a modest selection of merchandise. That first year, the shop grossed \$1,500. As visitor interest and profits increased year by year, the inventory expanded, and eventually the sheds were renovated for a rustic, but more polished, retail space. Sales surged alongside peak visitation following the 1994 release of the film adaptation of *Little Women* starring Winona Ryder as Jo March. The shop grossed \$300,000 that year. After expenses are deducted, retail revenue directly supports the preservation and operation of Orchard House.

Souvenirs are selected for their connections to site content—keychains, for example, are shaped like a book bearing the title *Little Women*. Cody explains, "at first I stayed very pure to things that were very good quality," but participation in Museum Store Association meetings convinced her that less expensive souvenirs would please some visitors. Regardless of price point, Cody carefully curates each item on offer, ensuring a link to the themes of *Little Women* and the Alcotts' lives. "Sometimes I stretch it, but everything has a meaning. I could tell you my story of why that's in there." Fabric cats represent Elizabeth Alcott's love of felines. Walking

sticks reference Bronson Alcott's collection. A selection of wooden children's toys and antique-style jewelry evoke 'the period.'

As discussed in Chapter One, Orchard House in its early days was considered a shrine to *Little Women*, but also to a traditional New England domestic aesthetic. Orchard House represented 'American' values of simplicity and hygiene that its founders hoped to safeguard and promulgate in urban, working class, immigrant homes. Interpretation at Orchard House still upholds the Alcotts as models to emulate, now in terms of personal values. The popular tee shirt, screenprinted with the motto 'Little Women Grow Up to Be Great Women' reflects the notion that emulation of the Marches/Alcotts positively affects one's 'becoming.' Emulation along lines of *self-discipline, education and family unity/domesticity* are encouraged through the shop's offerings.

Louisa's mother Abigail (fashioned as Marmee in *Little Women*) espouses the epigrammatic mantra 'hope and keep busy,' a motto that exemplifies the use of the Alcotts as role models for overcoming hardship. Cody explains the quotation's popularity among staff at Orchard House: "It's a quote that we use around here all the time, if anyone's feeling down, we say just keep hoping and keeping busy! You'll get through this, that's what Mrs. Alcott said. [...] It's so universal, you can use it for anything because it will apply." Nearly a thousand bookmarks featuring the quote are sold annually. An engraved sterling silver necklace is popular as a gift. A cross stitch kit yields a large wall hanging that reads 'Hope and Keep Busy' within a floral garland border. This motto promotes personal responsibility, tenacity, and hard work to get through tough times.

The large selection of books in the Orchard House museum store reflects the importance of education via acts of reading and writing. The store offers editions of all of Louisa and

Bronson Alcott's published works in print and volumes of letters penned by Louisa and other family members. A broad selection of biographies on various family members provide more detailed histories, contingent upon approval by the staff: "if there are a lot of inaccuracies in a biography, or a slant we disagree with, we don't carry that" (Cody 2014). Texts on transcendentalism and Concord in the 19th century contextualize the Alcotts. Though the goal of most visitors to the house is to get closer to *Little Women*, further engagement and immersion in Alcott family history is facilitated. One small area is dedicated to older or antique editions of Alcott's works, since "some people prefer an old book to a new book."

Cody estimates that of the inventory of roughly 250 different items, half are books. This includes six or seven different editions of *Little Women*, each with a different price point and features (hard cover, soft cover, abridged, large print, etc). Taken together, editions of *Little Women* are the number one best selling item. Orchard House guide Nicole Sousa describes intergenerational gift-giving via the shop: "Mums will hand it down to their kids, so we'll see a lot of mums or grandmothers come in and say 'I read this book growing up and now my daughter or granddaughter is going to read it, and we'll get the book here, and it's a special book for her,' and they kind of pass it along" (2014). Book purchasers are offered the option of a custom Orchard House bookplate authenticating the place of purchase. The bookplate marks the mass commodity as originating from a unique, originative place. "It makes it very special," one guide observes (Robinson 2014). The bookplate legitimizes the object as being obtained at its 'source,' adding symbolic value to a purchase that could be made more cheaply on Amazon.com.

A selection of blank books and journals references the Alcotts' daily practice of writing in journals, which they considered a means of both self-reflection and self-improvement. Postcards and notecards, in addition to being traditional gift shop offerings, reference the

Alcotts' personal correspondence habits. Imprinted pencils and bookmarks featuring images of the March sisters or pithy Alcott quotations further support the theme of betterment through reading and writing.

The theme of family devotion and domesticity writ large in *Little Women* is referenced throughout the site. Inside the house, doilies, antique furnishings, and a bare-bones kitchen conjure an age of grandmothers (or earlier) and a sense of generational continuity within a feminized domestic sphere. In the store, throw pillows, tea sets, and knick-knacks summon this homey, traditional Anglo-American domestic aesthetic. Cross-stitch kits show the house facade, or the famous assemblage of the four sisters gathered around Marmee's chair. The site does not have a cafe, but bottled water meets practical needs for hydration and heart-shaped shortbread cookies for snacking reinforce linked associations of love, baking, and home.

Cody identifies Jo's 'mood pillow' as the best selling item after various editions of *Little Women*. In *Little Women*, Alcott describes a cylindrical pillow used by Jo to communicate her 'mood' to her family members. If the pillow was positioned vertically, it indicated that she was in a good mood and felt like interacting. If the pillow was horizontal, it meant she was in a bad mood, or busy writing, and preferred to be left alone. Cody created a card identifying "Louisa May Alcott's 'Mood Pillow'" as "exclusively reproduced from the collection at Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, Home of *Little Women*." The card authenticates a generic pillow as having an auspicious provenance (being 'owned' by both Louisa and 'Jo') and possessing special communicative and symbolic attributes. Cody describes the pillow as "a catchy thing that people love, that's good for teenagers, or anybody." The mood pillow does double-duty as domestic decor that highlights a memorable aspect of the book's protagonist.

Celebratory symbols of traditional domesticity are balanced by other domestic themes being treated with humor, allowing the contemporary woman to relate to Louisa Alcott's tenuous relationship with domesticity. Having learned on the tour that Alcott's nickname for Orchard House was 'apple slump,'<sup>17</sup> visitors may delight in purchasing a framable copy of her apple slump recipe, rendered in calligraphy on cardstock. A refrigerator magnet reads: 'Housekeeping ain't no joke'<sup>18</sup> in a modern font, connecting the inheritance of domestic travails from Alcott's time to the present day in colloquial camaraderie that translates across generations. Cody explains, "Louisa wasn't a person who did a lot of housekeeping. And the magnet—'housekeeping ain't no joke'—we all think we have too much housekeeping and it ain't no joke that it's hard!" (2014). Literary critic Claudia Nelson argues that domestic fiction for girls and women draws its appeal, in part, from "the recognition that achieving and maintaining what is domestic, whether defined as intimacy, familiarity, or housewifery, is often neither easy nor pleasant" (Nelson 70). The mood pillow and magnet invite identification with Louisa Alcott's disidentification with domesticity.



**Figure 24: Mood pillows for sale at the Orchard House museum store.**

<sup>17</sup> Apple slump (aka apple cobbler) is a dessert comprised of baked apples topped with a layer of pie crust or biscuit. The untidy, uneven appearance of the dessert made it a humorous metaphor for the sagging, ill-maintained structure of Orchard House.

<sup>18</sup> In *Little Women*, Jo attributes this expression to the Marches' servant, Hannah (94).

**Photo by Sarah Gothie, 2013.**

Souvenirs promoting the betterment of visitors through learning (books) and emulating the Alcotts (reading, journaling, hoping, keeping busy) reflect key site themes. The conflicts within the families (the Alcotts as well as the Marches), some of which are flagged in Chapter One, do not prohibit their adoption as role models for family communication, function, and cohesion. Contemporary self-help books about family psychology or domesticity are absent, maintaining focus on literary inspiration and interpretation as the primary means to self-improvement. The Orchard House museum store selections reinforce that self-betterment is achievable by studying and emulating the Alcotts.

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At the museum stores of Green Gables, Hill Top, and Orchard House, the identity of the museum is indexed through its retail operations. Popular souvenirs from these three stores reinforce the sites' missions, histories, commemorative functions, and interpretative messages. The museum's identity determines to a great extent what is available for the visitor to purchase. Acknowledging the limitations institutional identity places on souvenir options, the next section considers the shop's value to the visitor, the meanings of souvenirs, and the role of shopping within a tourist/pilgrim experience.

### **Souvenirs and Tourist Identities**

Sometime in the 1990s, a package addressed to 'Green Gables, PEI, Canada' arrived at Hunter River post office. A park warden brought it to the Green Gables Heritage Place office, where staff discovered inside a ladies' fan and a letter. The letter was written by a woman who had visited the Green Gables house when she was a child, thirty or forty years earlier. An older relative had surreptitiously lifted her over the barrier at the door to 'Anne's' bedroom and

encouraged her to steal the fan from the bedside table. The woman had kept this souvenir of her visit, and her guilt, for decades. She wrote that it had bothered her ever since, compelling her, at last, to return the purloined artifact (incident as recollected by B. Macdonald 2011). Reminiscent of the pilfering devotees Alcott spoofed in *Jo's Boys*, this tale of an unsanctioned souvenir complicates the easy dismissal of collected mementos as trivial tourist tchotchkes. As this repentant woman's story attests, the significance of a particular souvenir, whether a live grasshopper or a mass-produced magnet, has the potential for meanings more complicated than the mere fact of 'being there.'

Museum stores are essential to the sustainability of many institutions, but museum studies scholar Sharon Macdonald argues that the museum shop benefits visitors as well: "It provides us with things that we might try to make into durable stories about ourselves—things that we will transform from commodities into meaningful objects that are part of our ongoing lives" (2012: 44). Visitors can touch, purchase, and carry home with them the objects in the gift shop collection—all things they are not allowed to do with its priceless cultural counterparts. This section examines the function of souvenirs in the postfeminist tourist's articulation of identity.

Visitors encounter the commercial space of a literary tourism site fresh off the immersive experience of another time and place, filled with wonder, and perhaps a little fatigued. On the cusp of departure, visitors must decide how they will remember the visit and what objects they will transport from the writer's home to their own home: "Its [the souvenir's] physical presence helps locate, define, and freeze in time a fleeting, transitory experience, and bring back into ordinary experience something of the quality of an extraordinary experience," Beverly Gordon writes (Gordon 135). In rites of passage, such as graduations and marriages, the participant

enters into the ritual in one form and emerges with a new social status. The transitional period—the liminal phase, as Van Gennep calls it—is characterized by a feeling of “ambiguity [...] becomingness” (Joseph 138). While the tourist revisiting girlhood stories in the materialized childhood imaginary of a literary tourism site is not participating in a rite of passage, the visit temporally consists of a before (girlhood and the period of longing to visit), a during (the present moment, at the site), and an after—a future return to ordinary, contemporary life and times in which this significant event will be recalled.

There is a quality of liminality to time spent at a meaningful museum. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) calls this type of playful liminality ‘liminoid.’ Liminoid experiences are optional, chosen and timed by the participant in Western, post-industrial societies—they are not part of a obligatory social structure as liminal experiences are in tribal and agrarian cultures. Turner describes the liminoid as “more like a commodity [...] which one selects and pays for [...] one *plays with* the liminoid” (emphasis in original, 86). The notion of play is especially important to Turner’s definition of the liminoid—it is a time of leisure and choice, a time set apart from ‘work’ time (85). The “freedom to transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play—with ideas, with fantasies, with words” (68) can produce sensations of time outside of time and give one a sense of transformation.<sup>19</sup> Souvenirs are typically purchased at the conclusion of a visit, just before visitors return to their “relatively stable” lives (57). The souvenir is itself a stable object, one which provides pleasure and reassurance during this transition.

Memories are always vulnerable, and if the photos on the camera have yet to be uploaded, backed up, or printed, the option of purchasing a physical relic to mark the moment

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<sup>19</sup> In the case of Jason and Vicky’s betrothal (discussed in Chapter Three), a more significant change in social status occurred during their Hill Top visit, as their relationship status progressed to a more formal level of commitment. It is noteworthy that many couples select literary houses as the setting for proposals and wedding photos, tying the historic site to an important moment in their personal ‘history.’



can provide welcome assurance. “Meaning is [...] produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural ‘things,’” Stuart Hall writes, “that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and [...] when we weave narratives, stories—and fantasies—around them” (Hall 1997: 3-4). Museum shop purchases, conclusory to a pilgrimage-style journey, “allow the owner to lay claim to a kind of personal possession of the meaning of an object that is beyond simple ownership. [It is] a way of personalizing the object, a way of transferring meaning from the individual’s own world to the newly obtained good [...]” (Lury 2011: 15). To understand this transference of meaning from the individual’s own world requires rethinking the temporality of the souvenir beginning with the moment of encounter.

Literary critic Susan Stewart’s temporal formulation of the souvenir in *On Longing* is premised on a nostalgic longing for origins:

The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable needs of nostalgia. The souvenir generates a narrative which reaches only ‘behind,’ spiraling in a continually inward movement rather than outward toward the future” (1993: 135).

Because Stewart’s study focuses on nostalgia—the ache of longing for people, places, and things of one’s past—her account of souvenirs is necessarily backward-glancing. The antiques and exotic objects she describes are already owned and imbued with the owner’s personal meanings and memories. Stewart’s account does not attend to the moment of acquisition. Acts of selection and purchase take place in a present moment, a moment in which the memory to which the object would be linked is in the process of unfolding. Souvenirs “authenticate the experience” (Stewart 1993: 134), just as the visit authenticates the literary work as originating from a specific place. The moment of purchase is about the present (being there and authenticating that experience materially) and the future (procuring mementos to aid remembering). While the

tourist is still inside the museum, in the liminal space of the store, souvenirs represent the *future*.

Tourists purchase souvenirs with the future-predicting assumption that they will want an object to materially represent their experience. The selection process involves considerations such as a desire for further engagement with the site content (this may result in a book purchase), a desire to share the experience with loved ones (this may result in a postcard or gift purchase), or a desire to be reminded of the experience in daily life (this may result in a refrigerator magnet or keychain purchase). Standard genres of souvenir, the small, portable items found in nearly every museum store, can certainly inspire a backwards-looking reflection or longing, but this backwards glance only achieves primacy *after* the visitor returns home. By offering the visitor a choice of objects to overwrite with her own narratives and meanings, “the shop gives us some experiences—and possibilities—that we don’t easily get from the museum” (Macdonald 2012: 45). The museum store bridges the gap between ‘extraordinary’ time and ‘ordinary’ time (Gordon 135), completing the liminoid tourism transaction.

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This tour of literary house museums in three countries has concluded with a departure through the museum stores of each, analyzing the types of institutional and personal memories souvenirs sold there might evoke. Museum stores at Green Gables, Hill Top, and Orchard House offer material resources through which past femininities are recalled, absorbed, and emulated. Whether the tourist purchases a tea set, a bookmark with ‘timeless’ advice for daily life, playful girlish accessories, or books brimming with educational and evocative histories, images, and fictions—souvenirs don’t just remind *where* one was, they remind *who* one was in that time and in that place. Luella Anderson and Mary Ann Littrell, textile scholars who study the commercial exchange of craft souvenirs in tourism contexts, interviewed a woman in early adulthood

(between the ages of 17 and 45) who expressed her view of souvenir shopping: “When you’re shopping for a souvenir, you’re looking for a remembrance of some place. [...] It means also a chance to find [...] [s]omething that kind of reflects your mood at the time you were traveling. Where you were at” (1995: 338). For this woman, souvenirs are idiosyncratic to the tourist, cueing a temporary return to complex memories of experience and affect.

Books by Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter and the dynamic, intersectional universe of goods, films, books, and tourism sites those books inspired *all* function to some degree as souvenirs that call forth a feeling of ‘return.’ All are souvenirs of who readers, fans, and pilgrims were—“where [they] were at” when they were children. A Hill Top staff person comments on souvenirs evoking the quaint, traditional Britishness that many associate with Potter: “It sort of takes them back, or reminds them of when they were little maybe their grandma read the book to them.” Roger Lancelyn Green compares childhood to a place as well as a time (Sorby 2011: 97); works of children’s literature are the souvenirs kept (tangibly or intangibly) by the adult who has moved on, to a new place, far away. Retention of the edition of the book one read as a child is not required, because new editions, with the same words, are readily available. A written story’s words remain stable across time in ways that most material culture of childhood does not. A plush animal or doll degrades, is lost in storage, is damaged in a flood. The familiarity of the words, in a particular order, telling a familiar story, can be revisited. A fresh copy of *Anne of Green Gables* can always be obtained.

Museums make elite and rare artifacts from far away places available for inspection and admiration, but heritage sites—especially those linked to children’s literature—hold something resonant, something the tourist believes to be constitutive of her identity from a very early moment of development. “I feel I have always known this story” a visitor to Green Gables

enigmatically writes on a comment card. Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top are perennially compelling pilgrimage destinations because they, too, are souvenirs of childhood. It may seem a stretch to say, 'I went to a place I had never been before as a souvenir of a place I had been,' or, 'I went to a place I've never been before as a souvenir of a person I was.' It sounds nonsensical, but if the stories visitors relate to guides are any indication, being at one of these museums *for the first time in their lives* reminds them of deeply personal memories at the same time they draw inspiration from the lives of the commemorated writers. Orchard House, Green Gables, and Hill Top fleetingly summon for these visitors intimate and longed-for moments, places, and relationships of their pasts, in ways that aid them in envisioning and enacting their futures.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation is itself an act of tourism, a journey through three literary house museums in three countries, all special places beloved and sought by tourists. Vacation historian Cindy Aron describes how vacation choices “announce much about the vacationer—not only class status and economic standing, but personal aspirations and private goals. [...] [V]acations are also exercises in self-definition. In affording time away from the demands of everyday life, vacations disclose what people choose to do rather than are required to do” (Aron 2). I have examined herein one avenue of ‘exercise in self-definition’ as it occurs in literary tourism contexts commemorating three Golden Age writers. Meditation upon, and superficial reenactment of “prefeminist feminine practice” (Hollows 2003: 189) can provide comfort, coping, and inspiration to the postfeminist subject who is caught in a web of culturally constructed, conflicting definitions of women’s roles in public and private life (Genz 2009: 51). According to Hollows, these comforts, “while not located in an idealized ‘real’ past, are nonetheless connected with ‘real’ and imagined feminine figures and scenarios that maintain a sense of tradition” (Hollows 2003: 195). The appeal of the domestic goddess fantasy, as she identifies it, is its provision of things lacking in the daily life of the postfeminist subject (scarcities of time and of sensual engagements with food). The idealized domestic goddess is not a real woman but a composite of ideas to be “temporarily inhabited.”

In the preceding case studies, it is a writer or character who is looked to as a feminine model to be ‘temporarily inhabited’ in a variety of ways, especially through tourism. From intangible life lessons derived from Louisa May Alcott’s triumphs over adversity to the

seemingly trivial burlesque of tourist photos in an ‘Anne’ hat, these experiments in the emulation of past feminine identities annotate the contemporary subject’s identity in response to the anxieties and longings of 21st century postfeminist women’s culture. In this process of homage, the gestures, costume, beliefs, and behaviors of historical feminine subjects are taken up as readily as any other consumer good, like so many other ways of making choices in the articulation of identity (what Elspeth Probyn (1993) terms *choisioisie*). These real and fictional historical female subjects furnish myriad, sometimes contradictory values for contemporary women to adapt and adopt, depending on what aspects of their lives and personalities are brought forward at a given moment.

Because the ‘return’ furnished by (her)itage is not literal, it is experienced in flashes of memory and emotion. Regardless of the length of the trip, feelings of escape via (her)itage occur in moments of encounter—a moment of tranquility while gazing at lambs dotting a Lake District hillside as Beatrix Potter might have, a moment of laughter with an Anne hat on one’s head, a moment of nostalgia, recalling childhood reenactment of scenes from *Little Women* with one’s sisters. In these moments, desirable, abstract qualities are temporarily accessed. Nigella’s moment of ‘feeling like a domestic goddess’ is about competence, sensuality, and an abundance of time. For the *Anne* enthusiast, it’s “feeling like a child”—playful, curious, grateful, joyful—as she visits the place where her favorite stories were written. Crucial to understanding the contemporary woman’s engagement with archetypes such as the domestic goddess or Anne Shirley is the liminoid element of play. Referencing or ‘inhabiting’ past feminine subjectivities is a temporary respite that is perceived by the subject as positive and pleasurable.

In the specific cases of Alcott, Montgomery, and Potter, the theme of ‘becoming’ looms large in the ways people connect to places and stories of the past. There is a girl at the center of

each of the first three chapters; each of these girls features in a narrative in which she must navigate gendered options for coming of age and apply her tenacious vitality and optimism in the face of challenges. The determination of these girls to develop themselves—to ‘become’—comes forward in the discourses generated by museum guides, tourists, and filmmakers. These interpretations coalesce around themes that signify in historically specific ways in the postfeminist period: conceptions of the self in a continual state of becoming; the thrill of ‘arrival’ and the potential it offers for flourishing; and becoming independent through life choices (in chapters 1-3, respectively).

In Chapter One, the girl is the merged character of writer Louisa Alcott and her fictional counterpart, Jo March in *Little Women*. In Chapter Two, tourists emulate Anne Shirley, the appreciative and imaginative red haired protagonist of L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*. In Chapter Three, the girl is the infantilized representation of author Beatrix Potter on a personal journey of empowerment, as depicted in the biopic *Miss Potter* (2006). Each of these girls is a metaphor, calling up a set of values and themes to which readers/fans/visitors can relate. Among other things, Jo signifies feistiness and familial dedication; Anne, imagination and optimism; ‘Miss Potter,’ creativity and independence. Fans witness all three of these ‘girls’ navigating the discomforts and pleasures of ‘becoming.’ In the context of tourism, ‘temporary inhabitation’ of these idealized women can help contemporary women to articulate the unfolding narrative of their own becoming, stage a temporary respite from contemporary life, and construe memories of their girlhoods from new perspectives.

Children’s literature, and its ripples and echoes through other popular forms, is but one place to trace (her)itage practices. The examples of Louisa Alcott, ‘Anne,’ and Beatrix Potter hold special appeal to a circumscribed audience of fans but the late 19th and early 20th centuries

are not a hotbed of inspiration for the fashions, attitudes, or lifestyles of women today. Examples of women's bodies and roles from the mid-20th century that inspire emulation in postfeminist popular culture are plentiful. 'Temporary inhabitations' of midcentury feminine archetypes range from the revival of swing dancing and pinup photography from the 1990s onward to the popularity in more recent years of *Mad Men*-themed costume parties. These examples suggest a preoccupation with the fashions and sex appeal of the most glamorous women of a pre-women's movement era, but more complex examples exist.

*Julie and Julia*, the blog that became a book and ultimately a 2009 film, juxtaposes the post-war Paris-dwelling Julia Child learning to cook and writing her first cook book with the post-9/11 New York civil servant Julie Powell, attempting to cook each of that book's often labor-intensive recipes in the space of a year. Powell's emulation of Child includes recreation of her recipes (and attempts to emulate her competence in the kitchen) as well as brief, playful burlesques of Child's clothing and mannerisms. The centrality of Child in Powell's life during this year-long period, her function not only as a role model but as a figure whose gestures, attitudes, recipes, and fashions are temporarily inhabited as an escape from daily life, is an ideal example of (her)itage inspired by a midcentury historical figure. The postfeminist emphasis on constant improvement and 'becoming' would seem to suggest that any female-focused popular genre would invite some sort of emulation, and in doing so, yield insights into the longings and anxieties of the postfeminist era. Popular cooking, home décor, and fashion media would be certain to furnish additional examples. The vast range of emulative practices evoking idealized women from past eras—and their specific applications to the longings and anxieties of contemporary women's lives—bear further examination by scholars of postfeminist popular culture.



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