

Finding Feminism in Avonlea: Reading Anne of Green Gables as a Quiet Rebellion

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Abstract : Since its publication in 1908, L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* has been read primarily as a charming coming-of-age idyll set on Prince Edward Island. Yet beneath its pastoral surface lies a persistent and carefully constructed feminist sensibility that rewards closer critical attention. This article argues that Montgomery's novel performs a quiet rebellion against the gender expectations of its era by granting its heroine, Anne Shirley, an interiority, an intellect, and an anger that conduct-book femininity of the period explicitly forbade girls to possess. Drawing on close reading of key scenes the confrontation with Rachel Lynde, the slate-breaking incident, the Avery Scholarship competition, and the novel's much-debated ending alongside historical context regarding the "New Woman" movement and Montgomery's own biography, this article traces how *Anne of Green Gables* reconfigures the marriage plot, elevates female friendship and female authority to structural importance, and imagines ambition as compatible with, rather than opposed to, domestic life. The article further considers Marilla Cuthbert's unmarried autonomy, the friendship between Anne and Diana Barry, and the trajectory of Anne's ambition across Montgomery's sequels, before addressing the scholarly debate over whether Anne's decision to decline Redmond College represents capitulation or agency. The article concludes that the novel's feminism is one of temperament and self-possession rather than doctrine a feminism embedded in narrative sympathy rather than declared in argument, which is precisely why it has endured, and continued to speak to readers, across more than a century of changing expectations for girls and women.

Keywords: *Feminist literary criticism, girlhood studies, New Woman, female friendship, children's literature*

Introduction

When Lucy Maud Montgomery published *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908, she did not set out to write a manifesto. She set out, by her own account, to write a story about a mistaken adoption a spirited orphan sent to an elderly brother and sister who had asked an orphanage for a boy to help with farm work. The premise is domestic, even whimsical, and the novel's early reviewers praised it chiefly for its humour, its vivid Prince Edward Island setting, and the freshness of its child heroine. Montgomery herself, writing in her journals, expressed surprise at the book's success and gave little indication that she considered herself to be writing anything so deliberate as social critique.

And yet, more than a century later, *Anne of Green Gables* continues to reward indeed, to invite a feminist reading. Not because Anne Shirley marches for suffrage, reads tracts on the woman question, or delivers speeches on equality (she does none of these things, and it would strain the text considerably to pretend otherwise), but because the novel structures an entire fictional world around a girl who is permitted, again and again, to refuse diminishment. Montgomery quietly rewires the coming-of-age narrative available to girls in 1908 so that intelligence, ambition, anger, and female companionship are treated as central and admirable, rather than as obstacles to be corrected on the road to marriageability.

This article makes the case that *Anne of Green Gables* is a feminist text not despite its gentleness but because of it. Its feminism is embedded rather than declared: it lives in which behaviours the narrative punishes and which it forgives, in whose ambitions are taken seriously, in whose friendships are given narrative weight equal to romance, and in whose voices are allowed to be loud without becoming grotesque. To read the novel for these qualities is not to project a modern politics backward onto an Edwardian children's book; it is to notice what Montgomery's contemporaries noticed and often found remarkable that this book behaved differently, in small but cumulative ways, than most girls' fiction of its time.

Historical and Literary Context

To understand what *Anne of Green Gables* was doing differently, it helps to recall what it was written against. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of significant, contested renegotiation of women's roles in North America and Britain. The figure of the "New Woman" educated, often unmarried or married on her own terms, sometimes employed, frequently a cyclist, a reader of serious literature, and a participant in public discourse was a subject of anxious cultural commentary throughout the 1890s and 1900s. She was celebrated by reformers and mocked by satirists in roughly equal measure, and she haunted the periodical press on both sides of the Atlantic. Girls' fiction of the period frequently registered this anxiety by offering heroines who flirted with unconventional ambition before being narratively steered back toward marriage, domestic competence, and the suppression of intellectual appetite as the ultimate marker of maturity.

Montgomery was writing directly into this current. Born in 1874 in Clifton, Prince Edward Island, she was raised largely by strict Presbyterian grandparents after her mother's early death and her father's departure to Western Canada. She was, by all biographical accounts most thoroughly documented in Mary Rubio's biography *Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings* and in Montgomery's own extensive journals an intensely ambitious young woman who trained as a teacher, worked briefly as a journalist, and pursued a serious literary career at a time when doing so as an unmarried woman in rural Canada required considerable social navigation. She did not marry until 1911, at the age of thirty-six, three years after *Anne of Green Gables* appeared, and her journals record a lifelong tension between her intellectual and professional ambitions and the domestic and religious obligations expected of her as an unmarried woman caring for an aging grandmother.

This biographical context matters because it clarifies that Anne's ambitions in the novel to be well-educated, to write, to achieve recognition on her own merits were not abstractions to Montgomery but lived negotiations. When Montgomery grants Anne an academic triumph that a girl of the period might plausibly have been denied, or when she frames Marilla's unmarried household management as capable rather than pitiable, she is drawing on a reality she inhabited rather than inventing a fantasy from nothing.

It is also worth situating *Anne of Green Gables* among its literary contemporaries and immediate predecessors. Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–69), and Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) all offer spirited heroines who are gradually tamed sometimes through illness and invalidism, as with Katy, sometimes through the gentle erosion of literary ambition, as with Jo March's eventual domestication in *Little Women's* sequels. Montgomery admired Alcott considerably, and the influence is evident, but *Anne of Green Gables* is notably less willing than *Little Women* to punish its heroine's ambitions through illness, loss, or romantic subordination. Anne's academic triumph is not undercut by tragedy in the way Jo March's writing career is complicated by grief and eventual retreat into domestic management of a boys' school. This comparative context is not offered to diminish Alcott's achievement, which was itself considerable and pioneering, but to show precisely where Montgomery's novel diverges from, and in some ways exceeds, the genre conventions available to her.

An Unwanted Girl Who Refuses to Apologize for Existing

The novel begins with a joke that is also a wound. Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, aging and in need of help running *Green Gables*, have arranged through an orphan asylum to adopt a boy. Anne Shirley talkative, imaginative, and entirely unwanted in the specific sense that she is not what was ordered arrives instead. In lesser hands, this premise sets up a familiar narrative: a girl earns her right to belong by becoming quiet, useful, and unremarkable, absorbing the household's disappointment as a debt she must repay through self-effacement.

Montgomery does the opposite, and the reversal begins almost immediately. Anne does not shrink to fit the space made for a boy who never arrived. In the buggy ride from the train station, before she has even seen *Green Gables*, she talks so continuously and so vividly about her imagination, her sorrows, and her opinions on nature that Matthew who "was fonder of being talked to than talking himself" is charmed rather than exhausted. When Marilla, upon discovering the mistake, coldly informs Anne that they cannot keep her, Anne's grief is rendered not as pathetic but as a legitimate, almost operatic response to a second abandonment, and the narrative's sympathy sits entirely with her.

Crucially, Anne's assertion of self continues even once her position in the household is secured. She insists on being called "Cordelia," because "Anne" seems to her insufficiently romantic, and she negotiates successfully, if temporarily to be addressed as "Anne spelled with an E," a small but telling insistence that even her own name should reflect her own aesthetic judgment rather than mere convention. She renames the geographical features around *Green Gables* the Lake of Shining Waters, the White Way of Delight, the Haunted Wood imposing her imaginative vocabulary onto a landscape that had previously been described only in the flattest utilitarian terms by its adult residents. This is not incidental whimsy; it is a girl exercising authorship over her own environment, refusing to accept that the world's existing names for things are the only names available.

This matters because so much girlhood fiction of the era, and a great deal since, treats a girl's excess of personality as a defect requiring correction. Anne's arc across the novel is not a story about learning to be smaller. Rachel Lynde, Marilla, and eventually Mrs. Allan attempt at various points to modulate Anne's behaviour, and Anne does learn genuinely and with real narrative satisfaction to exercise more judgment about when her imagination and her temper serve her and when they do not. But this is a lesson in discernment, not in diminishment. Anne at the novel's end has not become quieter; she has become more precisely aimed.

The Right to Anger and Voice

Two of the novel's most frequently anthologized scenes are, at their core, about a girl's right to feel and express anger without forfeiting the reader's sympathy a right that conduct manuals of the period explicitly withheld from girls, who were instructed that a well-bred temper was, above all, an even one.

When Rachel Lynde inspects Anne shortly after her arrival and pronounces her "terrible skinny and homely" with hair "as red as carrots," Anne does not demurely absorb the insult, as convention demanded. She erupts. She calls Mrs. Lynde "a rude, impertinent woman" to her face, declares that she hates her, and stamps her foot in a fury so complete that the adults in the room are, by the text's own account, scandalized. Marilla is horrified and insists that Anne apologize; the community's expectation is unambiguous. And yet the narrative's sympathies do not sit with propriety. Matthew, gentle and largely silent throughout the novel, quietly defends Anne's outburst, observing that Mrs. Lynde's comment was itself needlessly cruel; and the reader, guided by a narrative voice that has spent the preceding chapters inside Anne's vivid inner life, is invited to feel that Anne's fury, however excessive in expression, was a proportionate response to an insult delivered against a child who had no power to refuse it. This is a meaningful inversion of

the era's conduct-book femininity, which demanded that girls absorb criticism especially criticism of their appearance with grace, precisely because they were assumed to have no legitimate claim to object.

The slate-breaking incident operates by the same logic, at greater narrative stakes. When Gilbert Blythe, seeking Anne's attention, whispers "Carrots" across the aisle, Anne responds not with a blush or a tearful retreat but by breaking her slate over his head in front of the entire schoolroom. She is publicly punished by the schoolmaster, made to stand at the front of the class a humiliation the narrative registers with real weight and she refuses, with a stubbornness that persists for years, to forgive Gilbert even after he apologizes. The novel does not ask its reader to conclude that Anne's fury was unreasonable, only that her methods, and eventually her prolonged grudge, required refinement. Her anger throughout is treated as legitimate information about her inner life and her sense of dignity, not as a defect to be corrected into passivity. This is a small thing in the space of a single scene, but it was not a small thing in 1908, when female anger particularly a girl's anger about how she was perceived or addressed was routinely pathologized, moralized away, or simply rendered comic and unserious in fiction of the period.

It is worth noting, too, that Anne's capacity for shame and error is never rendered as a referendum on her worth. When she dyes her hair green attempting to turn it black, when she serves currant wine to Diana believing it to be raspberry cordial and is blamed for Diana's resulting drunkenness, when she accidentally uses liniment instead of vanilla in a cake she has baked for the visiting minister these episodes of comic disaster are treated with narrative affection rather than punitive irony. Anne is mortified in each instance, and Montgomery lets her be mortified fully, without rushing to reassure the reader that it does not matter. But the mortification is never presented as evidence that Anne herself is defective; it is evidence that she is a child still learning to navigate a world of adult rules, and the novel's sympathy remains with her throughout each humiliation rather than curdling into judgment.

Ambition Without Apology

Perhaps the most quietly radical thread running through *Anne of Green Gables* is Anne's intellectual ambition, which the novel treats as an unremarkable good rather than as an unfeminine excess requiring narrative correction. Anne wants to attend Queen's Academy. She wants to compete for the Avery Scholarship, a prize awarded for excellence in English. She wants and this is the crucial word, repeated throughout the novel's later chapters to win, not merely to participate respectably or to acquit herself with modest, ladylike competence.

Montgomery permits Anne to want this openly, discusses her preparation for the entrance examinations at real length, and then lets her succeed decisively: Anne takes the gold medal in English and, in the novel's climactic academic sequence, wins the Avery Scholarship outright, ahead of her rival Gilbert Blythe, who has been her closest academic competitor throughout their school years. This is not a minor plot beat. In an era when female intellectual achievement was frequently treated in fiction as either a temporary phase to be outgrown or a trait requiring apology (a clever girl in period fiction is often also lonely, awkward, or destined to be reformed by love), Montgomery allows Anne's cleverness to be simply, uncomplicatedly celebrated by the community around her, including by Marilla, whose pride in Anne's achievement is rendered with genuine tenderness.

The Anne–Gilbert rivalry deserves particular scholarly attention here, because it inverts a familiar structure of gendered competition in coming-of-age fiction. For most of the novel, Gilbert is not merely a future romantic interest waiting in reserve; he is Anne's academic equal and her most serious competitor, and Montgomery structures their contest for class rank, for prizes, for the scholarship itself as a fair fight between comparably gifted minds. Neither is permitted an unearned advantage. When Anne finally accepts Gilbert's friendship, years after the slate-breaking incident, it occurs on the level ground of mutual intellectual respect rather than through his having rescued, corrected, or surpassed her. Indeed, in the novel's final chapters, it is Gilbert who yields ground: having secured the Avonlea school position, he resigns it in Anne's favour so that she may remain near Marilla, whose eyesight has begun to fail, rather than travel to a more distant post. Montgomery reverses the customary gendered rescue narrative in this single gesture it is not Anne who is saved by a man's sacrifice for her sake in the conventional sense of romantic rescue, but rather two equals recognizing and accommodating each other's circumstances, with Gilbert absorbing the cost.

This reconfiguration matters because it refuses the genre's more common alternative: a heroine whose intelligence exists chiefly to be admired by, and eventually subordinated to, a male love interest's greater competence or resources. Gilbert never out-thinks Anne. He is her match, and later her collaborator, and the novel's romance plot which unfolds fully only in *Anne of Avonlea* and *Anne of the Island* is built on that foundation of parity rather than on rescue.

Marilla Cuthbert: Spinsterhood, Autonomy and Female Authority

Feminist readings of *Anne of Green Gables* understandably tend to centre Anne herself, but the novel's structure of relationships around her matters just as much to its overall politics, and Marilla Cuthbert deserves sustained attention in this regard. Marilla is an unmarried woman in her fifties who, together with her brother Matthew, runs a working farm and makes the significant financial and domestic decisions of the household. She answers to no husband, defers to no male head of household beyond consulting Matthew as an equal partner in the farm's management, and is presented throughout the novel without the pity, comic spinsterhood tropes, or narrative punishment that unmarried women so frequently received in fiction of the period. She is not lonely in any way the text treats as tragic; she is not desperate for male approval; her unmarried status is mentioned, in the novel's backstory concerning a broken engagement to a young man named John Blythe (Gilbert's father), but it is treated as a fact of her history rather than as an ongoing wound defining her present.

Marilla's authority within the novel is also notable for what it is not undercut by. She makes the decision to keep Anne against her own initial inclination; she manages the farm's finances, including the eventual crisis involving the failed Abbey Bank in which the

Cuthberts' savings are lost; and she navigates Matthew's death and her own encroaching blindness with a stoicism the narrative treats as admirable rather than merely sad. At no point does the novel suggest that Marilla's household is deficient for lacking a patriarch, nor does it introduce a male relative to rescue or correct her management of it. This is a quietly unusual configuration for children's fiction of the period, in which unmarried women running households independently were far more commonly figures of comedy (the eccentric spinster aunt) or pathos (the woman whose life is defined by an absence) than figures of straightforward, respected competence.

The gradual thawing of Marilla's affection toward Anne across the novel is likewise worth reading carefully. It would have been easy, and consistent with genre convention, to structure this relationship as one in which a rigid older woman is "fixed" or softened by a child's innocent wisdom a common sentimental trope. Montgomery resists this framing. Marilla changes, but she changes as an adult exercising judgment over time, weighing evidence, revising her own severity as she comes to understand Anne more fully; and Anne changes too, learning real discipline and consideration from Marilla that the narrative treats as genuine growth rather than as loss. The relationship is reciprocal and mutually educative rather than a one-directional narrative of a child redeeming an adult, which grants Marilla an interiority and agency that the "reformed by a child" trope typically denies to its adult women.

Diana Barry and the Primacy of Female Friendship

Equally central to the novel's feminist architecture is the friendship between Anne and Diana Barry, Anne's self-declared "bosom friend." Montgomery treats the intensity of adolescent female friendship its solemn vows of eternal loyalty, the devastation of a forced separation when Diana's mother forbids the girls from associating after the currant wine incident, the operatic joy of eventual reconciliation with precisely the same narrative weight that most fiction of the era reserved exclusively for courtship and romance. The famous scene in which Anne and Diana solemnly swear a vow of "solemn oath and promise" to be friends forever is not played for comedy at the girls' expense; it is rendered with the same sincerity the novel later affords Anne's eventual understanding with Gilbert.

This is a significant structural choice. In much girls' fiction of the period, female friendships exist as a kind of holding pattern pleasant, but understood by both text and reader as provisional, a rehearsal for the "real" plot of finding a husband, which will supersede and diminish the friendship's importance once it arrives. Anne of Green Gables does not fully subordinate the Anne–Diana friendship in this way, at least not within the scope of the first novel; it remains, throughout, one of the central emotional relationships of Anne's life, treated by the narrative as a source of genuine sustenance rather than as a placeholder. Female friendship, in other words, is not merely tolerated by the novel as a stage on the way to something more important; in *Anne of Green Gables*, it very nearly is the plot, competing for and often winning narrative attention against the more conventionally weighted romance elements involving Gilbert.

Nature, Imagination, and Resistance to Domestication

A further, less frequently discussed dimension of the novel's feminism lies in its consistent alignment of Anne with the natural world and with imaginative interiority as sites of freedom, set against the domestic interior as a site (though never an unkind one) of discipline and restraint. Anne's imaginative renaming of the landscape, discussed above, is one instance of this pattern; another is the recurring structure by which Anne's most vivid, most narratively celebrated moments occur outdoors in the Haunted Wood, on the Lake of Shining Waters, in the orchard in bloom while her moments of correction and discipline occur indoors, at Marilla's kitchen table or in the schoolroom. This is not a simple binary in which indoors is bad and outdoors is good; Marilla's kitchen becomes, by the novel's end, a place of real warmth and belonging for Anne. But the novel consistently treats Anne's imaginative and natural inner life as a resource she is allowed to keep, rather than as a childish excess she must trade away entirely for domestic competence. She becomes capable of baking a cake without incident and of managing a household in Marilla's later illness, but she does not stop naming lakes and does not stop finding "kindred spirits" in nature. The novel's vision of maturity is additive rather than subtractive: Anne gains practical competence without surrendering the imaginative and emotional richness that a more punitive narrative might have required her to relinquish as the price of growing up.

The Ending: Sacrifice, Agency, and a Complicated Feminism

The novel's ending has generated genuine, productive debate among feminist critics of Montgomery's work, and it deserves to be engaged honestly rather than smoothed over in service of a tidier argument. When Matthew dies suddenly of heart failure a death precipitated by the shock of the Abbey Bank's collapse and the loss of the Cuthberts' savings and Marilla's eyesight begins to fail dangerously, Anne relinquishes her scholarship to Redmond College and remains at Green Gables, taking a teaching position nearby so that she can care for Marilla and manage the farm. Read uncharitably, or read through a lens shaped by later, more emphatically career-oriented models of feminist heroism, this looks like a retreat into domestic duty: the ambitious girl who fought so hard for her scholarship folding herself back into caretaking, in a pattern familiar from countless heroines before and since who are narratively maneuvered back into service the moment their ambitions threaten to carry them too far from home.

This reading has real force, and it would be dishonest to dismiss it. Montgomery does, in the end, have Anne choose family obligation over further formal education, and she does so in a way that closes off, at least temporarily, the specific achievement the novel had spent its final chapters building toward. A reader is entitled to find this ending a disappointment, or at minimum a compromise, relative to the novel's earlier insistence on Anne's right to ambition.

But several textual features complicate a reading of the ending as simple capitulation. First, the choice is explicitly framed as Anne's own, arrived at through her own reasoning and offered to Marilla as a gift rather than extracted from her by anyone's demand;

Marilla in fact initially resists the idea, worried about Anne's future, and it is Anne who insists. Second, and crucially, Anne makes this choice from a position of already-proven capability rather than from a position of having never had the chance to prove herself: she has already won the scholarship outright, in open competition, and that achievement unlike the scholarship itself cannot be retracted or diminished by her subsequent decision. The novel does not suggest that Anne postpones her education because she doubts her own capacity; it suggests she postpones it because she judges, in this particular moment, that Marilla's need is more pressing, and because she has both the standing and the freedom to make that judgment for herself. Third, the novel closes not with resignation but with a passage of real hope and forward motion Anne's famous reflection that "the world doesn't seem such a howling wilderness" and that "there's always a bend" in the road ahead language that frames her decision as one chapter within a longer story rather than as a final foreclosure of ambition. And fourth, as Section 11 below discusses, Montgomery herself did not treat the ending as final: across the sequels that follow, Anne does eventually attend college, at Redmond, and pursues both a literary and an eventual professional life, which retroactively confirms that the first novel's ending was conceived as a delay rather than a permanent redirection.

The most persuasive feminist reading of the ending, then, is not that Montgomery argues women should choose domestic duty over ambition as a general principle, but that she argues a woman who has demonstrated the capacity to choose either path should be trusted to make that choice herself, according to her own values, without the choice being read by others or by the narrative as evidence of her diminished capability. This is a more conservative feminism than a twenty-first-century reader might wish for, and it does not fully escape the gravitational pull of the domestic-duty plot that the rest of the novel had worked so hard to resist. But it is meaningfully a feminism of agency and self-determination, rather than a feminism of resignation, and the distinction is worth preserving rather than collapsing.

Anne in the Sequels: Continuation of the Feminist Arc

Any full assessment of Anne of Green Gables's feminist politics benefits from considering what Montgomery does with Anne afterward, across the sequels that eventually extended into an eight-book series. In *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), Anne teaches at the Avonlea school and continues her intellectual life through informal study with Gilbert and through her involvement with the Avonlea Village Improvement Society, a civic project she herself proposes and leads an early instance of Anne exercising a form of public, organizational leadership beyond the domestic sphere. In *Anne of the Island* (1915), Montgomery makes good on the earlier novel's deferred promise: Anne attends Redmond College, earns a B.A., and pursues both academic achievement and a literary career, publishing her first stories, before finally accepting Gilbert's proposal again, notably, only after both have completed their education and established themselves as intellectual equals rather than as rescuer and rescued.

The later novels in the series, including *Anne's House of Dreams* and *Anne of Ingleside*, shift Anne's central concerns toward marriage and motherhood, and feminist critics have reasonably observed that the series' later volumes are more conventional in their gender politics than the first novel, with Anne's own literary ambitions receding as her domestic responsibilities as a doctor's wife and mother expand. This trajectory across the series as a whole should temper any claim that Montgomery's feminism is uniformly sustained or radicalized over time; if anything, the arc of the full series suggests a negotiated compromise between ambition and domesticity that mirrors, in fictional form, the tensions Montgomery herself navigated across her own life and marriage. But the crucial point for this article's argument is that the deferral in *Anne of Green Gables's* ending is honoured rather than betrayed: Anne does go to college, and the first novel's final chapters are best read, in light of what follows, as a postponement made possible by Anne's already-secured standing, not as a permanent narrative closing-off of her ambitions.

Critical Reception and Feminist Scholarship

Anne of Green Gables was, from its first publication, a considerable commercial success, but sustained academic feminist attention to the novel developed more gradually, alongside the broader growth of childhood studies and girlhood studies as scholarly fields from the 1970s onward. Early academic treatments of Montgomery's work were often preoccupied with questions of regional identity and literary sentimentalism, sometimes at the expense of serious engagement with its gender politics. Since the 1980s and 1990s, however, scholars including Mary Rubio, Elizabeth Waterston, Elizabeth Epperly, and later contributors to the Montgomery studies field associated with the L. M. Montgomery Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island have argued with increasing specificity for reading Montgomery's fiction as engaged, whether consciously or not, with the New Woman discourse of her period, and for taking seriously the tension in her work between female ambition and the domestic and religious obligations of her Presbyterian, rural Canadian milieu.

Montgomery's own journals, published in edited form beginning in the 1980s, have been particularly important to this scholarly reassessment, since they reveal a woman considerably more ambivalent about marriage, domestic obligation, and the constraints of her social position than the relatively serene surface of her published fiction might suggest. Reading *Anne of Green Gables* alongside these journals has allowed scholars to identify the novel's negotiated, sometimes contradictory treatment of female ambition as a direct reflection of tensions Montgomery lived rather than as an incidental feature of a children's story, lending considerable weight to a feminist critical approach to the novel that earlier, more purely sentimental readings tended to overlook.

Conclusion

Anne of Green Gables is not a feminist tract, and Montgomery herself would likely have resisted the label for a book she conceived primarily as entertainment and as a commercially viable serial for a popular audience. But its feminism lives persistently in its texture, in the accumulated weight of many small narrative choices rather than in any single declared argument: in a heroine who is permitted to be too much too loud, too clever, too imaginative, too quick to anger and who is loved by her own narrative rather

than corrected by it into blandness. It lives in an unmarried woman, Marilla Cuthbert, who is never an object of the narrative's pity for her spinsterhood and whose household authority goes fundamentally unquestioned. It lives in a friendship, between Anne and Diana, treated with as much narrative seriousness as courtship. And it lives in a rival, Gilbert Blythe, who yields ground to Anne rather than rescuing her, and who wins her only once they stand as intellectual equals.

MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS AFTER ITS PUBLICATION, ANNE SHIRLEY REMAINS A COMPELLING FEMINIST FIGURE NOT BECAUSE SHE REJECTS THE CONSTRAINTS OF AVONLEA'S WORLD OUTRIGHT, SHE DOES NOT AND BY THE NOVEL'S END SHE HAS EMBRACED MUCH OF IT, INCLUDING ITS DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL OBLIGATIONS BUT BECAUSE SHE INSISTS, THROUGHOUT, ON ENTERING THAT WORLD ENTIRELY AS HERSELF: IMAGINATION, TEMPER, AMBITION, AND ALL. AND THE WORLD OF THE NOVEL, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY AT FIRST, MAKES ROOM FOR HER RATHER THAN REQUIRING HER TO MAKE HERSELF SMALLER TO FIT IT. THAT, FINALLY, IS THE QUIET REBELLION AT THE HEART OF ANNE OF GREEN GABLES, AND IT IS WHY THE NOVEL CONTINUES TO BE READ, TAUGHT, AND ARGUED OVER BY EACH NEW GENERATION OF READERS ENCOUNTERING ANNE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

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