

**The Courage to Imagine:**  
**Anne's Pursuit of her Ambitions in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, *Anne of Avonlea*, and *Anne of the Island***

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**American Children's Literature (20th century)**

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## **Abstract**

The literary genre of *bildungsroman* embodies narratives involving the development and process of maturing and becoming an adult of their protagonists. These novels narrate their protagonists' journey from infancy towards adulthood. This genre has been evolving before it was coined *bildungsroman* in the eighteenth century. At those times, these novels were only focused on male characters, but some female authors have introduced female protagonists to these novels in the last centuries. An author who has devoted her writing career to address children with her female *bildungsromans* is Lucy Maud Montgomery. The present study analyses the first three novels of Montgomery's *Anne* book series that account for the protagonist's coming-of-age: *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), and *Anne of the Island* (1915). This study examines the evolution of the protagonist's (Anne's) imagination throughout these three novels in order to demonstrate that the author presents Anne's imagination as a driving force that allows the protagonist to question the limits imposed on her by reality, and to thrive and create her own life, even if that involves defying the established gender roles. The data presented in this paper may have significant value for the field of study as it extends the existing knowledge of the role of imagination in this series. The existing research fails to describe the development of Anne's imagination during her whole coming-of-age and it only focuses on her imagination in the first of the novels. Regarding future research, it would be interesting to assess whether imagination still has a meaningful role in the rest of the novels that compose the series. The paper concludes by arguing that in a society where children grow under the influence of technological devices that leave them with little time for daydreaming, it is significant to read works such as these where imagination is fostered.

**Keywords:** imagination, ambitions, gender roles, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Anne of Avonlea*, *Anne of the Island*, Lucy Maud Montgomery, *bildungsroman*, coming-of-age.

‘the vision and the faculty divine’ ... that gift which the world cannot bestow or take away, of looking at life through some transfiguring ... or revealing? ... medium, whereby everything seemed apparelled in celestial light, wearing a glory and a freshness not visible to those who ... looked at things only through prose. (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 354)

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## 1. Introduction

Since many centuries ago, there have been several novels centred on the childhood and adolescence of their protagonists. At the beginning, these novels were only centred on males. Long before the publishing of *Anne of Green Gables*, some novels accounted for their protagonists' developmental process from childhood to adulthood. They were named *bildungsromans*. The most paradigmatic examples of this genre are *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Goethe), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Joyce), *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger), and *David Copperfield* (Dickens). However, there are also novels of this kind where the protagonists are females, such as *Little Women* (Louisa May Alcott), *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë), and the *Anne of Green Gables* book series, which I will analyse throughout this paper.

*Bildungsroman* is a term borrowed from German that refers to a kind of novel, as the noun "roman" indicates, centred on the development – "bildung" – of a person within a society (Maier 317). Additionally, as Maier affirms:

The literary protagonist must leave his home environment to experience the world; in his encounters with people and new surroundings, the reader sees the multiple influences of these experiences on his developing character and his 'becoming' as an individual in society with a secure, self-formulated identity. (318)

Generally, as argued by Abrams, *bildungsroman* novels capture the evolution of their protagonists from childhood to adulthood. Moreover, in this process, they need to endure inevitable confrontations that will eventually allow them to arrive at a maturational stage (qtd. in Noomé 126). These happenings are named "rites of passage". There are several possible rites of passage that these characters may experience. However, Gates explains that the most traditionally employed rites of passage are the following: "birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and death" (172).

Nevertheless, several attempts have been made to scrutinise whether some novels should be considered as part of this genre or not. Furthermore, some authors show diverging opinions on this subject matter. The genre of *bildungsroman* has been broadly related to the German Enlightenment. Because of that association, some authors will only accept as a *bildungsroman* a novel written in Germany between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Graham 3). Following this line, authors disagree about whether

these kinds of novels based on female protagonists should be included in the definition of *bildungsroman*. This controversy comes from the fact that for an extended time in history, almost until the late eighteenth century, novels were concerned with the evolution of male characters. Before that moment, it would have been almost unimaginable to think of a female protagonist, and even less to a young girl (Maier 317).

Therefore, critics such as Ellis propose lists of characteristics that these novels surrounding female development must accomplish to be considered such. For example, she proposes three factors to be fulfilled: there must be an agentic protagonist who is implicated in her evolution; she must be thoughtful, which will allow her to develop her character; and she must be adapted to society (qtd. in Maier 318-319). In contrast, Noomé attempts to analyse whether female and male *bildungsroman* work in the same way. To carry her study out, she develops a list of five features that these novels should follow. This author states that a *bildungsroman* must be concerned with a character's growth from an early stage in their life to adulthood. There must be several rites of passage that allow the protagonists to grow by learning from them. The protagonists must suffer from some personal crisis, and they must confront the challenge of deciding whether or not to adapt to societal expectations. Finally, they must mature, and maturity must entail a certain acceptance of their personality (129). There seems to be no agreement on the definitions of the genre. However, Graham explains that the definition should not be so rigid as there are many unique and different variations of the *bildungsroman* that remain to be part of the genre (4).

On the other hand, while authors such as Lazzaro-Weis claim that there is no such a thing as the female *bildungsroman* (34), Pratt asserts that there is indeed a female *bildungsroman*. However, in these novels, “society provides women with models for ‘growing down’ instead of ‘growing up’, as is the case in the male model” (Pratt, qtd. in Lazzaro-Weis 19). This idea of “growing down” is further exemplified by Joannou’s words when she explains that the main difference between the coming-of-age of male and female characters is that when women grow, they have to face the weight of gender roles and the consequences of living in a patriarchal world (202).

For this dissertation, I will analyse the three first novels of the *Anne of Green Gables* book series. Even though the series is composed of eight books, the reader should bear in mind that only the three first novels – *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Anne of Avonlea*

(1909) and *Anne of the Island* (1915) – focus on the coming-of-age of Anne, the protagonist. These three books deal with eleven years in the life of Anne since she is eleven until she becomes a twenty-two-year-old woman. During these years, she has to endure several calamities – some more trivial than others –. She is influenced by her imagination and by the people who accompany her in her way towards adulthood.

These novels are *bildungsromans*, and several scholars affirm that the author Lucy Maud Montgomery manoeuvres the genre to let her protagonist learn from her mistakes (Miller 129) and, at the same time, she also allows her readers to learn (126). Taking all this information into consideration, the aim of this research paper is, therefore, to demonstrate how Montgomery presents imagination as a driving force that allows Anne to question the limits that reality imposes on her, to thrive, and create her own life, even if that involves defying the established gender roles.

This hypothesis will be tested by analysing the role of imagination in the three novels to scrutinise how it changes with Anne’s coming-of-age and how it affects the protagonist. The overall structure of the study takes the form of six main sections, including this introductory chapter, a theoretical background and contextual information, and a conclusion that gives a summary and critique of these research findings.

Throughout this dissertation, the 8<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) will be employed to cite and index the utilised sources.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Central to this novel – and more specifically, children’s literature – is the concept of imagination. Previous studies have reported different views on the concept of imagination and its implications. However, these diverging thoughts are all somehow connected. Warnock, for example, claims that imagination plays a crucial role in allowing a better understanding of the world and proposes the following definition for imagination: “Imagination as that which creates mental images” (10). She also claims that imagination is essential for creativity, and she presents two romantic poets as the best examples of this creative imagination: Coleridge and Wordsworth (10). This author also cites Hume’s research on imagination and explains that imagination is vital for reasoning as it provides people with new ideas to marvel at (qtd. in Warnock 15).

Many distinct kinds of imagination have been described. For example, Walton presents the following classification of imagination: “spontaneous and deliberate



imagining” (the former occurs unconsciously and the latter, consciously); “occurrent and nonoccurrent imaginings” (these may or may not employ straightforward concentration); and “social and solitary imaginings” (imagining in the company of other people or alone) (qtd. in Liao and Gendler). Currie and Ravenscroft propose more kinds of imagination among which we may find “creative imagination” (this kind of imagination implies a combination of thoughts in an innovative form) (qtd. in Liao and Gendler).

Furthermore, imagination has widely been associated with aestheticism. For instance, “David Hume and Immanuel Kant both invoke imagination centrally in their exploration of aesthetic phenomena” (Liao and Gendler). In connection with this idea of aesthetics, philosophers like R.G. Collingwood define art as a way of expressing one’s feelings imaginatively (Wiltsher, qtd. in Liao and Gendler). Walton claims that taking pleasure from art resembles children’s enjoyment of make-believes (Liao and Gendler). Related to the connection above between art and imagination, Kant asserts that imagination allows for creating art (Liao and Gendler).

Rieber and Carton provide the following definition for imagination: “the introduction of something new into the flow of our impressions, the transformation of these impressions such that something new, an image that did not previously exist, emerges” (339). These researchers claim that imagination is enriching for children and that school years play a significant role in their development of imagination, as they allow infants to devote time to daydream (346).

Besides, it has been revealed that even though it has been generally assumed that imagination plays a different role for each child, this assumption has resulted in being false. It is a booster for them to achieve their objectives (347). Notwithstanding, giving them the boost they need to achieve their goals is not imagination’s only mission. As Jalongo explains, it also acts as a mental refuge that provides them with security (168). Furthermore, it also prepares children for future socialisation with people (Singer and Singer 12). Besides, if encouraged by their parents, imagination results in being fruitful for infants to develop their language skills and other cognitive abilities, as shown by recent studies (Singer and Singer 24). Nevertheless, as imagination serves as a preparation for the future, it does not work in the same way in adulthood. Rosengren and French claim in their article that imagination is an ability that evolves during childhood and eventually decreases while approaching adulthood (42).

These characteristics of imagination during childhood and its evolution from infancy to adulthood can be observed in detail in the *Anne* series.

### 3. Contextual Information

Before focusing on the analysis of the three novels, it is relevant to introduce their author. Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) is one of the best well-known Canadian writers. She was born in Prince Edward Island, where she based many of her stories. During her life, Montgomery lived through the Victorian<sup>1</sup> and Edwardian Eras, and experienced both the Great War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). During her writing career, she had to face a conservative society – mainly promoted by Queen Victoria and King Edward –. Because of this, as women writers were not very well accepted, Montgomery had to sign her works with pseudonyms such as Maud Cavendish and Joyce Cavendish – Cavendish is a rural area in Prince Edward where she lived for a prolonged time –. Finally, she modified her aliases to L. M. Montgomery so that readers would not know she was a woman (McIntosh and Devereux).

Montgomery wrote literature for children, and her most legendary characters are Anne of Green Gables and Emily of New Moon. Simon declares that Anne is “among the most iconic characters in all children’s literature” (157). In addition, the novel *Anne of Green Gables* is considered the most outstanding Canadian book (Reimer 1036). Her novels show autobiographical notions, and they deal with issues of feminism and imagination. She has written twenty-one novels, short stories, and poetry books (McIntosh and Devereux). The *Anne of Green Gables* book series consists of eight novels, and the series of Emily of New Moon is a trilogy. Moreover, McIntosh and Devereux affirm that “her body of work has sold an estimated fifty million copies worldwide. *Anne of Green Gables* alone has been translated into at least thirty-six languages as well as braille. It has been adapted dozens of times in various mediums”. The most recent adaptation is a Canadian television series named *Anne with an E*, based on *Anne of Green Gables*. Regarding her honours, L. M. Montgomery is a very recognised author who has been awarded important rewards (McIntosh and Devereux).

Turning to the three novels analysed in this research paper, *Anne of Green Gables* tells the story of Anne, an eleven-year-old orphan. After spending most of her life in an orphanage and shelter houses, Anne is mistakenly adopted by Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, two single siblings who wanted to adopt a boy. However, once they adopt Anne,

the Cuthberts grow fond of her and decide to raise her as if she were their daughter. Soon after she is adopted, Anne meets her new best friend-to-be, Diana Barry, with whom she goes to the school of Avonlea. Anne demonstrates to be one of the best students, equalling Gilbert Blythe, her classmate, and rival. Throughout the story, Anne displays an imaginative and emotional personality that leads her to have dreams and ambitions. At the end of the story, Anne attends the Queen's Academy to get a teaching license and receives an Avery Scholarship to study for a degree at Redmond College. Nevertheless, as her adoptive father dies and Marilla loses part of her vision, Anne decides to stay with Marilla in Avonlea and work as a teacher at her former school.

*Anne of Avonlea* is the second novel in the *Anne* series. The story begins when Anne is about to start teaching at the Avonlea School. She is now sixteen years old. Once at school, Anne meets her students, and Paul Irving is the one with whom she shares more things in common, such as their imaginative capacity. Later in the story, her neighbour Mrs Lynde becomes a widow and decides to move with Anne and Marilla to Green Gables. This event allows Anne to leave her job at the school and go to college for the following academic year as Marilla now has Lynde's company and does not need Anne's help. Finally, Anne advances towards adulthood.

In the novel *Anne of the Island*, Anne is eighteen, and she is about to leave for college at Kingsport. Some of her friends join her, but her best friend stays in Avonlea. Anne lives at a boarding school with her friend Priscilla, and she meets more friends on the campus. During this time, she has many suitors, and they propose marriage to her, although she rejects them all. At the end of the school year, Anne and some of her girlfriends rent a small house that the protagonist finds inspiring. There, Anne begins to write short stories; nevertheless, she fails in having them published. Later in the story, Gilbert confesses that he is in love with Anne, but she rejects him. After that, she meets a boy she likes. However, when he proposes to her, Anne turns him down as she realises that she is not in love with him, but with Gilbert. Finally, she graduates and leaves for Avonlea, where she tells Gilbert about her feelings. He proposes to Anne once more, and she accepts.

In the following sections, I will analyse the role of imagination in these three novels and its implications for the protagonist.

#### 4. Anne's Imaginative Childhood in *Anne of Green Gables*

In the first scene of the novel, Anne is presented as an orphan girl who is waiting outside the Bright River train station, where she is supposed to be picked up by her future adoptive father, Matthew Cuthbert. The wait fills her with uncertainty, and thus she resorts to her imagination in order to entertain herself and plan what she would do if Matthew Cuthbert did not come for her:

I had made up my mind that if you didn't come for me tonight I'd go down the track to that big wild cherry-tree at the bend, and climb up into it to stay all night. I wouldn't be a bit afraid, and it would be lovely to sleep in a wild cherry-tree all white with bloom in the moonshine, don't you think? You could imagine you were dwelling in marble halls, couldn't you? (17)

As this passage illustrates, Anne's imaginative capacity acts not only as "a source of pleasure for Anne, but also as a source of survival, motivation, and power" (Gray 169). Her imagination helps her to make her wait more pleasant and, at the same time, it provides her with protection from a possible negative outcome: no one coming to collect her. Anne's intentional use of her imagination dates back to when she was left in an asylum: even if there was "so little scope for imagination" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 18). Anne's discomfort in the orphanage can be observed when she talks about a "few poor weeny-teeny" (22) trees from the asylum, whose description reflects Anne's as she claims that she understands how they feel, implying that she was enduring an analogous situation to theirs (22). Even so, her imagination would become her ally and her refuge in times of hardship to make her stay as enjoyable and as pleasant as possible.

However, Anne's imagination not only makes her life more pleasing and accompanies her through challenging times, but also provides her with opportunities. Her first opportunity arrives when Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert adopt her. Her adoption happens by mistake as they did not ask for a girl. There was a misunderstanding with the asylum's staff. They are in search of a boy who would help them with their farm, and notwithstanding, they adopt Anne. The adoption happens because Matthew familiarises himself with Anne's lively character and even if "he had never expected to enjoy the society of a little girl" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 21), he takes pleasure in Anne's company (21). However, it is not only Matthew's idea to adopt Anne, but also Marilla's who, pushed by her brother and her sorrow for the little girl who would be

adopted by a cruel family, agrees to the adoption. Anne's personality, shaped by her unique way of viewing the world and by her zest for life, transforms her into a desirable option for the reserved and conservative Cuthbert siblings, who are neither looking for a girl nor can afford to have one due to their precarious position.

Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert's reserved and conservative nature reflects the values of the Victorian era. The fact that such a conservative family adopts, accepts, and loves Anne is very salient because she does not fit in with the passive role that Victorian society assigned to young women. This role mainly consisted of women being relegated to the household, marrying at a noticeably early age, and not doing any other activities outside of marriage ("Victorian Era Courtship Rules And Marriage Facts"). By creating an unconventional protagonist who is respected by her adoptive family, the author, who, like Anne, grew up in a conservative environment (McIntosh and Devereux), advocates for a society in which women who do not adapt to the established social norms are, nevertheless, accepted.

In any case, even if the Cuthbert siblings accept Anne as she is, they also insist on her adapting to societal expectations of women in areas such as housework. Therefore, Anne has to cook at home, and she also has to learn to patchwork. Interestingly, it is when she does these types of activities that Anne feels that her capacity to imagine decreases. She claims that "there's no scope for imagination in patchwork" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 126), or "in cookery" (172). Montgomery resorts to the expression "no scope for imagination" to rebel against those activities that limited women's possibilities and ambitions. Some other times, Anne can imagine things while doing household chores, but the consequences are disastrous: for example, when she has to bake a pie, she cannot resist the temptation to imagine, what makes her forget about her duties and which eventually leads her to burn the pie (225-226). A few chapters later, she even claims that her "besetting sin is imagining too much and forgetting my duties" (287).

Luckily for Anne, her life is not limited to household chores, and there are even moments in which everyday life exceeds her expectations. When Anne first travels to Avonlea in Matthew's carriage and they go through a beautiful spot named "the Avenue", the landscape – a "long canopy of snowy, fragrant bloom", where the air "was full of purple twilight", and there was "a glimpse of painted sunset sky" (25) – is so sublime and beautiful that it makes the talkative Anne remain silent in order to admire it. The girl

claims that “it was wonderful – wonderful. It’s the first thing I ever saw that couldn’t be improved upon by imagination” (26). Anne’s reality also exceeds her expectations when it comes to friendships. For example, her best friend Diana “couldn’t be improved upon even by imagination” (146). Anne, who before arriving in Avonlea had never imagined she could witness anything better than the figments of her imagination (20), discovers that real life has many beautiful and surprising things to offer and is willing to appreciate them.

Nevertheless, even if the protagonist considers that her imagination could not improve upon some of the most positive aspects of her life, she cannot resist the temptation of adding her distinctive touch to them: For example, in the case of the Avenue, she renames it and gives it the name of “The White Way of Delight”, because, in her opinion, the original name does not do justice to its magnificence (26). Besides, at the beginning of the novel, when she has just been adopted, Anne even tries to change her name for “Cordelia”, as she thinks it sounds more romantic<sup>2</sup> and fits her personality better. When her adoptive parents reject it and she cannot officially change her name, she decides to spell “Anne” with an “e” as “it makes such a difference. It looks so much nicer” (34).

Anne’s traits are not those of a commonplace girl in the late nineteenth century, and because of this, her name cannot be common either. Anne does not adjust to the ideas of femininity of that society: she is not a submissive, quiet girl. Instead, she shapes the world and the way others perceive it and how they regard her. Even if girls were supposed to be silent, Anne’s language is characterised by her stream of consciousness. Montgomery displays Anne’s emerging thoughts, for example, at the beginning of her journey to Avonlea with Matthew, where she tells him each of the ideas that come to her mind (21). Moreover, her imagination is linked to the romantic vocabulary she uses to express her deepest feelings and thoughts, many times related to nature. It is this way of portraying the world through her imaginative language that allows everyone that she meets to adjust their manner of appreciating the world (Bernroth Overton 4). Hence, thanks to all these qualities, she gains the love of Avonlea, even though she does not conform to the ideas of how girls have to be. And it is also because of Anne’s settled personality that people in Avonlea realise that Anne must not change, it is them who need to adapt to her (8).

The protagonist of Lucy Maud Montgomery's novel also makes use of her imagination so that her external appearance is aligned with her inner self. For example, she imagines that her dresses have puffed sleeves instead of straight sleeves because she thinks that, like the name "Cordelia", they romanticise her style. However, exercising her imagination is easy when she is alone in her room, but it becomes hard when she goes to school and realises that every girl but herself is wearing puffed sleeves: "I tried to imagine mine were puffed, too, but I couldn't ... it was awfully hard there among the other who had really truly puffs" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 112).

Anne even makes the effort of imagining that she likes her clothes to avoid hurting the feelings of Marilla and Matthew, as they cannot afford to buy her the types of dresses she likes (107), but her efforts are in vain. Her incapacity to like the dresses comes from the fact that Anne's ideas and tastes are very well established. Thus, Anne cannot force herself to like something she dislikes. Anne also tries to console herself about her family's austerity when, in a visit to Diana's wealthy aunt's house, she claims that one of the advantages of being poor is that the range of things to be imagined is wider than when you are rich, as wealthy people have so many things that it does not allow any "scope for imagination" (323). Nevertheless, the examples above indicate that Anne's ability to imagine and transform reality has its limits and that imagination cannot wholly compensate for the things she does not have. But under no circumstances does Anne abandon her passion for dreaming and beautifying her reality. And it is her indefatigability that best describes her.

In short, Anne's imaginative capacity prevents her from being a conformist (Makrancy). Moreover, as Gray explains, her imagination allows her to discover an ideal and romantic world. This creative capacity works for her as a force that brings transformation (170), which gives an agentive role to the protagonist: she shapes her reality. In fact, it is her imagination that helps Anne through the process of discovering her dreams and ambitions and viewing the world from a unique point of view. Furthermore, Gammel has argued that Anne's typically romantic feature of enjoying nature is her form of developing and moulding her character (230).

It should also be noted that Anne does not keep her imaginative power to herself. Instead, she fosters the imagination of her female friends as well. For example, she and Diana imagine together that "the wood was haunted" (Montgomery, *Anne of Green*

*Gables* 227), and even if that becomes a dreadful experience from which they learn not to imagine horrible things, it contributes to the naming of the forest as “The Haunted Wood”. Later in the story, more girls join Anne and Diana in the improvement of their imaginative capacity and they form a storytelling club. The fact that Anne only shares her gift with other girls –and not with boys– could show that the author wanted to give the rest of the girls in Avonlea an agentive role instead of the passive one assigned to them by society. Moreover, it would help them develop a sense of sorority and a female community where they would feel able to unfold their abilities without being invalidated by male figures (Kornfeld and Jackson, qtd. in Bernroth Overton 11).

Even though imagination is always accompanying Anne, at the end of the novel, the protagonist is more focused on finishing her studies than on the wanderings of her mind. This change shows how she is growing and losing some of the freedom she enjoyed as a child. Nevertheless, Anne still thinks it is relevant for her to take time to let her mind wander and frequent her favourite places (Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 403), that is, the places where her imagination can run wild. Even though she needs to leave her imagination aside as she grows older, Anne does not forget about it and eventually returns to it, for it has many benefits for her. Furthermore, she claims that “it’s delightful to have ambitions” (390), which she could not have if it were not for an imagination that helped her to see beyond societal expectations. And even though she needs to put aside her aspirations of studying to care for her stepmother, Anne does not abandon her ambitions and pursues them, not being completely relegated to the household and still maintaining her agentive role in society.

From the analysis of the first novel, we can conclude that although the role of Anne’s imagination is different depending on the situation, it works as a guide for her to admire the beauty of everyday life and to realise that being a girl will not stop her from doing whatever she resolves herself to do.

##### **5. Anne: Staying Close to Childhood in *Anne of Avonlea***

When this novel begins, the protagonist is sixteen years old, and she is about to start her career as a teacher in the Avonlea School, where she studied before going to Queens. At this point, Anne considers that her life is satisfying enough as she still lives in Avonlea, whose landscapes she regards as inspiring. Anne is happy to be working as a schoolteacher, as she enjoys the company of young children. When she and her friend



Diana are on their way to an A.V.I.S. meeting – the Avonlea Village Improvement Society which, along with some of her friends, Anne forms to better Avonlea –, Anne claims that “[she would] be certain to dream ... [she] was a dryad or a wood-nymph ... But just this minute ... [she is] content to be Anne Shirley” (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 52). This statement shows a considerable evolution in Anne’s life and her use of imagination. There is a huge contrast with *Anne of Green Gables*, especially with the beginning of that first novel, where the protagonist resorted to her imagination in harsh situations to escape reality. However, in *Anne of Avonlea*, Anne has embraced her life and found comfort in her routine. But, even then, she does not abandon her passion for dreaming and, a brief time after telling Diana that she is content with her life, she explains that she still takes pleasure from imagining things after going to bed (53).

Nevertheless, Anne finds it hard to find time for cultivating her imagination, as she is busy with her job, the A.V.I.S meetings and her assistance in breeding Marilla’s deceased cousin’s twins Dora and Davy, whom she decides to take care of until their uncle returns to Canada. Because of that hustle, Anne explains that the only spare time she can devote to her imagination is on her way home from the Avonlea School (97). During those walks, the protagonist imagines she is “something very brilliant triumphant and splendid... a Red Cross nurse or a queen” (97). This excerpt is an exhibition of how Anne’s imagination works as an incentive for her to become a woman who does not abandon her dreams and ambitions. We may notice that she has not lost her ambitions due to the lack of free time and that she desires to continue improving even if she could accommodate herself in her routine, as she already has a job.

Anne’s imagination is also present in her job as a teacher. The protagonist believes that her mission is not only to help her students learn, but also to show them the importance of imagination. She admits she would “like to add some beauty to life ... [not] to make people *know* more” (70). Some people in the village do not accept her views on teaching. For example, when Anne is about to finish her task as a teacher in order to go to college, one of the women in Avonlea claims that she does not approve of her teaching methods as she teaches imaginative stories and takes her students to the forest (336). Her words show reticence towards Anne’s methods. Nevertheless, most of the children enjoy her lessons. Her teaching approach based on showing them the benefits of imagination can be viewed as a form of pushing them to have ambitions and question the limits that society imposes on them.

However, there is a student who does not like Anne as a teacher. That student is Anthony Pye, who misbehaves and shows a lack of respect towards her. Even if Anne is resolved not to hit any of her students, as some of her teachers did (35), she cannot avoid hitting Anthony when he admits having put a mouse on Anne's desk. Surprisingly for her, even if she feels wrong about whipping a student, she earns his respect with that action. In fact, Anthony recognises that her beating was "just as good as a man's" (132), which shows that one of the reasons why he did not respect her before was that she was a woman (Trimingham Jack 117). Nonetheless, Anne feels ashamed (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 131). Thus, we may observe how her loving behaviour towards her students prevails and how she does not hit a student again.

Anne has a great connection with her students, but it is no coincidence that her favourite one is Paul Irving. She confesses that although she knows she should not have favouritisms, Paul is the student she likes best (119-120). Since she first meets him, he becomes a kindred spirit<sup>3</sup> for Anne. Throughout the novel, the reader may observe how they share their dreams and imaginations as they know that they are a source of a richer life experience (169). But even though Anne thinks well of Paul, the rest of the people think he is crazy and even mentally ill because he has imaginary friends (215). However, his imagination is one of the reasons why Anne decides to spend time with him and show him that there is nothing wrong with his fantasies.

Actually, for her, Paul's fantasy is a wonderful trait, as her decision to be a teacher is not only based on her love for children but also on the fact that, that way, she will be in contact with childhood, a period of life characterised by imagination and where she would like to return. She even states that "one can't get over the habit of being a little girl" (97). Even if Anne is approaching adult life and has more responsibilities than she did when she was a kid, she attempts not to abandon her passion for imagination that accompanied her when she was a child. No matter if she has less time to devote to her fantasies, Anne does not want to lose the essence of the imaginative child she once was.

Being a teacher is an optimal opportunity for Anne to cultivate her imagination, but the school where she works as a teacher is not the only place where she can make the most of her ability to imagine things. In the novel, Montgomery presents Prince Edward Island, where Avonlea is located, as a favourable environment to escape from reality and fantasise. This fact can be noticed from the beginning of the first novel, where Anne

admires the landscapes of Avonlea and enjoys wandering through the forest and letting her imagination run wild. During one of those wanderings, Anne finds an old garden and discovers that it belonged to Hester Gray, a woman who died at age twenty-two, about thirty years before Anne learns about her story. Hester Gray lived in a city in the United States but needed some rest from the city life, and she found that rest in Prince Edward Island. In Anne's opinion, Hester Gray was fortunate to find a place like that where she could escape from reality, as not everyone has such an opportunity (141-144).

Even if she does not overtly say so and even if she cannot personally meet her, it may be argued that Anne finds a kindred spirit in Hester Gray. Hester Gray becomes Anne's soulmate, as both admire beauty (144). It is, in fact, through Hester's eyes that Anne remembers once more the immense value of taking pleasure in nature and admiring the place where she lives. A few moments after being acquainted with Hester's story, Anne wonders at a log and exclaims that "it's the most beautiful poem ... [she] ever saw" (146). This assertion, which her friends do not share, shows how thanks to her new potential kindred spirit, Anne again devotes time to admire the beautiful landscapes of the island and takes delight in such a common thing as a log.

The day Anne discovers Hester Gray's garden is not the only time when the protagonist finds new inspiring people thanks to her wanderings, as she also meets Miss Lavendar Lewis when she and Diana take a detour. Miss Lavendar is a solitary woman who had once been engaged to Paul Irving's father. When Diana and Anne first meet her, Miss Lavendar claims that she is very forlorn as no one visits her, and she says that her only pastime is imagining (249). She lives in her lodge alone with her assistant Charlotta the Fourth, with whom she does not share many interests. In contrast to Anne, Charlotta the Fourth cannot imagine things. She is described as the kind of person who looks "at things only through prose" (354), that is, as a person who does not share her poetic look on reality and who is unable to understand her fantasies.

Therefore, when Miss Lavendar meets the imaginative Anne, she finds a kindred spirit in her. The affinity between these two characters is displayed when Anne asks Miss Lavendar whether she also imagines things which, according to the narrator, means that both are kindred spirits (249). However, there is a remarkable difference between Anne and Miss Lavendar: while Miss Lavendar has few opportunities for her in society because of her age and her spinsterhood (Anderson 381-382), Anne is young and her future is full

of possibilities. Miss Lavendar is aware of this difference, and because of that, pushes Anne to pursue her ambitions, as not having done so has turned Miss Lavendar into “a white-haired little old maid with nothing but dreams to fill ... [her] life” (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 267). Her example serves Anne as a warning not to dwell on her dreams and take practical steps to achieve her goals in the real world. At the end of the novel, Miss Lavendar ends up marrying her old lover, Paul Irving’s father. This may be Montgomery’s way of portraying how older women could only integrate into the society of the time by getting married. However, her “belated marriage never changes her designation as ‘Miss’” (Gubar 50), which is salient as it may be a way of showing that getting married should not be the only way for women. Miss Lavendar was always an atypical spinster thanks to her imagination, and in no case is she going to change her identity (50-51). In any case, “Montgomery’s extensive focus on Miss Lavendar allowed her to open up space for discussion of the potential perils of spinsterhood” (Galletly 39), so her example serves as a clear precedent for girls to try not to become spinsters, as it may have certain disadvantages in the Victorian society.

Thanks to her wanderings, Anne finds new kindred spirits who help her to flourish and develop her confidence in the possibilities that life holds for her. Nevertheless, not all the people who surround Anne have the appreciation of beauty and the imagination that both Hester Gray and Miss Lavendar display. Anne feels frustrated by this realisation, as can be observed in her dispute with Mr Harrison, Anne and Marilla’s new and challenging neighbour. In that first argument, Anne tells him that she can excuse him for his unkind comments because of her imaginative ability (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 7) and just afterwards, she asserts that he is not a “kindred spirit” (8), although they become friends later in the story.

Other times, as it already happened to her in *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne does not feel frustrated with the people who lack imagination, but with the clash of imagination and reality. Imagining in excess makes dreams seem so real that, when they are not, she gets disappointed. For example, when Anne finally meets Paul Irving’s father, whom she had imagined as a hero, she expresses that it would have been disheartening if he had not been the handsome hero she had imagined (341). Although in this novel the protagonist feels more content with her life and the flights of her imagination are less frequent, she still tries to avoid the pain and the ugliness that sometimes characterise reality. In fact, she feels that her imagination is a haven in which only pleasurable and beautiful things

are allowed. When Marilla asks her to use her ability to imagine thinking of a punishment for her half-brother Davy, Anne informs her that she only imagines positive things as the world is too full of disagreeable things (105-106).

At the end of the novel, Anne's capacity to imagine and dream is what leads her to pursue her ambitions by leaving her job as a teacher and planning to attend university at Redmond with some of her friends. She is determined not to change as others have done, such as her best friend Diana, who is about to get married (360). Overall, Anne closes the story decided to follow her dreams and stay true to herself.

### **6. Anne's Coming-of-Age in *Anne of the Island***

In the third novel of the series, Anne's imagination undergoes a notable change. Her previous attitude towards her imagination is still observable at certain moments when she talks about it with admiration. She is grateful because of all the positive things it has provided her in the past, which have contributed to the moulding of her personality. She claims that every story she imagined during her childhood and adolescence allowed her to escape from reality and made her life rich, even if she has never been rich in real life. She states that wealth is ephemeral, but the worth of dreams is everlasting (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 11).

However, it is salient that Anne remembers what she imagined in the past and its positive aspects, but she does not frequently resort to her imagination in *Anne of the Island*. It seems as if she has turned a new page in her life now that she is an adult and thus, has left her imagination aside. Authors such as Gates argue that among the typical rites of passage in *bildungsroman* novels, the transition towards coming of age is the most complicated one, as the characters have to endure modifications of their psyches. Gates also states that Montgomery is a great writer, as she accurately presents this issue in her novels (172). This proves that her initiation into adulthood may cause Anne to talk about imagination as something that belongs to the past.

For Anne, this transition into adulthood is tough. She is not convinced with having to change, as she promised herself not to when she acknowledged that her friend Diana was changing at the end of *Anne of Avonlea* (Montgomery 360). Now, she wishes to have the life she had as a child (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 17) and she struggles to find the old Anne (255), but she cannot avoid experiencing these changes caused by the process of initiation into adulthood.

Besides, her adult life is not as she imagined it to be when she was younger (4). Her friends are changing and getting married or looking forward to doing so. Some others are getting ill and even dying, and as many of them have left Avonlea to study or work, their friendships are no longer the same as they were a few years before. Moreover, some of her male friends begin to look for more than a friendship with Anne, and she has to reject their marriage proposals. Her friend Gilbert's proposal is the one which she suffers more from rejecting, as they are really good friends at that point and she knows that from that moment on, their relationship will no longer be the same.

Anne's transformation affects the people whom Anne had influenced in the past. For instance, her friend Paul Irving, who enjoys imagining as she did, is discouraged from doing so when she tells him: "You must pay the penalty of growing up, Paul. You must leave fairyland behind you" (215). These statements may be read as if Anne were projecting her distress about bidding farewell to childhood on Paul, trying to convince herself that she must bid farewell to her childhood. However, Paul is still a child, and these words sound more like a discouragement than a warning of his future changes.

The protagonist is affected by this rite of passage, and even if she had always despised people changing within the years, she makes it even clearer in this novel when she is experiencing the change. The fact that she gives more importance to it in this novel can be noticed in the following statement where the word "change" is expressed in italic letters: "how horrible it is that people have to grow up – and marry – and *change!*" (250). This process is difficult for her as she realises that certain aspects of her personality are now different. For example, her imagination which, at this moment, she does not use as much as she would love to. So, this rite of passage is a traumatic experience for Anne, who feels like a stranger to herself (255). However, even if as an adult Anne does not resort to imagination the way she did when she was a child, her determined character stimulates her not to leave the world of dreams aside. For this, she decides to write short stories so that she can reconnect with her childhood and with imagination, and thus, lessen the transition towards adulthood. This decision shows how Anne's love of her imagination is bigger than the forces that lead her to change.

Another opportunity to reconnect with her imagination presents itself when Anne leaves for Kingsport to attend college. There, she feels that she will need to imagine she is in the forests of Avonlea. But eventually, she realises that the views of Kingsport also

allow some “scope for imagination” (35). Anne, who thought of Avonlea as a paradise for imagination, discovers at Kingsport that many other places allow her to dream. One of those places is a cottage –Patty’s Place– in the suburbs of that city (67). When Anne finds out that the cottage is for rent, she does not hesitate to go and try to rent it, even if she knows it will be too expensive for her and her friends to hire it. When they go to see Patty, the owner tells the girls that she has chosen not to rent it, but as she meets Anne and listens to the enthusiastic way in which she talks about her house, she decides to let them rent it for a price they can afford (98). It could be said that Anne can get to live at Patty’s Place thanks to the way her imagination shapes her words and makes her talk about places as if she were narrating a story.

Furthermore, Patty’s Place allows Anne to appreciate the suburban landscapes. As Scarth states, the suburbs were a combination of the good things that the cities and the countryside had, a place people could feel liberated from industries and farm work (3). This cottage “offers Anne the benefits of Green Gables – access to nature, a connection to the past, the comfort of domesticity, ‘scope for the imagination’” (4). The suburbs were a costly place where the rich people lived (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 95). The fact that Anne and her friends get to live there is very salient, as they belong to the lower classes, which had it difficult to live somewhere where only rich people could.

Nevertheless, Anne’s bond with imagination sometimes has negative consequences that lead her to act immaturely and inexperiencedly. In this case, her romantic<sup>4</sup> dreams of childhood are the main reason. Now that Anne is an adult, she must suffer the consequences of that childlike excess (Berg 126), as the impressive expectations she created around love during childhood still influence her (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 200). Because of those expectations, the marriage proposals Anne receives throughout the novel do not satisfy her. Moreover, it is not until she realises that her idealisation of love makes her unable to recognise real love that she acknowledges she is in love with Gilbert.

Anne’s abandonment of her tendency to idealise excessively can also be observed when she not only recognises that she loves Gilbert but also acknowledges that the future of their relationship will neither be a fairy tale nor perfect. She accepts being poor as Gilbert has not finished his Medical studies yet and he has an impoverished income (339). Nonetheless, she claims that she will return to her imagination to beautify her future as

she did when she was a young girl. This idea is reinforced when she claims that they do not need to be rich, as it is great but does not allow much “scope for imagination” (339).

Furthermore, the fact that Montgomery decided to turn Anne into a married woman represents the author’s need to adapt to what the conservative society would accept as readers, although the author had not initially planned that future for her protagonist (Gubar 58). In fact, Anne is not as decided to get married like the other girls, and in this novel, she claims that it is awful that people have to marry (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 259). Therefore, it is not that Anne would not follow her dreams and stay true to herself, but rather that society in 1915 was asking for an ending where Anne would become engaged (Wiggins, qtd. in Gubar 53).

Finally, we may notice that Anne decides to stay close to the realm of dreams as she asserts that she will not give up imagining. She states that they (Gilbert and her) “would be as good as dead if ... [they] had nothing left to dream about” (Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* 337). Moreover, in her last sentence, “dreams will be very sweet now” (339), we may observe that her future with Gilbert will be happy as they will follow their dreams and ambitions (339).

## **7. Conclusion**

Regarding the analysis of Anne’s imagination throughout the three novels, it has been demonstrated that the protagonist’s ability to imagine allows her to have grand ambitions even if these ambitions involve defying social constraints and gender roles. Besides, her imagination makes her able to endure hardship by offering her shelter and consolation.

During her childhood, Anne’s imagination works for her as a survival mechanism, as a means to beautify the world and her experience on it, and as a realm of possibilities that allows her to question the limitations of her reality. Moreover, her imaginative character allows society to appreciate her and adapt to her instead of being Anne who needs to adapt to society. Anne uses the motto “no scope for imagination” to rebel against limiting activities, especially against those based on gender roles. However, sometimes her excessive imaginative activity clashes with reality and makes her feel that the real world does not live up to her expectations. Nevertheless, these collisions with reality eventually allow her to centre into the tangible world.

When Anne reaches adolescence, she feels comforted in her life, which causes her to imagine less than when she needed to escape from reality. Notwithstanding, her



imagination still works as a stimulus for her to pursue her ambitions. During her growth, Anne finds people who become kindred spirits and motivate her to aim high and keep imagining. Anne decides to become a teacher to be close to children, as childhood is the time when imagination is at its peak.

Finally, when Anne becomes an adult, she notices that her imagination is not as powerful as it was when she was a child, and this realisation makes her feel upset. Therefore, she decides to write stories to foster her imaginative capacity. Thus, her dreams of writing and staying close to her imagination are fulfilled. Overall, Anne's imagination accompanies her in her transition from childhood to adulthood. Throughout these years, her precious capacity has fulfilled its purpose: to encourage her not to abandon her ambitions and believe that she can do whatever she is resolved to do.

Through these novels, Lucy Maud Montgomery makes a plea for imagination as a driving force that allows her readers to question social limitations and pursue their dreams and ambitions. The *Anne* series is still being published, and there are some TV series and film adaptations of the books, which shows that twenty-first-century children can still feel inspired by Anne's example. Furthermore, in a society where children grow under the influence of technological devices that leave them with little time for daydreaming, it is significant to read works such as these where imagination is fostered.

This research extends our knowledge of the role of imagination in the first three books of the *Anne* series, as the existing research fails to describe how Anne's imagination develops from her childhood to her adulthood and only focuses on her imagination in the first of the novels. Regarding future research, it would be interesting to assess whether imagination still has a meaningful role in the rest of the novels that compose the series.

## Notes

1. The Victorian Era was the epoch when Queen Victoria reigned in Great Britain (1819-1901) after the death of William IV. The Victorian society was known for its conservativeness and it was considered a moment of great progress. *Anne of Green Gables* is developed in this period of time. However, due to the moment it was published, it is considered an Edwardian novel. This means, from the Edwardian period (1901-1914) when King Edward VII ascended the throne after the death of Queen Victoria (Bernroth Overton 3).

2. The term “romantic” will refer throughout this paper to the ideas of Romanticism, an artistic movement which gained relevance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These romantic ideas were related to the “beauty of nature and human emotions” (“Romantic”).

3. “Kindred spirit” is an expression used in the analysed novels. The protagonist Anne looks for kindred spirits throughout her whole lifespan. It is not clear which are all of the characteristics she requires people to have for them to be considered kindred spirits. However, Anne makes clear throughout the novels that they must be imaginative (Montgomery, *Anne of Avonlea* 8). Moreover, Montgomery presents kindred spirits in contrast to people that “look at things only through prose” (354).

4. The term “romantic” here, does not refer to the definition I have provided above. At this point in the analysis, it refers to dreams that the protagonist had related to love and “loving relationship[s]” (“Romantic”).

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