

# *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery as a Coming-of-age Novel

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## Abstract

*Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery is a Canadian Classic children's fiction published in 1908. It revolves around an eleven-year-old orphan girl named Anne Shirley who is vibrant, witty, has a vivid imagination and a positive outlook on life. This coming-of-age story begins as Anne Shirley arrives at the Green Gables house on Prince Edward Island, Canada, to assist the upper-middle-aged siblings Marilla and Gilbert Cuthbert on their farm. The Cuthbert siblings were disappointed to see a girl as they were expecting to foster a boy to assist with the field labor. Anne Shirley landed in Green Gables as a mishap but won everyone over time with her spirited personality and charming nature. In the predominant literary narrative, children's literature is under-represented and forgotten as childhood, after all is seen as a state from which we grow away. But children's literature provokes an intense response and engagement amongst its readers through its congruence. A coming-of-age story in children's literature focuses on the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist from youth to adulthood and confounds the audience to experience the surrounding of the protagonist to impact the readers' thoughts and attain self-growth. In light of the above information, this paper aims to substantiate *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery as a coming-of-age novel to understand the impact that children's literature has on its audience through various elements such as culture, identity, positivity, friendship, love, growth, and imagination.

**Keywords:** culture, identity, growth, positivity, friendship, love, imagination.

## 1. Introduction

Children's literature is defined as good-quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction (Lynch-Brown, et.al 2004). It is any kind of literary text that has been written for the benefit of children. The writers of children's literature often promote a moral or a religious value aimed specifically at children through their literary texts. In the academy world, with reference to Studies of Literature in English, predominantly, Children's literature is not considered as serious literature or treated with the same status compared to other literary texts or genres such as Eco-literature, Feminist-literature, Post-colonial literature, African-American literature, etc because of the intrinsic conservatism in Children's literature as most of the books have a happy ending or postulate hope. Adult reading looks down on this trait, as 'happy endings' in fiction are categorised for entertainment and recommend truth and abrade for concrete writing. In an article called "Why it's time to take children's books seriously," by Catherine Butler states that

Ultimately, disdain for children's literature has less to do with the quality of the work than with the contradictory feelings adults have about children and childhood. These fall into two broad groups, the first of which can be summarised: "The more grown-up the better". As St. Paul put it: "When I became a man, I put away childish things..." (I Cor 13.11). The adult view is the real view; the child's just an approximation. Applied to children's literature, this leads to the belief that children's books are literature with training wheels – and that those mostly nearly resembling adult books are the most worthwhile (Butler, 2016).

The concept of Childhood is cherished and celebrated within the personal space of an individual but in a social or cultural setting, childhood feelings are disdained, therefore children's literature is considered to be less significant compared to other forms of literary divisions. In the end, the adult world trivializes children but not their own intrinsic childhood. So the more children's literature is isolated from mainstream studies, the more it is away from critical discussion and understanding of childhood experiences and problems.

## 2. Literature Review

There are various studies on L.M. Montgomery's novel *Anne of Green Gables*. A research article titled "The Sweetness of Saying "Mother"? Maternity and Narrativity in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*," published by Christa Zeller Thomas in 2009, discusses the state

of observing the motherlessness effect of many heroines in nineteenth-century fiction. Marah Gubar, in his article “Where is the Boy?”: The Pleasures of Postponement in the Anne of Green Gables Series, published in 2001, talks about how female characters must make to confirm their unruly desires to dictate heterosexual romance. Another article titled “Anne Shirley’s Character Development and its Causes as Seen in *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery” by Fatimah Salsabila Az-Zahra, et.al., published in 2019 postulates on character development in the novel with a discussion on the causes and their reasons. Another article in the same year 2019 titled “Psychology of Author in *Anne of Green Gables* Novel written by Lucy Maud Montgomery” evaluates the psychology of the author in reference to the novel being a semi-autobiography. The researcher Yu Jin Ng, et.al.’s 2021 article titled “Educating Effervescent Women Scientists Through Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*” discusses the novel’s use in educating female students about effervescence in STEM subjects. These research articles provide extensive research on the novel, but they have not concentrated on the novel’s reference to the coming-of-age genre in the context of children’s literature. Analysing this genre will be more helpful with the deeper understanding of the subject. The novelty of the paper is to understand the way that children’s literature provides hope to its readers through its various dimensions.

### 3. Methodology

The researchers have used qualitative research and to bring this research, to the next level, they used a descriptive approach. The author has adopted a discussion method and the objective of the article has been developed through analysis and comparison. The primary source of the research is the novel *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery published in 1908. The secondary sources are collected from various research articles, internet data, videos and books.

### 4. Discussion

#### 4.1 Importance of Studying Children’s Literature

In an interview with Daniel Hahn, Professor Michael Rosen states that in terms of the separatist argument, many people claim that they need a separate discipline or study or a separate platform to discuss their in-depth problems which are either missed or overlooked in a generalized academic study. This idea led to many School of Thought and Study, such as Feminist Literature, Marxist Literature, Asian Literature, Indian Literature, African Literature, Queer Studies, Disability Studies, African-American Studies, etc. For example, African-Americans express that it is important to have a separate critical study and a body of critical theory as African-American Studies which is separate from British Studies and other American Studies. Because it is important to establish confidence in each other within the community and to know who we are in case if we dissipate ourselves when we try to constantly have arguments with people who did our wrong bit. The concept of separate study with the example of African-American Study is synonymous with any other School of Thought. Similarly, one of the arguments that children’s literature has is that it is important to gather people of this genre to create an argument, which in turn raises the critical level of the subject without having to constantly justify the significance of the genre. Therefore, it is important to present children’s literature with mainstream studies for inclusivity and to understand the salient features of the genre (Rosen, 2015).

As time progressed, some arguments were promoted for children’s literature, indicating that children’s literature is not as feeble for studying as claimed by the mainstream academia. In an essay entitled “On Three ways of Writing for Children” by C.S. Lewis while he discusses the various children’s novels he enjoys, states that “I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story. The good one lasts. A waltz which you can like only when you are waltzing is bad waltz” (C.S., 2020). This means that a children’s story that can only be enjoyed by children is not a good children’s story in the slightest. Many critics claim that there is never a good children’s book they read in their childhood that they do not want to revisit or reread during their adult lives. Therefore, this argument manifest that a good children’s book is something that is enjoyed by all age groups. Hence the idea that reading children’s literature is childish is vague and indefinite, as children’s literature has as much significance and complexities as any adult literature.

Children’s Literature also influences adults in a greater way. In a 1998 movie named, *You’ve Got Mail*, directed by Nora Ephron, there is a quote by the main character (Rebecca) who owns a library in New York City, that states, “When you read a book as a child, it becomes part of your identity in a way no other reading in your life does” (Ephron, 1998). Revisiting their childhood memory with a book would help an adult to retain their child inside them. An essay called “Why We Read Fiction” states that “The cognitive rewards of reading fiction might thus be aligned with the cognitive rewards of pretend play through a shared capacity to stimulate and develop our imagination” (Zunshine 2006). This professes that fiction helps in creating an escape route through imagination to its readers in terms of both child and adult reading of a text.

#### 4.2 Importance of Classic Children’s Literature

A video on “Why we should Re-Read Great Books”, talks about a great quote from the Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius that he gets from Heraclitus, where they say that no man steps in the same river twice because it is not the same river and he is not the same man. As human beings keep evolving with their experience and the river keeps moving as it streams it is not the same person that comes back. Similarly, when we re-read books, we might find as if we missed something or find something new since we come back with different experiences and perspectives. Though the words are the same in the text, the world in which they exist has changed. Lucius Seneca another Roman Philosopher states that it is important to linger on the works of the master thinkers as we get something new every time,

we read something old and that is what makes them Classics. *Anne of Green Gables* by Luis Maud Montgomery is considered a Classic as there is something new to cherish and explore for people from all walks of lives.

Initially, there was no such genre as Children's literature, as books were written for everyone. If there were, it would be on religious topics. The process slowly began to change, significantly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the release of *Little Women* by Louis May Alcott in 1868, where the target audience were primarily young girls. The subject was not just on religion but also on real life problems. Similarly, *Anne of Green Gables* was also a part of expanding the content of Children's Literature in its time by discussing about being an orphan, adoption, etc., especially by presenting the work as a coming-of-age novel, which was very innovative for its time.

#### 4.3 Introduction to Luis Maud Montgomery

Luis Maud Montgomery was a Canadian regional romantic novelist. In the Canadian Encyclopedia there is an article called "Lucy Maud Montgomery" by Andrew McIntosh and Cecily Devereux where they mention the various Honors' that Montgomery attained and states

In 1923, Montgomery became the first Canadian woman to be made a member of the British Royal Society of Arts. In 1924, she was named one of the "Twelve Greatest Women in Canada" by the Toronto Star. In 1935, she was named an Officer of both the Order of the British Empire and the Literary and Artistic Institute of France (Devereux, 2020).

*Anne of Green Gables* was her first novel and claimed instant success upon its release. This novel could also be semi-autobiographical as it draws on the author's own girlhood experience. Montgomery's mother died from tuberculosis when she was young and her father left her to be with her grandparents as her caretakers in Prince Edward Island. She was raised by two upper-middle-age elders near a farmland surrounded by nature. This experience could be reflected in the story of *Anne of Green Gables*, as the eleven-year-old protagonist Anne Shirley is an orphan, moves to Prince Edward Island and is raised by two upper-middle-aged elders near farmland surrounded by nature. The story progresses from Anne's adolescence to her adult life, and the novel prepares the audience to experience their surroundings in the same way the protagonist does. The facet that holds the story together is Montgomery's beautiful writing and the character of Anne, who is real, innocent, and joyful. Through these aspects, this paper aims to substantiate *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery as coming-of-age novel to understand the impact that children's literature has on its audience through various elements such as culture, identity, positivity, friendship, love, growth, and imagination.

#### 4.4 Importance of Coming-of-age Novel

The coming-of-age in a novel is also termed as Bildungsroman, which in German translation means a novel in which a character is built, or a formation novel. The article titled "Literary Themes Coming of Age" states that in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, some German novels, such as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1795 established a narrative pattern where a young protagonist undergoes a process of trials, experience and revelation. Later this narrative pattern will be followed by several authors in the forthcoming centuries. Instructor Ann Casano states that

A coming-of-age story, also called a Bildungsroman, is all about the protagonist's journey from being a child to being an adult. It is a journey that takes a young person from naïve to wise, from idealist to realist, and from immature to mature. The path of the protagonist, or main character, can vary from story to story. Perhaps he had to go to war, or lost his mother, or experienced extreme injustice, or went on some great worldwide adventure. There will usually be pain and suffering along the way – growing up isn't easy. However, no matter the narrative direction, the result that the hero grows from his experiences and in some way loses the childhood innocence that help steer him towards adulthood (Casano, 2021).

Therefore, a coming-of-age story includes a protagonist who is socially and emotionally maturing, and they make discoveries about who they are as a person and the world. Anne Shirley enters Green Gables with her imagination, positivity and hope. Anne discovers Green Gables through her optimism and imagination, questions every little thing about her life in Green Gables such as how the road look so red or what could be the reason for the Cuthbert siblings to never marry and several other questions. She states

...how you going to find out about things if you don't ask questions?... isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out about? It just makes me feel glad to be alive—it's such an interesting world. It wouldn't be half so interesting if we know all about everything, would it? There'd be no scope for imagination then, would there? (Montgomery, 1908).

The relevance of a coming-of-age story is that it helps create relatability for their readers and builds a connectivity through the story, providing hope and helping readers understand that they are not alone in their struggle, making them realize that everything will get better like the character they read in their coming-of-age story.

#### 4.5 Discussion on the Novel

As a coming-of-age story's protagonist, Anne begins her expedition of discoveries through questions about her journey. There is also a shift from immaturity to maturity, from naïve to wise, in a bildungsroman novel. In a Catholic Literature Series held in 2014 on the topic "Children's Literature and the Golden World" by Children's author and speaker Daniel McNerny discusses the way children's literature captures imagination and innocence and states that children's literature is about the adventure into the 'golden world' in which innocence is fought for and achieved. Here, 'golden world' refers to the state of real and absolute purity, as the divine connection of childhood and children is protected through the pure state of mind. The innocence of a child is beautiful and gives oneself a state of reverence. The mainstream idea of protecting innocence refers to confining the child and not letting them explore the world. McNerny suggests that real

innocence is achieved through branching out and discovering the world, understanding the good and bad and still choosing to exercise the virtue of innocence. The preparation novel transfers the protagonist from a childish state to adulthood, children's literature ensures that this transfer is from puerile to reverence.

Anne's journey of good and bad is manoeuvre through her imagination. She looks at a Cherry-tree in the railway station and calls it a beautiful bride as it has slim white britches, she looks at the avenue road and calls as "White Way of Delight" (Montgomery, 1908), the Berry Pond is called "the Lake of Shining Water" (Montgomery, 1908), she also says "When I don't like the name of a place or a person, I always imagine a new one and always think of them so. There was a girl at the asylum whose name was Hepzibah Jenkins, but I always imagined her as Rosalia De Vere" (Montgomery, 1908). To overcome her difficult time in the asylum, she would imagine that her fellow inmate was not an orphan but the daughter of belted earl who was stolen away by her cruel nurse and dies before she could confess. If she does not like the clothes, she is wearing, she would imagine it to be a pretty puff sleeve dress. Anne rifle through several of these imaginations to overcome her difficulties and stay joyful.

Montgomery has effectively captured Anne's innocence and imagination through her writing. In adult literary writing, imagination is not given much respect, as there is no substantiated evidence for imaginary thought. Therefore, it is difficult to make a critical comment as it takes the readers away from reality. McNerny, in his critical discussion, argues that the way children's literature captures imagination and innocence does not take the readers away from reality but towards it. Anne's conversation about her experience was part of her reality. Her imagination portrays her innocence in the ways she handles reality. Therefore, imagination is not taking the readers away from reality but towards Anne's truth. Anne's experience helps her to mature in the novel, and her imagination helps her enjoy the process of maturing.

Though imagination is appreciated in children's literature, in a coming-of-age story, the protagonist moves from a state of idealism to realism, where there is a shift from the false view of the world to the most realistic view of the world. Montgomery has portrayed the growth of the character through various concepts such as gender, identity, home, friendship and love. Montgomery is progressive and dynamic in the way she handles gender in the novel, which eventually subsides with other elements such as identity and home. The Cuthbert siblings were expecting to adopt a boy to help with their farm, but due to miscommunication, they received Anne Shirley. Initially, they were disappointed to receive a girl but decided to keep her until they found her a suitable home to reside in. Anne never had a permanent place as she was continuously shifting from one foster home to another and was excited to have a family and a place called home. In the novel, when Anne meets Mathew Cuthbert, she states

Oh, it seems so wonderful that I'm going to live with you and belong to you. I've never belonged to anybody--not really. But the asylum was the worst. I've only been in it four months, but that was enough. I don't suppose you ever were an orphan in an asylum, so you can't possibly understand what it is like. It's worse than anything you could imagine. Mrs. Spencer said it was wicked of me to talk like that, but I didn't mean to be wicked. It's so easy to be wicked without knowing it, isn't it? (Montgomery, 1908).

Anne was devastated to hear that they wanted a boy. She did sulk in the beginning, but when the Cuthbert siblings asked for her name, she decided to make the best of the situation and requested to call her as Cordelia. She decides she was not going to stay there longer and decided it did not matter if they called her by a different name. Anne states that Cordelia sounds much better than plain old boring Anne. When the Cuthbert siblings especially Marilla Cuthbert, refused to call her by a false name, she requested that they at least spell her name as Anne with an 'e' as that sounds much better than the regular Ann. This portrays Anne as a positive, charming person who expects everyone to view her the same way. Even in the case of being punished by her teacher, she is more concentrated on the teacher misspelling her name rather than being falsely punished. She is proud of her fantasy world and assertive of herself. She states that she would rather look stupid in puff sleeves than plain in boring clothes. On the other hand, this does not mean Anne is an ungrateful and meticulous child. As an eleven-year-old orphan, Anne's world is very limited, and her experience and happiness are also very limited. Therefore, she tends to cherish and protect every little thing that makes her special and happy. Including her name and her desire to appear in puff sleeves. Anne extends her love and care to the people in her life as well, when Anne gets Diana as her first friend, she states,

"A bosom friend—an intimate friend, you know—a really kindred spirit to whom I can confide my inmost soul. I've dreamed of meeting her all my life. I never really supposed I would, but so many of my loveliest dreams have come true all at once that perhaps this one will, too" (Montgomery, 1908).

This portrays Anne's priority for friendship in her life.

It is important to have a strong and an opinionated protagonist, but every opinion of an eleven-year-old could not be equitable. Anne says that she would rather be pretty and dumb than ugly and smart. She does not like her red hair; despises the way she looks and thinks that no one will love her. She is stubborn and has an uncontrollable temper. She uses elongated words and arduous descriptions to express her excitement. Anne overcomes her negative traits through her life experiences in Green Gables.

The character growth in a coming-of-age story begins when the protagonist has a conflict with the society, and sometimes there is an epiphany where there is a sudden realization of the truth about him/herself or the world around them. Anne's battle or conflict as a protagonist could be viewed in two ways. The battle with the outside world and the battle with her inner self as there is no self-acceptance. Anne's battle with the outside world began the moment she entered Green Gables as she is not a boy. But Anne suggests that a girl can do just as much work as a boy. In terms of Anne's battle with her inner self, she never appreciated her ability to study well compared to others until the Cuthbert siblings expressed how proud they were of her hardworking skills and would have her over a hundred orphan

boys. The Cuthbert siblings had unconditional love for Anne as she was their own. The love portrayed in the novel is not romantic love but the familial love, which is delightful, incredibly thought-provoking and impactful to the readers.

Understanding the etymology of conflict in a Bildungsroman novel could be salient. In a Video titled, “Mini Lecture: Coming of Age Stories,” by Keith W. Mathias comments on the Impact of Coming of Age stories as a genre. He discusses that the goal of a protagonist in a bildungsroman is to attain maturity. It is attained through the protagonist’s journey of overcoming difficulties in their lives as there is some sort of moral, physical, or psychological growth or change that takes place in the protagonist. This move, growth, or change could mark the shift of the protagonist from innocence to experience.

The epiphany in Anne’s life unfolds with the death of Mathew Cuthbert. Anne just could not express her complete feelings about Mathew Cuthbert’s death and ironically, she laughed at the times she used elongated words. She also let go of her grudge towards her fellow classmate Gilbert as she realizes it is not healthy to hold onto wrath as she faces the huge loss of her loved ones, nothing else matters. When Marilla Cuthbert saw Anne coming home with her nemesis Gilbert, Anne stated that

We haven’t been—we’ve been good enemies. But we decided that it would be much more sensible to be good friends in the future. Were we really there half an hour? It seemed just a few minutes. But you see, we have five years’ lost conversations to catch up with Marilla. (Montgomery, 1908).

In the end, she decides to not pursue higher education and wants to stay and teach in Prince Edward Island and take care of Marilla Cuthbert not because it is expected of her but because it is her choice. Anne Shirley has grown to be a strong woman and does not need others’ approval for her life decisions therefore she decides for herself and chooses her family. Mathias continues to proclaim that the epiphany in a coming-of-age novel of its protagonist’s journey would push them to find their sense of peace or belonging or to find themselves as they pass from Childhood to Adulthood. This journey of maturity could also be witnessed in Anne as she claims, “God is in heaven, all’s right with the world” (Montgomery, 1908) at the end of the novel.

## 5. Conclusion

The journey of maturity in a Coming-of-age novel could give its reader relatability, connection, and reassurance, as stated earlier, that they are not alone in the difficulties they face in their real-life during childhood and promote hope for their readers. This promotion of hope in the majority of novels in Children’s Literature might lead to intrinsic conservatism meaning ‘happy ending’. This practice of happy endings might have made many academicians look down on Children’s Literature and consider it a not-so-serious genre, as forever happy ending could not be an exact depiction of reality. But a close reading of Children’s Literature could make the readers realize that the use of ‘happy endings’ in its stories is not just to imitate reality but to promote the dream of better reality at an early stage among its readers. In an article on “*Happily Ever After...*” by Rashmi Bora Das, where she discusses the importance of happily ending stories in Children’s Literature, states that

It is true that human experience is a package where failure, disappointments and sorrows come alongside successes, joys, and celebrations. But that does not warrant that we always look at life with a pessimistic view point... The catword here is hope. It is imperative that stories, along with their realistic portrayal of life, incorporate elements of hope, humility will cease to exist. Our existence on this planet is nothing lesser than a rollercoaster ride, and it is hope that keeps us alive through the ups and downs with the promise of laughter and sunshine (Das, 2017).

*Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Montgomery as a Coming-of-age novel, could promote hope among its readers through certain concepts such as culture, identity, positivity, friendship, love, growth, and imagination.

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