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Anne of Green Gables: Childhood, Feminism, and the Canadian story

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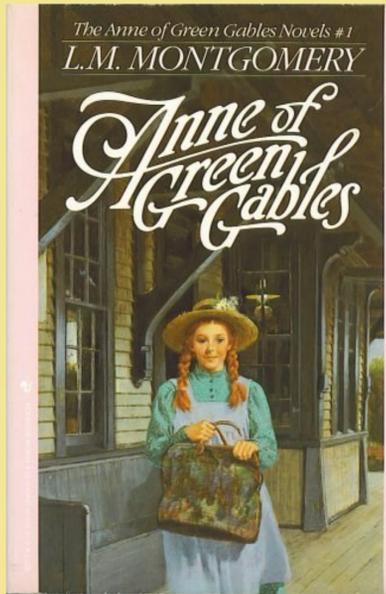
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Anne of Green Gables:

Childhood, Feminism and the Canadian story

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Abstract:

Anne of Green Gables presents three unique, distinct, and incredibly important narratives that have implications for today's society. First, Anne acts as a proto-essentialist feminist. By explicitly rejecting the objectification and fetishization of young girls, Anne is able to create space for herself and other young females to grow and learn. Secondly, Anne's relationship with Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert demonstrates a need for society to give legitimacy to children and the genuine experiences they face. By doing so, the township of Avonlea is culturally transformed into one with greater compassion, empathy, and richness, and transforms ideas of childhood, the feminine, and family. Finally, *Anne of Green Gables* transforms the classic Canadian literature narrative of survival into a story about how to thrive in a community, against all odds.



Childhood

The legitimacy of the childhood experience is often undermined by the actions of adults. In the case of Anne, her adoptive mother, Marilla, possessed strong Protestant ideals surrounding child rearing. This was supplemented by external actors within a small community to contribute to the overall environment of the township of Avonlea.

Yet, Anne's experience as an orphan forced Anne to explore and discover identity in a way that other children during her time were unable to do. Thus Anne had a strong, although feisty, identity that was rooted in self agency and self determination.

The contact zone between the Protestant ideals of Marilla and other adults in Avonlea and Anne's rejection of these ideals creates a societal dialogue on childhood. By the end of the novel, most of the adults of Avonlea are reminded of the intrinsic value of childhood: imagination, exploration of self, and honesty.

Feminism

Anne, while possessing a multitude of identity markers such as intelligence, competitiveness, and empathy, possessed a strong sense of what it meant to be woman in 19th century, conservative/Protestant Canada. With the application of a simple dual understanding of feminism (essentialism vs egalitarianism) readers can see that Anne rejects the objectification and fetishization of young girls by deploying proto-essentialist feminism.

While 19th century women occupied completely different categories than men, Anne utilized her unique identity to redefine her and other girls' roles in relation to the other young boys.

This proto-feminism was an indirect product of the Enlightenment that took place just decades before the story of Anne. The instilled sense of individuality created both scenarios Anne finds herself experiencing. First, Anne is reduced to her physical characteristics (namely by other young boys' psychological attitude towards girls and women.) By the same coin, Anne is able to utilize her individualism to define herself and reject external challenges to her identity: in this case what it means to be a girl.

Canadian Story

"Canadian Literature is the literature of survival"—Margaret Atwood.

The nature of the land, especially on the east coast of Canada made life hard for early explorers. Unlike Americans who travelled to escape religious persecution, the Canadian experience has always been about natural resources. The dialogue between mankind and the land established the Canadian myth: survival.

While the story of survival may apply to Anne due to her jumps from foster home to foster home on Canada's rugged east coast, it is the cultural shift that Anne created in Avonlea that expands the Canadian story.

More specifically, Anne's actions all take place within the preexisting constructs of Protestant society, such as church and school. But it is *how* Anne functions within these institutions that changes the story from the physical dialogue into the social dialogue of what it means to thrive rather than merely survive.

"Some people go through life trying to find out what the world holds for them only to find out too late that it's what they bring to the world that really counts."

Sources:

Margaret Atwood: Survival

Shein.com

School Library Journal

Anne of Green Gables: L.M.

Montgomery