Bringing Anne Close: Early Visualizations of Anne of Green Gables in Japan

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Anne of Green Gables has enjoyed well over a dozen major Japanese translations since its first in 1952, and Prince Edward Island is an ever-popular tourist destination for Japanese fans of *Anne of Green Gables*. This paper examines how early illustrations of Anne draw on the pre-established history of girls' literature in Japan while also making space for contemporary readers to discover points of self-identification.

Anne of Green Gables's popularity in Japan is no secret in *Anne* circles. Prince Edward Island became a frequent destination for Japanese tourists after the novel's first translation in 1952, a translation that has been followed by many others.[1] *Anne* was an instant success after its translation by Muraoka Hanako, and the subsequent seven books in the series were translated and published in quick succession, with the final volume, *Rilla of Ingleside* (translated as *Anne's Daughter Rilla*), published a mere seven years later in 1959.

Anne's early and immediate popularity in Japan has been the subject of many scholarly discussions that make the connection between *Anne* and contemporary Japanese *shōjo (*or girls') culture. *Shōjo* manga and anime have a long history of adaptation of European literary works and their associated imagery, and the topic of the European and North American novel as adapted into *shōjo* has been discussed extensively within *shōjo* studies.[2] Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, in particular, points to the influence of Euro-American women writers and girls' novels in the early

development of *shōjo* culture.[3] An aestheticized Europe that openly refers to European literary tradition has been a common theme since the founding of the genre. As Hisayo Ogushi additionally notes, North American works' popularity gained traction after the Second World War and peaked in the 1970s and 1980s. *Anne of Green Gables* is an excellent example of such a work.[4] In this paper, I am drawing on this prior scholarship to look closely at some early visual depictions of Anne in both illustrations of the novels and teen girls' magazines. I will not only explore how Anne was visualized but also use this as jumping-off point to think about how the character of Anne was framed for young Japanese girls of the 1950s. I will argue that Anne herself acts as a point of self-identification, while the world of Avonlea conforms to *shōjo* genre conventions.

Anne's visual and sensory world was being constructed for Japanese readers from early on. *Anne of Green Gables*'s first edition in Japan was not illustrated, but *Anne* did not appear in a vacuum, as readers at the time had a number of visual references to look to for turn-of-the-century Western settings. Visual and narrative depictions of an exoticized, indistinct European setting were common in early stories like Yoshiya Nobuko's 1910s and 1920s *Hana Monogatari* (*Flower Stories*) series, which built dreamy worlds using explicitly European-coded imagery, such as pianos and churches. Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase argues that Yoshiya's flower worlds, and the *shōjo* stories that draw inspiration from them, use these intentionally European-coded motifs to distance Japanese readers from their immediate surroundings and build an exotic dream world.[5]

Akiko Uchiyama ascribes the early popularity of the 1952 Muraoka Hanako translation of *Anne* as an echo of the *shōjo shōsetsu* (girls' fiction) that was popular at that time and argues that there is evidence to suggest that Muraoka's translation was a conscious attempt to engage with the genre. She points out that Muraoka echoed the "schoolgirl" speech common in *shōjo shōsetsu*, such as *no yo*, *te yo*, and *te* sentence endings.[6] This sophisticated, upper- or middle-class, educated girls' speech used by both Anne and Diana in the translation is characteristic for *shōjo shōsetsu* and is significantly more in keeping with Japanese genre conventions than with the original text, in which Anne's language is remarkably flowery and stands out from that of her peers.

Uchiyama furthermore suggests that the physical and cultural remoteness of Prince Edward Island contributes to the *shōjo*-ness of the *Anne* books, particularly that it

may promote “imaginative accessibility.” She writes, “the essence of *shōjo shōsetsu* lies in the concept of a girls’ school that is closed off from the outside world—an exclusive world of ephemeral beauty” and discusses the importance of small things, particularly food. She cites Honda Kazuko, who explores the importance of food in the *Anne* mythos in more detail, and notes how food items that appear in *Anne*, such as pound cake, feel exotic but are also accessible—all one needs is a kitchen and a recipe. Uchiyama additionally points out that the description of Anne’s dream dress, gifted to her by her beloved Matthew, resembles the clothing popular in *shōjo* stories contemporary to the 1950s and beyond.7 With an already existent base of dream worlds rooted in vaguely turn-of-the-century European themes to rely on, *Anne* slots nicely into the *shōjo* niche.

Visualizing Anne

A young Japanese reader in the 1950s would not have had much political or social context for *Anne of Green Gables*, so the setting would likely appear antiquated but not easily placeable to any specific date. There are very few details in the text itself that would mark a particular time and place. To a youthful Japanese reader, the presence of trains and horse-drawn carriages would have conveyed a sense of vague timelessness, but the text evinced a significant absence of any other political or technological identifiers that might anchor them.

And yet, despite this sense of distance, there is also evidence for a kind of self-identification between Anne and her early readers. A 1954 edition of Muraoka’s translation, *Akage no An*, published two years after the original edition, features illustrations by artist Toyama Yoko that help to demonstrate how Anne was viewed when she entered the Japanese reading consciousness.8 The illustrations are in full colour and clearly a centrepiece. The first illustration, which depicts the episode in which Anne gets stuck on a bridge piling in the pond and is rescued by Gilbert, is a large fold-out in colour. The imagery is vivid and the illustrator pays equal attention to both the characters and the landscape. The early production of this illustration and the care taken with it and others in the same volume indicate a certain investment in the visual world of the *Anne* books.

In another example from *Anne of Avonlea*, this same translator and artist expands on this theme and moves toward the self-identification I discussed in the introduction.9 The illustration depicts the scene in which Anne and Diana have tea with Miss Lavendar. While Anne is dressed very much like a contemporary (1950s)

Japanese schoolgirl, Miss Lavendar and Diana are dressed in ways that are explicitly aligned to the period of the book's setting. They wear high collars, long skirts, updos, and plenty of frills. The distinction that I want to point out here is the difference between Anne and the two other people in the illustration. Even more than the visuals of Anne's dress, the contrast her presentation makes to Diana and Miss Lavendar both situates Anne within the world of the text and brings her closer to a contemporary reader. Anne's clothes are distinctly mid-century in their cut and style, while the rest of the space is decorated with an ornate tea service and other earlier period and locational cues. The juxtaposition in turn heightens the contrast between Anne and her two companions.

Yet another helpful series of examples that can contextualize Anne's presentation in these early images is found in a 1954 edition of *Junior Sore Iu* magazine, a girls' magazine aimed at teenagers. In this issue, *Anne* is given a large, prominently placed spread: six full-colour pages, with illustrations, narrating Anne's story.10 The story is also given a large cover image. The interior is not an excerpt from the novel but more of a retelling in first person from Anne's point of view. These retellings were not an uncommon practice for girls' magazines at this time. Anne and Gilbert are depicted on nearly every page. Both are dressed in clothing meant clearly to evoke the early 1900s, a floor-length dress for Anne and a vest and coat for Gilbert. Anne is shown as slightly older than she is for most of the first novel, which follows her through ages eleven to fourteen. However, the older teen that she appears to be in the illustrations, aligns with the demographics of the magazine. The text itself is a summary of the novel. The illustrations focus exclusively on the aged-up Anne and Gilbert. Based on the illustrations alone, one might understand the story as a romance, but even though Montgomery's novel positions Gilbert as a romantic interest, very little to no romantic storyline takes place in *Anne of Green Gables* itself. At the point of this particular magazine's publication, the relevant novels that would explore their romance (*Anne of Avonlea* and *Anne of the Island*, translated in 1955 and 1956, respectively) had not yet been released in Japanese.

The cover illustration for the story is yet another contrast to the interior illustrations. Anne retains her red hair, but she is dressed significantly closer to how a young Japanese girl in 1954 might be, in a pinafore and sailor hat that is set jauntily at the crown of her head. Her hair is likewise very modern, long down her back and cut into bangs.11 She even wears a bobby pin over her ear. The styling is unmistakably contemporary to the magazine and a sharp contrast to the stylized look of the

interior. So, here we have two Annes—neither of whom actually reflects the Anne of the text. One is an adult or older teen Anne in book-period-aligned garb, while the other is a younger Anne but clearly far more in tune with a young girl of the 1950s. Both appeal to the magazine's readership in different ways, one in age and the other in style.

Conclusion

There is strong evidence for how *Anne of Green Gables* aligns with contemporary girls' culture of the 1950s in Japan, as well as how the novel fits into the longer history of *shōjo*. However, in the illustrations that I have discussed here, visual presentations of Anne are both adhering to the *shōjo* tradition and acting as a point of contact for a contemporary reader. Although Anne's world is set at a remove from contemporary readers, as discussed by Dollase and Ogushi in regard to many European or North American *shōjo*, she is made familiar by her style and dress, particularly set against other depictions of the space she inhabits and the stylization of those around her. Even in these early depictions, Anne's visualization is flexible, and that flexibility gives readers ample points of contact to place themselves alongside her and, perhaps, to become her.

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Banner Image: Book Cover of *Akage no An no tezukuri ehon*. Hakusensha, 1995. Ryrie-Campbell Collection, KindredSpaces.ca, 363 REF-Japanese.

- 1 For an overview of Japanese translations, see Yoshiko Akamatsu's "Anne in Twenty-first Century Japan," *The Anne of Green Gables Manuscript*, 2023, https://annemanuscript.ca/stories/anne-in-japan/#:~:text=Hanako%20Murao…..
- 2 For further reading on the topic of *Anne* in Japan, as well as the related question of European imagery and/or themes in *shōjo* studies, see Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, "Early Twentieth Century Japanese Girls' Magazine Stories: Examining Shojo Voice in Hanamonogatari (Flower Tales)," *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2003, pp. 724–55; *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, edited by Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley, Routledge, 2010, particularly chapter 6,

"Japanese Girls' Comfort Reading of *Anne of Green Gables*," by Akiko Uchiyama; and Deborah Michelle Shamoon, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2012.

- 3 Dollase, *Age of Shōjo* 127.
- 4 Ogushi, "American Literature in Japanese Shōjo Comics."
- 5 Dollase 32.
- 6 Uchiyama, "'Akage no An' in Japanese Girl Culture" 214, 213.
- 7 Uchiyama 215; she cites Honda, "Muraoka Hanako" 228.
- 8 I have personally viewed this edition and the images discussed in the rest of this essay. Unfortunately, I was not able to include them here due to copyright restrictions.
- 9 *Anne of Avonlea* is known in Japan as *An no Seishun*, and *Anne of Windy Willows* as *Akage no An no Kōfuku*. The illustrated volume I accessed is a copy of *Anne of Avonlea*, but is titled *Akage no An no Kōfuku* both in the catalogue and on the title page of the work. Therefore, I have chosen to cite this copy as *Kōfuku*, in keeping with the catalogue and original title, while translating the title as *Avonlea* in the bibliography and the body of this paper.
- 10 Shiro, "E Monogatari Akage no An" ("The Illustrated Story of *Anne of Green Gables*") 53–60.
- 11 Cover illustration to Shiro, "E Monogatari Akage no An" ("The Illustrated Story of *Anne of Green Gables*") 53–60.

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