Rural Canada
Anne of Green Gables
Anne of Green Gables gets a sexy makeover, blond dye-job for new edition — and Canadian fans are not amused
TORONTO — A new image of Canada's most beloved literary orphan has Canadians rolling their eyes and reaching for the memes.
Anne of Green Gables

- A Canadian icon
- Why so popular with Canadians?
Charlie on YouTube

- Toronto’s Riverdale Farm
- Saving Riverdale Farm
Rural Icons

• At least 80% of the Canadian population is urban
  – And 45% of Toronto people were not even born in Canada

• So why the intense interest in Canadian farm and rural life?
Rural Icons

• The Canadian family farm has become a repository of values
  – Iconic, symbolic
• Known as Agrarianism
Rural Canada

• Is a real place, inhabited by people, operates economically, socially, environmentally
• Is a symbolic space
• The two personalities conflict
Two examples of the conflict:

• Helene Cummins’ 2009 paper on Ontario farm children
• Michael Broadway’s 2008 paper on the impact of BSE in northern Alberta’s beef country
Farming

- Is both local and non-local
- Local growing conditions, soils, landscape, weather, diseases and pests
- Non-local inputs of farming technology, fuel, fertilisers,
- Farms have to operate in global markets, producing for urban populations
Farming

• Shows us the connectedness of geographical space
• Farms in rural Canada depend upon urban markets
  – Rural landscape is arranged to meet urban needs
Rural Landscape

- Rural landscapes have been arranged around what farmers need to serve urban markets
- These arrangements change over time
• Rural Quebec: long lots, rang & roture
  – Quebec dairy cattle
• Rural Ontario: lot, concession and township
  – Harvest on the Borland Farm
• Rural Manitoba: square sections and townships
  – North of Snowflake MB
• Rural Alberta: square sections in Cattle Country
Farming

- Increasingly the urban food supply is industrialised
- Large agribusiness multinationals
  - Making farm inputs
  - Operating farms
  - Processing and marketing product
- The farm resembles a factory
Alberta’s Feedlot Alley

- Brooks AB
- Feedlot near Medicine Hat
Farming

• The family farm faces tough competition
  – Some grow into agribusinesses
• Most have to struggle
  – Taking off-farm jobs
• The family farm is in decline
  – Lives on in agrarian fantasies and the Fisher-Price play set
Cummins 2009

- Interviews with Ontario farm kids in 2000
- Farm kids identified with their family farms, and deeply attached to rural places
- Farm kids noted distinct male/female gender roles
  - Men worked as farmers
  - Women kept home and family
Cummins 2009

- Most farm kids did not seem willing to become farmers
  - Especially the girls
- Suggests that the farm families are not reproducing themselves as farmers
  - The next generation is preparing to leave the farm
Broadway 2008

- Looked at the BSE outbreak of 2003 in northern Alberta
- Media and politicians treated it as a major crisis
- Broadway finds the impacts were exaggerated
2003 BSE Outbreak

- May 2003 BSE found in an older Alberta cow
  - US border closes to Canadian beef. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan impose bans
  - 85% of the beef exported to the US market
  - Stops a flow of 100,000 animals/month across the US/Canada border
  - A trade worth perhaps $4/bn a year
North Central Alberta

- One of several cattle-raising regions of Alberta
- Broadway studies two counties with 50-60% of farms beef-producing
Exaggerating BSE

- Crisis is short-term. US border re-opens Aug 2003
- Some media claims losses of $11 billion/year, perhaps 75,000 jobs
- Major federal-provincial BSE recovery programme distributes millions in compensation
But what actually happened?

- There was some decline in beef-producer’s income
  - Farmers tried to sell extra land, equipment

- But very little evidence of farm bankruptcy
  - Although it added to the stresses of the family farm
But what actually happened?

- Most of the BSE Recovery Programme funds went to the big feedlot operators
  - US-based Tyson subsidiary Lakeside Farm Industries collects $32 million
  - One of Broadway’s farmers with 175 head gets only $1500
BSE Crisis

- Shifts beef production toward calves and younger less BSE-prone cattle
- Increases the pressures on the smaller family beef farms
  - 40% of whose owners are already working off-farm jobs
- The Beef agribusiness gains advantage and tax-payer subsidies
  - Did they help exaggerate the crisis?
  - BSE continues
2015

• Cattle prices are now at historic highs, 40% more than a year ago
• Alberta’s Cattle Country making money
  – Especially the big producers.