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**Identity Construction Through Imagination:
Resistance to Conventional Girlhood in Montgomery's
*Anne of Green Gables***

***A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation***

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Dedications

To my family and friends.

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Abstract

Anne of Green Gables, a novel by L. M. Montgomery published in the early Twentieth Century, presents an orphan girl whose strong imagination becomes a powerful tool for self-expression and identity formation. The author portrayed her personal struggles and hardships through the character Anne, which allows readers to gain insight into the imaginative mind of a child who struggles to find acceptance and belonging within a society governed by rigid social expectations. The aim of this research paper is to analyse the social structure of the Avonlea community to lay the groundwork for understanding Anne's personality and her need to use imagination. The findings show that Anne is expected to conform to patriarchal social order; however, her imagination consistently allows her to challenge this model, transforming moments of marginalisation and exclusion into acts of self-definition and creative agency. The study concludes that imagination, far from being a mere personality trait, operates as Anne's central strategy of resistance to patriarchal expectations, enabling her to construct an identity that exceeds the conventional girlhood Avonlea attempts to impose on her, and contributing to a feminist reading of female agency in late-Victorian children's literature.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Conventional Girlhood, Identity Construction, Imagination, Orphanhood, Resistance.

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General Introduction

Children's literature had an important role in constructing childhood, morality, and identity. In addition to its entertainment function, children's literature has also been a pedagogical and ideological space where social values are conveyed, negotiated, and even contested. Children's literature increasingly served as a way for authors to explore individuality, emotional development, and gender roles. Within this literary tradition, texts addressed to young readers instil dominant social values, including obedience, modesty, and domesticity, in young readers' minds, at the same time, critiquing them to a certain extent. As a result, children's literature offers a valuable framework for examining how childhood and identity are culturally constructed and represented through narrative.

One of the key figures in children's literature is the Canadian writer Lucy Maud Montgomery, whose writings have significantly influenced the literary and cultural construction of girlhood. Her writings in the early Twentieth Century incorporated elements of realism and imaginative storytelling to produce complex representations of childhood. Her writing does not reflect the social and cultural context of its time, but it also features characters who resist limiting social norms. The focus on emotional complexity, imagination, and personal development makes Montgomery's writing in children's literature significant and relevant to literary studies.

One of her most famous novels is *Anne of Green Gables*, published in 1908 under the name L. M. Montgomery. The novel's main plot takes place in late Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-Century society and recounts the adventures of Anne Shirley, an eleven-year-old orphan, in the fictional town of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island. However, she was mistakenly sent to live with an elderly brother and sister, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, who were searching for a young boy to help with the work on their farm at Green Gables.

The novel portrays Anne's transformation from a socially marginalised young girl to a confident woman capable of creating her own identity through her imagination, emotions, and

creativity. Anne comes alive in the novel as a character both embedded in and subverting the social conventions of her time.

Since its publication, *Anne of Green Gables* has been considered as a classic of international children's and young adult literature that deals with themes of belonging, social expectations and gender roles, which makes it a significant text in the study of self-construction and girlhood in historical and literary contexts.

Thus, this research paper seeks to investigate the process of identity formation in *Anne of Green Gables* via imagination and the ways in which the protagonist resists conventional girlhood. The novel introduces imagination as both a personal trait and a means of coping with societal expectations and of forming identity. The significance of this work lies in its contribution to understanding how femininity, girlhood, and identity were historically constructed in literature. In contrast to the qualities expected of girls, such as obedience, modesty, and emotional restraint, Anne portrays girlhood through imagination, emotional openness, intellectual curiosity, and the creation of self-narrative. That illustrates how literature challenges cultural ideologies.

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the feminist theory highlight the relationship between girlhood, imagination, and identity formation in the novel?
2. How does the novel challenge conventional models of girlhood within the context of children's literature?
3. How does imagination contribute to Anne's identity construction?

In an attempt to answer these main questions, first, it is assumed that *Anne of Green Gables* shows imagination not as a childish fantasy but as a feminist tool of resistance that

allows Anne Shirley to cope with trauma, orphanhood, and social marginalisation. Through imagination, Anne is able to reconstruct her painful experiences and gradually create a coherent and confident sense of self.

Secondly, it is presumed that the novel subverts the dominant model of girlhood presented in early children's literature, which emphasised obedience, silence, modesty, and conformity to a domestic role. Instead, Montgomery presents a heroine who is emotionally expressive, curious, and intellectually inquisitive; her resistance to rigid social expectations is not through rebellion or confrontation but through her imagination.

Finally, it is hypothesised that imagination in the novel serves as the central tool of identity construction, enabling Anne to redefine her reality and claim her individuality within the conservative social context of Avonlea.

In terms of methodology, the research will follow a qualitative research approach relying on an in-depth textual analysis of the novel. The primary text will be analyzed using a feminist theoretical perspective. The secondary texts involved in the process will include literary criticism from the field of feminist literary criticism as well as studies of children's literature and girlhood.

The research is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter aims to discuss children's literature within a theoretical framework that emphasises its essential characteristics and cultural significance in the construction of childhood and gender roles, and examines how girlhood is represented and how literary texts contribute to the construction of female identity. Moreover, the chapter provides an overview of the novel's critical reception and a literature review of imagination, girlhood and identity. It outlines the theoretical framework and offers an analysis of girlhood from a feminist perspective. Also, it explores female identity and self-

expression within social structures. Additionally, it examines the psychological aspects of imagination, focusing on the role of fantasy in childhood development.

The second chapter examines conventional girlhood in the Nineteenth-Century Canadian society. It starts with a brief overview of the novel followed by the restrictive social structure based on the “domestic ideal”, it examines the Avonlea community through the lens of social surveillance, specifically the characters who represent traditional social norms such as Marilla Cuthbert, Mrs. Rachel Lynde, Mrs. Barry, and Mr. Phillips. the social marginalisation of orphans and examines how they were often perceived as burdens or outsiders within society.

In Chapter Three, imagination is analysed as a narrative act of agency and self-creation in *Anne of Green Gables*. It examines how Anne employs storytelling, renaming, and imagination to recode her social environment, which initially repels her, and to make her feel that she belongs there. The chapter also traces how Anne evolves from relying on imagination to cope with difficult situations to imagining as a way of resisting oppression and constructing herself. Lastly, Anne’s imaginative acts are shown to challenge norms of girlhood in Avonlea, contributing to its evolution.

Chapter One: Theoretical and Critical Background

1. 1. Introduction

From fairy tales whispered in parlours to novels that have travelled across centuries, through the study of children's literature, we can explore how society shapes and negotiates the concepts of childhood, identity and gender. This chapter focuses on the theoretical and cultural frameworks for analysing the construction of childhood and girlhood in literature. It demonstrates the role of children's literature in challenging dominant societal ideologies while integrating the psychological and feminist perspectives on self-construction. Moreover, the chapter's main focus is to show that literature is not only a mirror of social norms but also a space for identity exploration, personal growth and resistance. Finally, the chapter provides a literature review of childhood, imagination, girlhood, and self-construction.

1. 2. Children's Literature: Definition and Significance

As a way of preserving the traces of human existence, literature emerged onto the historical stage as a kind of memory for humankind. It captures the scenes, emotions, and experiences of life from antiquity to the present day. Through its pages and even before pages existed, it has recorded the evolution of societies, beliefs, and identities, allowing each generation to leave behind a testimony of its time.

In its earliest stages, however, literature did not appear in the clear and organised form we recognise today. It existed instead through paintings, storytelling, myths, and occasional written fragments, and was most of the time created for amusement. These early expressions were unplanned and unstructured, yet they carried the essence of human creativity and imagination.

With the gradual development of human intellect and perception, these forms of expression began to acquire shape and coherence, and, over time, this creative output was gathered under the recognised term "Literature", which provided a framework for organising

human imagination into distinct periods, movements, and categories. It allowed for the classification of works across ages and tendencies, and eventually distinguished between the audiences of adults and children, men and women, thereby reflecting the growing complexity of both society and literary production.

Children's literature may be defined as a specific genre of literature, it is a wide range of fictional works like fairy tales, picture books, poetry, novels and non-fictional texts like educational materials biographies created for young readers typically from infancy to early adolescence. It is intended to develop literacy and through time it progressed to include moral lessons that enhance self-awareness and makes children understand the world around them, it is not only texts created for their entertainment but a cultural field influenced by the ideologies and social expectations.

Children's literature is a cultural arena that promotes and resists ideologies and social constructions of gender and class. As Peter Hunt (1999) has noted, "children's books are part of the ideological structures and cultures of the world." (5) This statement emphasises that children's literature is not produced in isolation but reflects the culture in which it is produced.

Through children's literature, children can feel and express emotions such as empathy, overcome fears, and pursue and satisfy their wishes and desires. It is highly flexible, moving from light-hearted adventures and fantasies to more realistic portrayals of everyday life. As a result, young readers can find stories they can identify with and, at the same time, be exposed to new and expansive ideas.

In essence, children's literature is not simply stories that are written for children. On the contrary, it is a developing genre that combines elements of art, teaching, and culture, and through such stories, children develop both intellectually and emotionally. In addition, they learn about societal values, build their identities, and enhance their imagination.

One of the most notable characteristics of children's literature is audience orientation; the stories are written with attention to the children's cognitive and emotional development. The stories have been written in a manner that allows children to comprehend the language, relate to the characters, and enjoy them. Simplicity of language, imaginative narration, moral instruction, visual representation, and the exploration of identity and social values are among the key characteristics that distinguish children's literature from other literary genres.

Imagination and creativity play a major role in children's literature. For instance, children's stories may include elements of fantasy and magical events that give children an opportunity to experience things beyond their everyday world. In addition to imagination, children's literature may include moral elements. For instance, children's stories may include lessons about what's right and wrong, ethical values, and societal norms.

Both language and content have been thoughtfully selected. Language that is clear, vivid, and rhythmic, along with repetitions and rhymes, is useful for comprehension and memorisation. As the child develops, increasingly sophisticated language and sentence structures can be incorporated to support reading development. The use of visual media is yet another element that adds richness and comprehension to written texts; illustrations are as important as the text itself, and sometimes stories are told only through pictures. Children's literature often explores themes such as identity and social conventions. This allows children to encounter multiple viewpoints on childhood, challenge gender stereotypes, and analyse society, using relatable characters and stories as examples.

To sum up, children's literature is about education, ethics, language, illustrations, and identity formation. It is through these elements that the significance of children's literature is established when forming the perceptions of the child about him/herself and the environment surrounding them.

1. 3. Feminist Perspectives on Gender Roles

Getting equality within a male-dominated society was a complex challenge. Most Western societies were traditionally patriarchal, granting men authority, power, and superiority over women. Females in these societies were treated as extensions of males, without any basic rights, and often were oppressed. The emergence of feminism changed the whole vision of women. It offered a theoretical framework that called for women's rights, including education, employment, and political participation. Over the years, these ideas evolved from mere theory into movements as women protested and fought to demand their rights. Nowadays, women are not limited to domestic responsibilities; they also hold high positions in society.

Feminism is generally perceived as a concept that was formulated in the West. The word feminism comes from the Latin root word "femina", which means a woman. The term became widely used in the early Twentieth-Century as people fought to secure women's suffrage, or voting rights, primarily in Western nations, followed by a more organised socio-political movement for adequate emancipation of women from patriarchal society. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, feminism is defined as the 'principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men'. In this context, political rights are perceived as one of the earliest and most important demands formulated by the feminist movement.

The concept was introduced and expanded by many scholars, for example, Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex* (1949) that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is Civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (2). This highlights that being a woman is not about biology but about the roles society expects women to play; it is performative rather than innate. Since women gradually get to perform through both social and self-policing, they learn to become what is understood as, in their social/cultural context. Bell hooks similarly defined

feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” She wanted to make feminism about more than getting women the same rights as men; she wanted it to also be about changing society and culture.

In recent times, the position of women has changed rapidly across the world. The representation of women’s oppression in society is an important concern in the study of literature. Women have maintained a strong presence in literature. Fiction in literature reflects social conditions more than any other genre, and it is frequently influenced by societal perceptions of women.

While the feminist perspective critiques the limitations society imposes on women by examining societal influences and gender roles, it is important to analyse how people form their identities within these limitations.

1. 4. Femininity Representations

Femininity can be understood as a set of qualities that shape how society expects young girls to behave and present themselves. In other words, femininity is not simply a natural personality trait but a socially shaped concept. As a result, women are often expected to embody socially constructed characteristics of femininity imposed by cultural norms (Windsor 893). This illustrates that femininity is a form of control in which behaviours are evaluated.

Another trait that this theory emphasises is that girls are aware of their positions right from childhood, which shapes their actions and even how they see themselves. From an early age, women are taught to recognise the kinds of behaviour, attitudes, and physical appearance that society finds appropriate for them. They acquire such lessons from families, schools, the media, religion and traditions. As a result, girls internalise these standards and control their behaviour in line with society’s expectations. Apart from shaping how girls behave in both public and private settings, these standards also affect girls self-perception and identity formation. As a

result, it is closely tied to how these individuals perceive themselves, since their self-evaluations often revolve around what society expects of them.

The theme of femininity has played an important role in many literary works; many authors have portrayed female characters in their novels who reflect stereotypical feminine qualities in the late Nineteenth-Century (Weiss-Town 14). The theme of femininity has played an important role in many literary works. As an example, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin both explore the social expectations imposed on women and depict how young women navigate societal pressures as they attempt to define their own identities and desires within traditional restrictions.

1. 5. Understanding Girlhood in Literature

What is it to be a girl, and what does a “girl” mean? Arising from a longstanding and continuous interest in classic texts such as Louisa M. Alcott’s 19th-century *Little Women*, L.M. Montgomery’s 20th-century *Anne of Green Gables*, to modern stories like J.K Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, fiction has provided an important tool to explore the concept of girlhood and their experience and their social positions.

The concept of girlhood has been identified as a key theme in the study of literature. In its context, girlhood has been recognised as a socially and culturally constructed concept shaped by social norms, expectations and power relations. Many scholars argue that girlhood is not a static experience; rather, it is mediated by factors such as race, class, historical and cultural context.

In many literary texts, the female protagonist has been depicted as a complex, multidimensional character. They were shown in ways that support conventional gender norms and illustrated as domestic, obedient and caring. However, contemporary literature often

challenges these stereotypes by presenting girls as individuals who defy societal norms to gain independence and explore their own interests and ambitions.

Scholars like Karen Coats argue that children's and adolescent literature serves as a key reference for exploring identity formation and the ways narrative forms shape identity and society. In her studies on children's literature, literary narratives are not only entertaining material, but they also serve as cultural discourses that teach children values and attitudes about who they should be and how they should express themselves. As literary stories play an important role in the mental and emotional development of young readers, Coats argues that they allow readers to explore alternative identities. In addition, through narratives and symbols, literature helps children create both personal and social identities and reflect cultural ideologies.

Deborah Siegel, on the other hand, focuses on how culture affects girls and how it is impossible to understand it without considering society. She argues that girlhood should not be discussed without considering its social context, since cultural conventions shape perceptions of oneself and the behaviour one is expected to demonstrate. Specifically, she focuses on the pressure girls face regarding their femininity, looks, behaviour, and place in society. She mentioned that girlhood must be studied in a wider cultural context that defines female identity. Her perspective is especially relevant in literary studies because female characters in children's literature often reflect or resist dominant cultural expectations about gender and girlhood.

1. 6. Identity Formation in Children's Literature

Identity as a concept and a term has a long and complex history. Etymologically, the word "identity" dates back to 1603, originates from the Middle French *identité*, and has earlier roots in the Latin *identitatem* which signifies "sameness". Identity can be defined as something that changes and grows over time. It is shaped by the people we interact with, the culture we

live in and the ideas we are exposed to. It is a way for people to understand themselves. Thus, identity is not fixed but actively constructed through human experience and interaction.

From this perspective, identity is made of both personal and social plans, meaning that they complete and influence one another. Patrick Colm Hogan, in his book *Personal Identity and Literature*, highlights the contradiction of each person's self-perception, understanding the fluidity of identity that is shaped by various elements such as social interactions and subjective experience, and the narrative we create (31). Moreover, he explains that identity requires consciousness across many other contexts that exist under different circumstances. So, identity is a mixture of both you and your circumstances.

In the article "Beyond Identity", the authors Brubaker and Frederick Cooper note that in social theory, to "identify" means to categorise oneself or others based on characteristics like race and gender. It implies that identity is intrinsic to social interaction. However, it does not mean that identity, in its strong sense, is important in sociology. It suggests that, through sociological research, the concept of identity has been found to be inadequate for describing the dynamic aspects of social constructs. As humans and society are inherently tied to identity, it is an essential topic in social dynamics. Therefore, it is based on various aspects of identity.

In connection with gender, we can see that identity is a socially constructed concept shaped by constructed behaviours and expectations. Therefore, the creation of girlhood identity involves both internal and external factors. Internal factors involve feelings, ideas, imagination, desires, and personal perceptions of how a girl sees herself and her actions. These personal characteristics can play an important role in the development of self-consciousness and in shaping a girl's identity and aspirations. On the other hand, various external factors, such as family expectations, education, and social relationships, significantly affect identity development. Therefore, girlhood identity evolves constantly through the interplay between the inner self and the outer social world.

In children's literature, identity formation assumes special importance. The literary works targeted at children tend to provide models of behaviour and social roles that help develop an idea of the self among children. literary narratives usually portray childhood as a period of transformation where the child learns how to negotiate emotions and relationships, as well as develop a sense of identity. Peter Hunt argues that children's literature can be seen as a complex genre that creates the experience of reading as well as the perceptions that the child creates of reality through the use of language and narrative position.

It is in these works that the scope for the creation of alternate identities also arises, especially where some characters defy established norms. Through imagination and narrative expression, fictional characters are often capable of questioning the boundaries of the societal limitations within which they function and define themselves. Coats argues that the emotional and psychological experience of the reader, especially the child, within the worlds of fantasy and self-expression is well captured in literature written for children. As such, literary texts offer opportunities for self-definition and individual expression grounded in emotional development and creativity.

To conclude, identity is a term with many dimensions. It evolves constantly through social engagement and experience. An approach to identity as a process opens new opportunities for a literary character study and sheds light on the significance of imagination and resistance in identity construction.

1. 7. Imagination as a Literary Concept

Imagination plays a major role in literary theory as well as in psychology. It is viewed as an essential faculty which influences human perception and creativity in life. While there are various definitions of imagination, it can be defined as the act of breaking away from the confines of reality to create something else.

Imagination from a literary perspective has always been considered more as a means for creating a new world. The famous English poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his work *Biographia Literaria* (1817), perceives imagination as a powerful transformative tool, which transforms reality rather than representing it. He makes it quite clear that there is a difference between primary imagination, which is about man's capability to perceive sensory impressions, and secondary imagination, which is all about creating art from the transformation of reality. Moreover, imagination, together with myth, archetype, and symbolism, is an essential element of literature. According to Northrop Frye in his work *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), imagination is very significant in the creation of literary techniques, among other things. Consequently, the concept of imagination in literature has much in common with imagination from the philosophical perspective.

In psychology, imagination is considered an intellectual function important for human development, especially in children. Imagination is closely linked to the process of symbolisation, as kids use their imaginations both to perceive reality and to think about possibilities beyond it during playtime. In other words, imagination is indicative of an important mind-based developmental process that helps people improve abstraction and analyse things that are not present in our reality. Imagination is not just an individual psychological activity. In fact, it only arises from interaction with other people. This way, imagination acts as a powerful mechanism for the re-interpretation of reality.

A psychological perspective in literary studies emphasises the significance of imagination in the development of individual identity. It is suggested that interaction with fiction enables children to see from other people's viewpoints and imagine being others. Imagination enables children to navigate societal pressures and limits and construct an identity of their own outside society's confines.

1. 7. 1. Role of Imagination in Childhood

While engaging in imaginative activities, children can experience new emotions, experiment with various scenarios, and interpret complex internal phenomena, such as fear, joy, loneliness, or longing for someone.

Imagination is also a mechanism helping a person cope with various situations. Children often use their imagination when situations are stressful or uncertain, even if those situations lack some element of reality. According to psychological theories of childhood development, like those of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, imagination is important because it helps children cope with their emotions and make sense of difficult or challenging life experiences. According to Jean Piaget, children construct their realities through cognitive development and symbolic thinking. Thus, they can reinterpret certain life experiences through imagination and play. In addition, according to Vygotsky, imagination and fantasy are significant aspects of childhood development, since they allow children to rearrange reality and make sense out of their social and emotional experiences.

Fantasy shows how imagination helps children go beyond the constraints of their surroundings and envision other realities. Creativity helps provide children with new meaning and interpretations of their experiences. Of significance here is narrative self-construction, which underscores how the child engages in storytelling, both internally and externally, to give meaning to their personal existence.

1. 8. Literature Review

Early scholarship perceives that children's literature plays an essential role in constructing and imparting traditions, principles and social functions. According to Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, children's literature is an ideological domain in which culture, power, and story converge to shape how children imagine and perceive society (8-9). According

to them, these texts serve not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for values and the construction of interpretative structures.

Supporting this perspective, Alan C. Purves argues that children's stories have always reflected the moral, educational, and cultural values dominant at the time, making such stories both a form of entertainment and a means of social education (23-24).

Similarly, the psychoanalytic interpretation of fairy tales by Bettelheim emphasises the psychological role of children's literature. According to him, fairy tales assist children in dealing with their inner problems by making them external within the realm of a story (15-18). Despite not using literary criticism, Bettelheim's work reveals that children's literature is engaged in constructing identity psychologically and emotionally through symbolic narrative representations.

Peter Hunt, one of the major contributors to the field of children's literature, asserts that this kind of literature should be analysed not only as a phenomenon, but also within the broader ideological framework in which it is produced and consumed (Hunt 4-6). As he claims, it is impossible to analyse children's literature without reference to the social discourse underlying it, be it related to class, race or gender issues.

Yet another important contribution by Jacqueline Rose highlights the role of narratives in shaping the child's emotional and social development. According to Rose, through repetition and symbolical structures, the child acquires the tools to navigate and understand the complex and the ambiguous world (92-95). Therefore, Rose's theories support the idea that, through children's literature, readers create meaning and learn about themselves and their social context.

When it comes to girlhood, many scholars believe that it is not a fixed concept but rather something that changes over time, depending on factors such as culture and the historical period.

According to Catherine Driscoll, girlhood is an ever-changing concept because it depends on cultural assumptions about girls and their representations in society.

Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* has been widely analysed in the literature for its themes of imagination, identity, femininity, and education. The novel has been studied through various lenses, including feminism, psychology, sociology, and literary criticism, with regard to Anne Shirley's character as an imaginative and rebellious young woman.

Lesley Clement discusses the relationship between imagination, empathy, and identity in *Anne of Green Gables* in her paper "Mobilising the Power of the Unseen." She suggests that Anne's development moves from self-centredness to understanding others, helping her grow and mature. She concludes that it is due to Anne's imaginative capacity that she has been able to form emotional bonds with others despite being restricted by society, thus making imagination an empowering concept.

Numerous scholarly articles have been written on *Anne of Green Gables* using various critical approaches. Christa Zeller Thomas, in her 2009 article titled "The Sweetness of Saying 'Mother' Maternity and Narrativity in *Anne of Green Gables*", explores the theme of motherlessness in Nineteenth-Century fiction and its influence on female protagonists. This author emphasises that the character status of an orphan significantly influences her personality traits, emotions, and identity as a whole. Being deprived of maternal warmth at a young age makes Anne continually seek her mother's love and care, making her relationship with Marilla more emotionally important to her. Thomas explains that Montgomery presents motherhood as something created through emotional connection and nurturing rather than biological ties alone, as Marilla slowly evolves into a mother image, showing patience and understanding towards the young girl.

Similarly, Marah Gubar, in the 2001 article "Where is the Boy?: The Pleasures of Postponement in the *Anne of Green Gables* Series", analyses how female characters negotiate

their desires within the expectations of heterosexual romance and social conventions. Gubar maintains that while many girl's novels of the Nineteenth-Century rush their characters into romance and marriage within the first few chapters, Montgomery focuses entirely on Anne's childhood, education, relationships, and fantasies. The article highlights how the narrative creates "pleasure" through postponement, allowing readers to focus on Anne's personal growth rather than romantic fulfilment. Gubar further notes that Anne resists being associated with love, particularly with Gilbert Blythe, because she wants to be free to explore her intellect rather than be limited by romantic attachments. Thus, delaying heterosexuality provides the author with an opportunity to show other sides of the young woman's character besides marriage.

Yu Jin Ng and colleagues in their 2021 article, titled "Educating Effervescent Women Scientists Through Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*" examine how the novel can be used as an educational tool to encourage and inspire female students interest and participation in STEM fields. They argue that child curiosity and imagination, as well as a strong willingness to acquire new knowledge, are early attempts to address scientific issues, namely, to find creative answers to questions about how different phenomena occur in nature. The article concludes that Anne can serve as an inspirational example for young women, as her enthusiasm for learning and expressing herself challenges conventional gender roles that associate females with non-scientific careers.

Despite the variety of works already written on this topic, the majority of existing research has focused either on one aspect of girlhood representation, such as the portrayal of women and girls, or on the other, the development of gender identities. Few scholars have considered the role of imagination in constructing girls' identities through children's literature. This work will attempt to fill this gap by examining imagination as a central mechanism of identity formation through a close reading of the text, focusing on how Anne's imaginative

discourse, emotional perception, and narrative development contribute to the construction of her girlhood identity.

1. 9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theoretical foundation of this study by exploring concepts of children's literature, girlhood, imagination and identity construction. It showed that children's literature is not only a form of storytelling for young readers but also an ideological space where values and beliefs are connected and sometimes questioned. Through the themes and characters, we can see that they play an important role in shaping how children understand themselves and the world around them.

The chapter also aimed to demonstrate that girlhood and femininity are not fixed traits but socially constructed concepts influenced by social norms, while gender constructions may find their way into literary works in the ways girls are depicted. At times, they reinforce the existing stereotypes, while at other times they defy them by showing a more independent image of women.

In addition, it has been established that the notions of identity and imagination reveal that identity is not something static but rather something that keeps changing based on experiences and interaction. More specifically, imagination becomes particularly vital in the process of change as it gives readers an opportunity to adopt alternative perspectives. Overall, while there is existing research on the concepts mentioned separately, the chapter aims to connect them in a close reading to address the gap.

Now that the framework for the feminist and literary analysis of this text has been set by establishing key concepts like patriarchy, gender roles, Domestic Ideals, and imagination as a form of resistance, the next chapter will look at the history of Victorian Canada, and the social conventions and attitudes regarding girlhood and orphanhood at that time.

Chapter Two:
Conventional Girlhood
in *Anne of Green Gables*

2. 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the social and cultural environment of Avonlea in the novel *Anne of Green Gables* and its role in shaping the main character's life. First, it explores conventional girlhood in Nineteenth-Century Canada to demonstrate that girlhood is not only a stage of development but also an ideological and socially constructed phenomenon. Also, the Domestic Ideal is presented as a cultural construct that determines female identity through traits such as modesty, religious values, and domestic responsibilities. In other words, the culture of Nineteenth-Century Canada is represented as socially strict, where discipline is maintained through surveillance and social control. Thus, imagination becomes necessary as a means of liberation from constraints and limitations.

2. 2. *Anne of Green Gables*: A Synopsis

Lucy Maud Montgomery was born in 1874 in the town of Clifton. She was Canada's most widely read author, known for her poems, short stories and novels. She lost her mother when she was barely two years old; her personal life was a major source of thematic inspiration for her novel, *Anne of Green Gables*. She faced loneliness and social pressure from a very young age, just like the protagonist. Montgomery found a way to escape from her reality by using imagination to cope with challenges. Through this novel, she gained international recognition among both adults and children.

Anne of Green Gables, written by Lucy Maud Montgomery and published in June 1908, is a classic of children's literature. It takes place in the fictional village of Avonlea, on Prince Edward Island. It tells the story of an orphan girl, Anne Shirley, who was mistakenly adopted by Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, a brother and sister who have always lived together and therefore haven't had children of their own. They had asked for a boy child from the orphanage to come and work for them on their farm. However, they had Anne instead.

Anne lost her sense of self after her parents died, making her vulnerable to being placed under the care of 21 households that treated her terribly, along with an orphanage that refused to accept her. The adversities she faced during her youth caused a lack of social connection. The protagonist finds herself at odds with society right from the start of the story.

As an orphan girl who had limited chances, Anne's biggest dream is to be a part of a family that would provide her with a place where she could belong, but as soon as she arrives at her new home, Marilla does not accept her, and she starts asking Matthew why the orphanage sent a girl rather than a boy. However, she quickly captures their hearts and gets along with the siblings within days of her arrival, owing to her cleverness and unusual character traits. As the years pass, Anne grows, takes responsibility, and goes through many adventures. Therefore, because she is very enthusiastic about discovering who she truly is, Anne begins her self-construction through interactions with people and experiences in Avonlea.

Furthermore, Anne Shirley's character development is shaped by the education she receives and by her interactions with others at school, including Diana Barry and Gilbert Blythe, which greatly contribute to her mental and emotional growth. By the end, she receives the scholarship before her life is struck by tragedy. The death of Matthew deeply affected her, and her realisation that Marilla will go blind made her think of dropping out of completing her four-year education and looking after Marilla instead. But luckily for her, Gilbert offers her his teaching position at Avonlea School near Marilla.

2. 3. Conventional Girlhood in Victorian Canada

The role of women in Nineteenth-Century Canada was significantly constrained by patriarchal traditions and domestic ideology, in which women were expected to marry and manage the household, children, and family members. They had very few opportunities to

participate in politics and the economy. However, women's movements began challenging these social restrictions during the early Twentieth-Century.

In this context, *Anne of Green Gables* portrays a society in which women play an important role in shaping social interactions within their community. Even as Avonlea adheres to many traditional Victorian ideals, Montgomery creates a space for female authority and girls' individuality to become visible. While Victorian Canadian society emphasised values such as submission and modesty, Montgomery presents Avonlea as a society governed by women. Through gossip, domestic authority, and interpersonal networks, the women are the ones who shape the town's moral structure, allowing the novel to be interpreted as a potential feminine utopian space (McQuillan and Pfeiffer 20). In the Avonlea community, the culture of expectations was intensified by the fact that reputation held significant weight within the society. Everyone was continually evaluated on the basis of their behaviour, especially women, whose behaviour was seen to affect the entire family.

2. 3. 1. Social Marginalisation and Orphanhood

In the late 19th Century, orphans' lives were quite traumatic, having to endure continuous marginalisation and being treated as outsiders who did not belong to any place or group of people. Therefore, they were a threat to the rest of the community. As Claudia Mills argues, "almost every orphan novel in the end is about the search for a family; the protagonist finds a home, finds a loving and caring adult to whom he can belong" (227). This draws attention to the way orphan stories portray their struggles to gain social acceptance and belonging.

This idea is represented in *Anne of Green Gables*, where the protagonist is seen as an outsider and is perceived as a burden rather than a child with emotional needs. These

experiences reinforce her feelings of insecurity and make her constantly struggle with the dilemma of seeking love and fearing rejection.

Anne is marginalised in Avonlea due to her evaluation of the way she looks, who she is, and how she behaves; indeed, she is seen as “different” or socially unacceptable. As Victorian girlhood was characterised by obedience, modesty, and emotional control, her personality was constantly subject to correction and criticism. In addition, Anne's red hair and somewhat rebellious nature serve as symbols in the novel. Appearance and judgment are connected within the society of Avonlea, which explains why Anne becomes deeply ashamed of traits that set her apart from other children. One example appears when Anne impulsively dyes her hair in an attempt to transform herself into what she imagines to be a more acceptable and beautiful girl. However, the experiment ends disastrously when her hair turns green as she forces Marilla to cut it short. This event symbolises the destructive effects of social pressure to look like one particular type of girl and the harmfulness of conformity to unrealistic female ideals imposed by society.

Her need for change suggests the way girls in particular have been expected to adapt to mainstream beauty norms and ideals if they wish to be accepted in their surroundings. Montgomery therefore presents marginalisation not only as social exclusion but also as a process of internalisation in which individuals begin to perceive themselves through the judgement of others. Anne's insecurity reveals how social control operates psychologically by encouraging individuals to monitor and correct themselves according to external expectations.

Finally, Anne's orphaned status and marginalisation highlight that she is an outsider in society. Being different from others and her exaggerated emotional expression put her at odds with the rest of the community; yet it is this difference that helps her resist and challenge these dominant norms. Avonlea can be regarded as a society of social control which constrains and

defines identity, thereby laying the groundwork for future discussions on imagination and individuality.

After entering Avonlea society, Anne becomes increasingly exposed to the expectations imposed on girls and women in Victorian Canada. These expectations were strongly influenced by the Domestic Ideal, which defined femininity according to morality, obedience, and domestic responsibility.

2. 3. 2. The Domestic Ideal

The concept refers to a dominant Nineteenth-Century social belief in which a woman's respectability was based on her performance of household responsibilities and her appearance as a “proper” lady. She was not valued for who she was or what she wanted to be, but rather for her role as wife and mother within society. Nancy Armstrong argues in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that women are primarily defined by their roles in the domestic world, where morality and identity are shaped by housework rather than by individuality. According to Armstrong, domestic fiction encouraged the idea that the perfect woman needed to cultivate virtue and make sacrifices at home, thus confining women’s activities to the private sphere.

In Avonlea, women are constrained by expectations shaped by the domestic ideal, as their freedom and social mobility are limited by constant surveillance and public judgment, leading to social criticism and exclusion for any divergence from socially acceptable behaviour. With this pressure, women find themselves obligated to control their language, way of dressing, and behaviour to ensure social acceptability.

One example appears when Marilla repeatedly attempts to discipline Anne’s behaviour. Her daily attitudes greatly annoy Marilla. Whenever she expresses her imaginative ideas, Marilla often silences her, “For pity’s sake hold your tongue, you talk entirely too much for a little girl” (Montgomery 47). It is common for all children to talk excessively, but not in the

way that Anne does; in fact, Marilla often gets confused by what Anne says. All that Marilla ever wanted from Anne was for her to focus on household tasks and behave like a good child, but instead, Anne tends to be absentminded while doing her work.

Another example can be seen when Anne decided to decorate her hat on her own, which made Marilla insane after hearing about it, especially when she informed her about how bad others reacted to it, because decorating a hat in such a manner was something absurd in Avonlea: “Becoming fiddlesticks ! It was putting flowers on your hat at all, no matter what colour they were, that was ridiculous. You are the most aggravating child!” (Montgomery 117). Marilla’s reaction demonstrates how deeply Avonlea society values conformity and respectable femininity. Anne’s harmless attempt at self-expression is deemed inappropriate because girls were expected to appear modest and to behave according to strict social conventions.

2. 5. Mechanisms of Social Control in Avonlea

The novel *Anne of Green Gables* examines the social norms and the pressure women faced in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. In particular, one of the primary themes is the traditional gender roles. Women were obliged to become wives and mothers without any possibility of receiving an education or building a career. Anne faces these pressures coming from various aspects of her life. For example, her adoptive mother is convinced that a woman’s place is at home, while Gilbert makes fun of Anne for her interest in books. At the same time, she needs to adhere to the strict moral code of her environment, which values hard work and obedience. On the other hand, those factors contradict Anne’s goals of self-development, leading her to face many failures and disappointments. But at the end, she keeps trying to realise her dream of being a writer.

This opposition between Anne and the norms expected of her in Avonlea society is far from theoretical, as it unfolds through Anne's constant engagement with characters who

personify various forms of power. Each character represents a particular instrument of power within the social framework, either in the private setting or in the larger world of the community or institutions. This section examines the interactions between Anne and some of the main characters, and it explores the types of authority that affect Anne's development. Including family authority, social control within communities, and institutional influence, which attempt to regulate her behaviour and identity.

2. 5. 1. Domestic and Moral Authority within the Household

One of the most immediate forms of social control is exercised within the domestic space, as represented by the character Marilla Cuthbert, who symbolises domestic authority, moral guidance, and the acceptance of conventional gender roles within the house. The female protagonist serves as a stern, emotionally controlled mother to Anne. Marilla was described as “a tall, thin woman, with angles and without curves, her dark hair showed some grey streaks and was always twisted up in a hard little knot behind with two wire hairpins stuck aggressively through it. She looked like a woman of narrow experience and rigid conscience.” (Montgomery 6-7) She is well organised and very strict about her routine. She believes in doing things with dedication, responsibility, and hard work. Furthermore, she is deeply religious, and many of her decisions are greatly influenced by her religion. For her, a girl should be raised to be responsible, modest, and useful to herself and others in a domestic environment. She tries to discipline and teach Anne about proper conduct and morality. She was very strict in raising Anne; she never showed emotions. But, her warm and loving side was shown in so many parts of the novel. She expected Anne to be obedient and take care of the house, as every other girl of that time; meanwhile, Anne is always doing her work while being mentally elsewhere, which makes Marilla mad at her most of the time.

The relationship between Marilla and Anne is quiet formal, Marilla found it difficult to communicate with Anne in the beginning as she was disappointed because she is the opposite of what she wanted at first, she said “I don’t want an orphan girl and if I did she isn’t the style I’d pick out” (Montgomery 41). However, after spending more time together, they both start to value one another and develop a family where they support each other. In particular, Marilla acts as an advisor to Anne, showing her the significance of working hard and being honest. Meanwhile, Anne adds happiness, humour, and entertainment to Marilla’s life. Gradually, their relationship grows closer and more intimate, so that by the end of the book, it resembles that of a mother and her daughter.

Marilla’s role as Anne’s caregiver becomes central to Anne’s emotional and moral development; it extends beyond discipline and instruction. As the novel progresses, Anne's positive nature and creative energy gradually soften Marilla's rigid character and bring emotional warmth to Green Gables. Thus, the relationship between Marilla and Anne becomes mutually influential, while Marilla educates Anne in proper social behaviour, and Anne encourages Marilla to express affection. The development of their relationship clearly shows the significance of caring for children and their educators.

This idea can be supported by the work of Perry Nodelman *The Hidden Adult*, who explains that adults in children’s books often serve as guides who are supposed to instruct the child regarding their behaviour and prepare them socially. In most children’s fiction books, the caregivers are always seen as authority figures who teach the children the difference between right and wrong behaviour. Through discipline, counselling, and guiding, these adults play a great part in shaping the character of children. Marilla plays such a part in this novel since she constantly attempts to teach Anne Avonlea’s social values

2. 5. 2. Community Surveillance and Social Judgment

Another key instrument of control employed in Avonlea is community surveillance, which involves people always being watched and evaluated based on their behaviour. An example of this kind is Mrs Rachel Lynde, an important figure in the community who is not afraid to speak her mind; she personifies the community's values and standards, which are used to monitor individuals' behaviour. While Marilla wields her power over her household, Mrs Lynde wields it over the entire community.

The character was introduced at the beginning of the novel, prompting the reader to question her place in Anne's life. She was Marilla Cuthbert's neighbour, and they had a very close relationship. Mrs Lynde is famous for being aware of everything happening around everyone in Avonlea and for speaking her mind, regardless of whether it sounds nice or mean. Essentially, she is the "watcher" of the community, judging people based on social expectations.

The first time that Anne and Mrs Lynde met wasn't a pleasant experience as soon as she saw her, she started criticizing her appearance as she said: "well, they didn't pick you for your looks, that's sure and certain [...] she's terrible skinny and homely, Marilla. Come here... Did any one ever see such freckles? And hair as red as carrots!". (Montgomery 91) Through these remarks, Montgomery exposes how young girls are evaluated according to rigid standards of femininity and beauty. Instead of seeing Anne as an individual with emotions and intellect, Mrs Lynde assesses her solely by her outward appearance.

Mrs Lynde's actions are typical of the mechanisms of patriarchal social control at the core of the feminist approach in this paper, not by way of any physical punishment, but by virtue of the male gaze extended to the community, in order to control the conduct of women and girls within Avonlea. For instance, in Avonlea, social discipline is achieved through the actions of the members of the society as they keep watch on the actions of others. In particular,

Mrs Lynde can be seen as acting as an instrument of societal discipline, ensuring that people, particularly young ladies, conform to social standards.

However, Anne's defence against such an insult becomes especially important, since it contrasts with the passive femininity that was imposed on girls in Victorian society. Anne does not accept Mrs Lynde's insults silently but stands up for herself and reacts emotionally. The fact that Anne does not accept her humiliation and reacts negatively shows that she is willing to oppose the traditional model of obedience, which was suggested by domestic ideology at that period of time. Anne's reaction illustrates her developing sense of individuality, as she refuses to allow her identity to be entirely defined by the judgments of others.

2. 5. 3. Moral Respectability and Parental Control

The preservation of moral respectability is also represented in the novel as a form of control, as it is reflected through the character Mrs Barry, the mother of Diana, a respected woman known for her strict parenting style, yet she is another example of social and domestic authority in the novel, especially considering that she is portrayed as a strong and highly moral mother figure. Mrs Barry's is more internalised and centred within the domestic setting, where she wields authority over her household through stringent control and strict discipline. She has a strong conviction about raising her daughter, Diana, according to the moral standards of Avonlea society. and it can be seen in the way she carefully supervises Diana's behaviour, manners, and friendships so that her family does not lose its good name in society. For example, after Anne mistakenly serves Diana currant wine instead of raspberry cordial, Mrs Barry quickly blames Anne, calling her a "wicked little girl" (Montgomery 178) and forbidding Diana from seeing her again, since she considers her an unsuitable companion. This action reveals how important morals and proper etiquette are in her view. Besides, Mrs Barry wants Diana to act as a well-mannered girl, thus bringing pride to her family's name. By supervising her daughter

all the time, Mrs Barry depicts a Victorian ideal of motherhood where women were supposed to maintain the morality of their homes and guard their children from immoral influence.

Meanwhile, she wasn't happy for the friendship of Anne and her daughter, she was so hard on her and she didn't want her to hang out with Diana she even said "I don't think you are a fit little girl for Diana to associate with. You'd better go home and behave yourself" (Montgomery 182) in a cruel tone all for some mistakes that she did while playing. This shows how society tends to define individuals according to public opinion rather than their true character. After a long time of separating them, Mrs Barry had no choice but to give up on her principles, since Anne helped her little daughter survive from a potentially fatal croup. Anne, who was known in Green Gables as a clumsy girl with a questionable reputation, could not be expected to save someone's life, yet she proved everyone wrong and showed how clever she is. In this incident, the novel criticises excessive social judgment and suggests that true worth should be measured by actions and kindness rather than by reputation or conformity to social expectations.

2. 5. 4. Institutional Discipline and Educational Authority

The school system also serves as a tool for discipline and conformity in Avonlea society. Such an authority can be depicted in Mr Phillips, the school teacher of Avonlea, who is described as superficial and, consequently, has no influence on his students. His teaching methods are based on strictness, rote learning, and subordination rather than on creative thinking.

Anne's arrival in Avonlea changes everyone around her; their attitudes shift to respect and admiration. But this is not the case for everyone, as her teacher, Mr Phillips, who is more detached and represents a system of education that fails to understand and encourage her talents,

did not like her attitudes; rather, he did not like her at all. He showed his intense dislike of her and made every effort to make her feel miserable.

Apart from hating Anne's attitude, Mr Phillips did not like her presence. It is clear that he hates her and always tries to bring her down. As a teacher, it is his responsibility to guide her through her mistakes and direct her toward the correct path so she can use her abilities to study. On the contrary, he was always hoping that she would commit even more mistakes so that he could punish her, as he once made her stand next to the platform for the rest of the afternoon while he wrote "Ann Shirley has a very bad temper. Ann Shirley must learn to control her temper" (Montgomery 157) on a blackboard. It is in line with the feminist perspective on institutional socialization processes that see the school, as much as the home, as a place where little girls are socialized to be obedient and silent in accordance with the gendered norms of the community of Avonlea. Mr. Phillips's goal is not to educate but rather to silence the characteristics that define Anne's individuality.

2. 6. Conclusion

This chapter provides the social and cultural setting of Avonlea in L.M. Montgomery's novel *Anne of Green Gables*, drawing attention to traditional girlhood in Nineteenth-Century Canadian society. It revealed that girlhood is a socially constructed concept based on rigid expectations. In this case, the Domestic Ideal plays an important role in defining a cultural pattern of female identity which is confined to obedience, usefulness, and respectability. It also demonstrates Avonlea not as a repressive society but as a space that allows women to participate in its activities and situates feminine power. Despite the constraints of Victorian ideologies, women became influential in creating morality and control within the community.

After analyzing the strict patriarchy within Avonlea and the restrictive model of a "girl" forced upon female youth, this next chapter will explore how Anne Shirley's imagination serves

as her main means of fighting back against these restrictions and building an identity for herself that Avonlea's gender expectations never wanted her to be.

Chapter Three:

Anne's Imagination and Identity Construction

3. 1. Introduction

Building on the patriarchal mechanisms of control examined in Chapter Two this chapter argues that imagination functions as Anne's primary mode of resistance, allowing her to construct a sense of self that exceeds the narrow gender role Avonlea attempts to impose on her. It shifts the focus from the restrictive social structures to an examination of imagination as both a response to those constraints and a concept of identity construction in *Anne of Green Gables*, focusing on the main character Anne. While imagination is viewed as an individual's personality or as a childish form of escapism, this chapter takes into account the multifaceted nature of imagination as a means by which Anne can analyse the reality around her, shape her role within society, and actively construct her identity.

Imagination in this chapter operates through interconnected dimensions, the first one is Imagination as a feminist tool of resistance used by Anne to resist marginalisation that she faces as an orphan girl because of exclusion from the male-dominated society of Avonlea. The second perspective regards the imagination as an instrument through which she interprets her experiences and finds meaning in the narration of her own life. Finally, it serves as a quiet protest and helps her resist the constraints imposed by the social conventions of the Avonlea community.

3. 2. Anne as an Orphan Archetype

Anne is an excellent example of how the traits and characteristics of archetypes can help and inspire people to find solutions to problems that seem to be difficult to solve. She proved that one does not have to own traditional masculine qualities and strength; instead, one can use these values in other ways to create one's identity in a world full of difficulties. For example, when Anne first arrives at Green Gables, she faces rejection because Marilla and Matthew wanted a boy who would help them with their farming chores. Since Anne lacks the physical

strength to engage in masculine labour, her personality helps her gain acceptance among the Cuthberts. Her ability to communicate gradually changes Marilla's attitude toward her. Rather than proving her value through physical work, Anne proves it through affection, loyalty, and emotional intelligence.

Another example appears in Anne's relationship with the Avonlea community. Since Anne is an orphan, people tend to exclude her from the community. But she is able to overcome social isolation by making friends, like Diana Barry. This demonstrates that kindness and sincerity can lead to social success through empathy and personal connection rather than power or authority.

Being an orphan girl in the early 19th century posed the biggest challenges to Anne Shirley as a character. Yet, it is the same background that allowed the writer to develop a strong feminine character whose path from youth to adulthood was marked by her imagination and self-construction. The orphanage made Anne Shirley experience all the difficulties of the coming-of-age process alone, since she could not rely on her family or those around her. She had to deal with struggles to find herself a home and a family, to discover her freedom within a patriarchal system, learn moral and social etiquette, and fit in with the exclusive environment of Avonlea.

Anne's attachment to the concept of "home" reflects her deep desire to plant roots for herself, wishing to belong in a stable environment at a time when being an orphan or abandoned was as common as poverty and sickness. The search for identity was a need for survival. For most kids, just getting something to eat and somewhere to rest would be enough, no matter what methods were used to achieve these basic requirements.

Consequently, orphans tend to live in a sort of "limbo" regarding traditional status since they do not belong to traditional families. Anne exemplifies this archetype by beginning in

isolation and then embarking on a journey toward integration. As Anne explains, she has been passed from one household to another after the death of her parents; they treated her more as a burden than as a child: “Nobody ever did want me. I might have known it was all too beautiful to last. I might have known nobody really did want me.” (Montgomery 34) This quote shows the deep insecurity that Anne feels and how being an orphan makes her an outsider, and the instability associated with traditional family life.

However, at the end of the novel, Anne is no longer portrayed as a socially displaced orphan but as a member of the Cuthberts family. This indicates that Anne’s story is one that highlights the movement that characterises the orphan archetype, moving from loneliness and displacement to acceptance and integration.

3. 3. The Characterisation of Anne Shirley

From the beginning of the story, Anne’s appearance is presented as different from that of other girls; she is portrayed as:

A child of about eleven, garbed in a very short, very tight, very ugly dress of yellowish wincey. She wore a faded brown sailor hat, and beneath the hat, extending down her back, were two braids of very thick, decidedly red hair. Her face was small, white and thin, also much freckled; her mouth was large, and so were her eyes, which looked green in some lights and moods and grey in other. (Montgomery 16)

Her clothing is described before her physical characteristics, drawing attention to her tattered dress, which speaks to her solitary, troubled background as an orphan and child labourer. Anne’s arrival in Avonlea made her aware that her appearance made her appear neglected, which segregated her into a lower social class, reinforcing the social judgments that are tied to people’s outward looks (Simmel 541). At the beginning, while waiting for Matthew’s arrival, she wasn’t wearing any coat or any protection against the weather; she was dressed only to clothe herself.

She has outgrown her dress; her sleeves are too short and fail to cover the entire length of her arms. Furthermore, the size of the carpet bag Anne was carrying shows how few material possessions she has, thereby inviting sympathy from the reader as an impoverished orphan.

For this reason, her vision of happiness is owning a white dress. For her, White is the colour of luxury, as she states, “I do hope that some day I shall have a white dress. That is my highest ideal of earthly bliss. I just love pretty clothes”. (Montgomery 19) It is also the signifier of leisure and consumption. As explained by Jennie Macdonald in her essay “‘I Just Love Pretty Clothes’: Considering the Sartorial in *Anne of Green Gables*” Anne’s quest for new garments is associated with her need to transform, so that she can become part of her new community (246-7). For her, the more beautiful and costly the dresses, the higher are the chances that she would have developed strong social relationships. This is why Anne dreams of wearing a “silk dress”, “gold watch” and “kid gloves” (Montgomery 20).

It is no wonder that Anne does not appear attractive from the start, since the author's image is full of negative connotations. However, it must be noted that despite others initial impressions of her, they cannot help but like her once they get to know her. In effect, her imaginative abilities function as a form of self-invention. Anne is unwilling to let her imagination be limited by either her physicality or her orphan status. Rather, she reinvents herself and her environment according to more idealistic standards.

Matthew, who is depicted as reserved and introverted, likes being around Anne because he does not have to participate in conversations. It is easy for Anne to conduct both a question and an answer, and it is very convenient for him. For instance, from the moment they left the railway station for Green Gables, the girl carried on a whole conversation with herself, while Matthew only had to agree with her sometimes and answer some of her questions briefly. She just needs to speak constantly. Everything can become the subject for her conversation; even a blossoming tree can serve as an entry point into her stories. As we have noticed, this young lady

is often ignored or overlooked, and speaking is one way she stays focused. Her self-talk can be understood as a mechanism to overcome social neglect and emotional loneliness. This is because Anne did not grow up with stable affection from her parents; she created the habit of imagining friends and having conversations on her own. By talking consistently, she can make up for the lack of attentive listeners in her life; this can be seen as a psychological strategy that helps her cope with loneliness and maintain an identity and a sense of comfort.

3. 4. Imagination as a Personality Trait vs. a Narrative Tool

On the first reading about Anne Shirley, imagination seems to be merely a personality trait which defines her as an interesting and special girl in her own way. She never stops talking, exaggerates every trivial detail, and she lives as much in her inner world as in the real one. It might seem simple to assume that Anne's imagination is nothing but a silly fancy associated with her personality, which makes her an amusing character in the book. However, reading the novel makes it clear that Montgomery sees imagination differently and uses it in a more complex manner.

Anne's manner of living is based on imagination; she reimagines everything that she doesn't like, even her name, when Marilla first asked her, and she answered "I've always imagined that my name was Cordelia—at least, I always have of late years. When I was young I used to imagine it was Geraldine, but I like Cordelia better now. But if you call me Anne please call me Anne spelled with an e". (Montgomery 35) Demonstrating Anne's habit of transforming her reality and refined identity.

The tendency of renaming and imagining her identity can be interpreted through Dan McAdam's theory of narrative identity, where he argues that individuals create and develop their identities by integrating their personal life stories, including past experiences, present reality, and imagined future, in order to explain who they are and who they might become.

Using this concept, one can state that renaming herself Cordelia marks the beginning of her self-narration, helping her redefine her identity beyond that of an orphan. (100–101)

Furthermore, Anne's imagination becomes especially visible in moments of uncertainty, when Matthew first arrives to pick her up, she immediately starts creating dramatic possibilities, saying: " I'm very glad to see you. I was afraid you weren't coming and I was imagining all the things that might have happened to you. If you didn't come for me tonight, I made up my mind to go down the road to that cherry tree at the corner, climb up it and stay all night..." (Montgomery 16), which shows her ability to transform fear and loneliness into imaginative narratives very easily, because for her, imagination operates as an ongoing process of interpretation of reality.

Another powerful part that shows how Anne convinces herself and believes strongly in her fantasies is when she pictures how her and Diana's life would be like when they grow up old, Anne realizes that Diana will marry someday, and she would be separated from her that's when she says "I cannot ever live without her. [...] I hate her husband—I just hate him furiously. I've been imagining it all out" (Montgomery 167) even though she knows that it is just her imagination she still feels sad about the idea of her marriage. As a result, Marilla always warns her not to use it much because she is worried that she might become too involved in her own mind and it would have a negative effect on her life. Since getting lost in fantasies would have an emotional and psychological impact on her, leaving her dissatisfied with ordinary life and overly sensitive to events that have not even happened..

Moreover, her imagination is not limited to herself; it also influences those around her. Anne often encourages her friends to develop their imagination, but she also inspires Diana to join a story club and learn to write imaginative stories. Where she tells Diana, "I've just thought of a plan, Diana. Let you and I have a story club all our own and write stories for practice. I'll

help you along until you can do them by yourself. You ought to cultivate your imagination...”
(Montgomery 293).

On the other hand, Montgomery uses Anne’s imagination as a literary tool to create an impression of the town of Avonlea. Through the renaming and reinterpretation of places, Avonlea comes to be perceived as a dynamic and emotionally charged setting. Imagination is employed here as a narrative literary device that allows the reader to experience Anne’s perceptions of the world. In effect, Anne’s imagination is not restricted to her mind; it functions as a means of constructing the fictional world in a way that makes the setting more vivid, emotional, and engaging for the reader.

Through a psychoanalytic approach, specifically the “transitional space” theory developed by Donald Winnicott, one can analyse Anne’s imagination as a combination of her inner emotions and external reality around her. In this space, she is able to process her difficult experiences, including loneliness and orphanhood, into an imaginative story. This allows her to cope with these feelings and gives her the ability to handle emotional deficiencies and develop a strong identity. Winnicott argues that children who experience emotional deprivation often rely on imagination in order to create a sense of security and continuity. An example can be seen when Anne accidentally insults Mrs Rachel Lynde and is compelled to apologise. The humiliation of the situation deeply affects Anne because she is highly sensitive. However, after the apology, she quickly reconstructs the experience through imaginative reflection, turning it into a dramatic emotional episode rather than a purely painful memory. Through narrativising, Anne manages to distance herself from feelings of humiliation and embarrassment.

3. 5. Anne’s Relationship with Nature

Anne’s relationship with nature can be situated within the romantic tradition; descriptions of nature can be observed in almost every chapter of the novel, and it plays a vital

role in the life of Anne Shirley. In relation to her imagination, nature goes beyond mere description; it becomes emotional and spiritual. She sees nature not as something to be used but as something to be lived.

Anne often personifies plant and tree life, and even assigns them genders. Going back to the days spent in Avonlea, Anne found a way to connect with nature because she adores natural settings and even goes so far as to give them stories. Nature becomes a safe emotional refuge where she can project feelings that society often ignores. Unlike people, nature does not reject or criticise her appearance, her talkativeness, or her fantasies. Therefore, by personifying natural elements, Anne creates a comforting world that responds to her emotionally. The geranium is not simply a flower; it becomes part of a living, affectionate environment that welcomes her into Green Gables. Indeed, one of the first things that Anne does when she sits down in the kitchen at Green Gables is find a name for a geranium that sits in the windowsill..

Oh, I like things to have handles even if they are only geraniums. It makes them seem more like people. How do you know but that it hurts a geranium's feelings just to be called a geranium and nothing else? You wouldn't like to be called a woman all the time. Yes, I shall call it Boney. I named that cherry outside my bedroom window this morning. I called it Snow Queen because it was so white. Of course, it won't always be in blossom, but one can imagine that it is, can't one?.. (Montgomery 50)

Anne and Marilla perceive things differently. Flowers for Marilla are just a messy plant, but for Anne, they symbolise the beauty and freedom which she had never experienced before in her life. As the novel progresses, Anne keeps naming things found in nature, which helps her assimilate them into her own imaginary world, where everything is fascinating.

For her, everything around her is beautiful, including places that others might consider ordinary or ignore. She feels touched by sunsets, blooming flowers, and scenery, frequently

expressing herself in a very strong poetic style. Her love for nature complements her imaginative self and sets her apart from the adults around her, who find it difficult to understand Anne's reactions.

Moreover, Wordsworth argues that all children possess an innate imaginative capacity grounded in perception, but creative imagination is a skill fostered only in a few individuals. he also highlights nature's contribution to the development of imagination (Wordsworth 14). Anne not only instinctively responds to nature through observation, but she also actively interacts with nature by naming the spots instead of leaving them ordinary; for instance, Barry's Bond becomes "the Lake of Shining Waters" (28) and "royally beautiful" is renamed "the White Way of Delight" (26) Through this process of renaming, Anne creates a new reality for herself by transforming the real landscape into an aesthetic one that captures her imaginative perception.

As she grows up, she continues to love nature. As she goes through the stressful time of examination at Queen's Academy, her love of nature makes her calm and reminds her of what truly matters in life. This healing function of nature grows stronger towards the end of the book, following Matthew's death. Even though Anne feels intense pain from his death, she nevertheless finds herself affected by the presence of nature, which makes her feel "the old inrush of gladness" (Montgomery 413). Nature does not erase her sorrow, but it changes it, helping her remember that there is more life than death.

In the end, Anne's relationship with nature shows an important aspect of her identity formation. Through it, she can resist the social pressure and adapt to its needs, creating a way to live in reality. Her emotional state is connected to nature and is simultaneously used by her to assert herself. It implies that her connection with nature is an integral part of her imagination. When Anne is happy, she perceives nature as bright and welcoming; when she is sad, it mirrors her inner feelings. This reflects a psychological blending between external environment and

inner imagination, where nature functions almost like a “screen” for her emotions. In this sense, nature is not separate from her imagination; it is the space in which her imagination operates.

3. 6. Resistance and Resilience: Self-Construction Against Patriarchal Expectations

Anne Shirley constructed her personality during her adolescent years. From a feminist perspective, resilience refers to the ability to adapt positively to adversity, not by avoiding emotional pain, but by transforming it through coping strategies and meaning-making. Self-construction is a developmental process through which individuals build identity by integrating lived experiences into a coherent sense of self. She had managed to empower herself by knowing more about who she truly is. Although Anne had to conform to the societal standards of Victorian femininity, she remained an agent because of her vivid imagination.

Right from the beginning, Anne, being an orphan girl, makes her vulnerable because of all the marginalisation that she went through, which means that she is emotionally deprived and lacks belongingness. But rather than becoming the victim of such hard situations, she learns from her experiences and turns them into constructive advantages. This reflects a feminist form of resistance, where individuals reframe negative experiences to preserve emotional stability. Anne’s tendency to reinterpret suffering through imagination shows early forms of narrative identity formation, in which personal experiences are reorganised into meaningful internal stories that support self-worth and belonging.

A very clear example of Anne’s resilience is when she was insulted by Mrs Rachel Lynde about her appearance; instead of taking the insult without complaint, she reacted very emotionally, and, by doing so, she appeared improper by Avonlea standards. However, this is a very important instance, as it shows that Anne doesn’t accept insults in a way that undermines her self-respect. Even when she is forced to apologise. Therefore, her resilience stems from her ability to regain respect while remaining herself; her emotional response and refusal to

internalise humiliation demonstrate that her self-esteem is externally challenged but internally defended, which is a key feature of resilience in identity formation.

Moreover, the way she deals with loneliness, especially in the first chapters, when she has not been able to make any friends, shows her resilience. Unlike the portrayal of a lonely individual, Anne manages to cope with that by using her imagination and creating a link with her surroundings. The naming of places and making them seem beautiful in her mind is another demonstration that Anne does not accept anything as it is. This is not just an act of escaping from reality, but of making her surroundings seem beautiful enough for her to belong there. An example occurs when Anne talks about her life before her arrival at Green Gables. Having grown up without constant affection from others, she mentions how she developed fictional friends like Katie Maurice and Violetta to combat her loneliness.

I used to pretend that my reflection in it was another little girl who lived in it. I called her Katie Maurice, and we were very intimate. I used to talk to her by the hour, especially on Sunday, and tell her everything. Katie was the comfort and consolation of my life. We used to pretend that the bookcase was enchanted and that if I only knew the spell, I could open the door and step right into the room where Katie Maurice lived.
(Montgomery 83)

In this way, it can be seen that Anne's friends are an alternative source of affection rather than merely a means of coping with being alone.

In the final chapters of the novel, Anne begins her journey into adulthood, particularly after Matthew's death. He is the first to embrace the girl for who she really is and helps her discover herself. Though he does not attempt to alter Marilla's approach to raising Anne, he pays close attention to everything Anne says and tries to help her. The more they bond, the more Matthew shows Anne affection, thereby creating familial connections. The death of Matthew

marks a milestone in Anne's development into a mature woman because it is the first time she loses someone she dearly loves. The death of Matthew also becomes an important turning point for Anne's defiance against the patriarchal power structure as well because Matthew was the only adult in the community who had accepted her for what she was without wanting to change her to the stereotype of Avonlea girl. Losing Matthew is the first major experience of grief that Anne must integrate into her personal life. This moment accelerates her maturation, as she is required to transform emotional pain into resilience. Rather than breaking her sense of identity, the experience contributes to its consolidation, since self-construction often develops through the integration of loss, change, and emotional challenge into a coherent life story.

3. 7. The Transition to Adulthood

Throughout her coming-of-age journey, Anne ultimately empowers herself by understanding her true identity. During her development, Anne slowly begins to understand how to balance her imaginative, rebellious self with the expectations of Victorian femininity in order to be accepted within Avonlea's society. Although she adapts to the social norms, she does not abandon her own personality or her imaginative quality. At the end of the novel, Anne appears to embrace her role as an adult with the new identity she has created for herself.

Anne puts more effort into her education, and although she does not fully adhere to Victorian ideals of femininity in her behaviour, she recognises that she has been integrated into society and given an opportunity to achieve her dreams. The characters around Anne greatly influence the development of her personality. Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert give her love and security; Diana inspires her creativity and sense of uniqueness; and the new teacher, Miss Stacy, provides the ideal of an independent, educated woman. She gains confidence and becomes aware of her own identity: "I don't want to be anyone but myself, and I'm quite content to be Anne of Green Gables" (Montgomery 382). This means that her social environment helps her

cope with childhood trauma and shape her identity. Having grown up as an orphan who was repeatedly displaced and emotionally deprived, once she enters Avonlea, the consistent care she receives from figures such as Matthew and Marilla introduces a radically different emotional framework based on permanence, affection, and belonging.

3. 8. The Transformation of Avonlea

The transformation becomes evident in Anne's interactions with the Avonlea community, especially with Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert. As Marilla initially embodies discipline and self-control, she becomes emotionally vulnerable as Anne shows more affection and emotion. On the other hand, Matthew is touched by Anne's imaginative stories as they provide him with some form of emotional attachment.

Ultimately, Anne's character brought a new definition of girlhood in Avonlea. Unlike the traditional ideals of the quiet, obedient girl, she is emotionally expressive, smart, and ambitious. Through her storytelling, creativity, and strong identity, she challenges the community's limitations on girls' development and shows that identity does is not only socially imposed, but actively shaped by imagination. Gradually, the community begins to accept that femininity has a more complex meaning. Therefore, it is possible to say that Anne does not conform to society's values but transforms them, which supports the idea that imagination functions as a powerful tool for both self-construction and social change. An example of social transformation is seen in her academic success and ambition, which challenge the traditional belief that girls should only prepare for domestic life. The development of Anne's character allows Avonlea to realise that a woman can be an imaginative, educated, ambitious, and independent individual who is socially respected at the same time.

3. 9. Conclusion

Imagination emerges in this chapter as an active process whereby Anne Shirley establishes her identity and place within the setting of Avonlea. Imagination turns out to be a means of interpreting her own experiences, thereby reconstructing reality.

The aspects explored in imagination show that it is an important factor in Anne's development. Through imagination, she reinterprets the experience of deprivation and loneliness, allowing her to create meaningful, symbolic connections and to convert moments of uncertainty into moments of transformation and development. Anne's growth demonstrates how identity can reshape the social environment in which one lives, as her way of interpreting the world reshaped Avonlea's social values.

In the end, as illustrated in this entire chapter, imagination within *Anne of Green Gables* is not an escapist tool for children but a conscious feminist tool of self-creation a point which will indeed be validated and synthesized in the final chapter that follows this one, along with a consideration of its implications for feminist theory of girls' literature.

General Conclusion

While many Nineteenth-Century literary works reinforce traditional feminine ideals, *Anne of Green Gables* portrays a little orphan girl struggling to find her place in society. Anne's imaginative interpretation of social conventions strongly reflects the ingenuity of childhood and highlights the importance of the child's perspective. Her experience as an adopted child supports Montgomery's aim of questioning social attitudes toward children, particularly orphans. Moreover, the romanticised child presented in the novel evokes sympathy for orphans and draws attention to the idea that children deserve the same care and support as adults.

The theoretical section of this research examined the concepts of children's literature, girlhood, feminism, identity, and imagination to formulate the study's critical framework. It pointed out that children's literature is not just a means of entertainment but also a cultural force that both generates and challenges social values, gender roles, and models of behaviour. Within this framework, girlhood was regarded as a socially constructed notion determined by the patriarchal norms and values that prescribe particular forms of behaviour for young girls. Besides, the analysis of imagination and identity demonstrated that identity is a complex phenomenon shaped through socialisation and storytelling.

Moreover, the research demonstrates the restrictive social environment of Avonlea and its influence on the regulation of women's behaviour. Using concepts such as the Domestic Ideal, community surveillance, moral authority, and discipline, the dissertation revealed that conventional girlhood was a way through which society exercised social control over young girls. The characters Marilla Cuthbert, Mrs Rachel Lynde, Mrs Barry, and Mr Phillips represented different structures of power that sought to discipline and raise Anne according to Victorian ideals of femininity. On the other hand, the status of orphanhood contributed to the marginalisation of Anne, reinforcing her position as an outsider struggling to achieve belonging and emotional security.

Rather than fully submitting to different restrictions, Anne develops a form of resistance through her imagination and creativity. Also, her relationship with nature is greatly influenced by her imagination; She finds comfort in it and runs to it whenever she faces hardships. Next, the analysis revealed how imagination creates a space in which the protagonist uses her experiences of loneliness, rejection, and insecurity as a form of self-expression. Through renaming, creating imaginary characters, and emotionally interpreting nature, Anne recreates her surroundings and herself. Thus, imagination is essential not only in helping Anne deal with the challenges she faces but also in developing an identity free from social restrictions.

Moreover, the research has demonstrated that Anne's development influences not only her identity but also the society in which she lives. The Avonlea community starts to accept forms of femininity that move beyond obedience and silence. Anne's emotional intelligence and ambitions serve to change the attitudes of the individuals around her, most notably those of Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert. Thus, the novel ultimately presents imagination as a means of transforming society and the self. Ultimately, this analysis reveals that the novel *Anne of Green Gables* portrays girlhood as a process of continual identity formation through imagination, strength, emotional development, and social relationships.

Montgomery portrays imagination as an important form of resistance to the traditional portrayal of girlhood and societal constraints. Although Anne's imagination is always viewed as an obstacle that would prevent her from becoming a successful and respectable woman, she proves them wrong and gradually becomes admired as the ideal young woman. In contrast, those who criticise her attitudes fail to understand that her imagination is not a weakness but a force that contributes to her personal growth and identity construction. By following Anne Shirley's transformation from an outsider to a valued member of Avonlea, the novel has shown that individuality and creativity can successfully challenge conventional models of femininity.

The confirmation of the first hypothesis about the use of imagination as a feminist tool of resistance, rather than just childhood fantasy is fully confirmed. By means of renaming, self-narration and interpretation of her environment through her imagination, Anne refuses to accept the identity she was supposed to have and creates her own one. The second hypothesis about the subversion of the main model of girlhood in children's literature through the replacement of its key elements (obedience and silence) with emotions and intellect of a curious child is also proven. In this book imagination is used not for the open rebellion against social norms but for the redefinition of the concept of girlhood, which is gradually accepted by Anne herself. The confirmation of the third hypothesis about imagination being the tool of identity construction is also achieved.

There are many different directions for further research on this topic. First, one might consider conducting a comparative analysis between Montgomery's novel and other works by authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett in her *A Little Princess* (1905) and Eleanor H. Porter in her *Pollyanna* (1913). In particular, the analysis should help to find out if the use of imagination as a way of resisting patriarchy is a trend in all girls literature of the time or a specific feature of Montgomery's writing only. Second, a study of adaptations in movies and TV shows of *Anne of Green Gables* may help to understand what modifications have been introduced by directors and how they contribute to or deviate from Montgomery's understanding of girlhood resistance. Third, one can conduct a postcolonial or eco-critical reading of Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. For example, such a reading may involve discussing the significance of the girl's intimate connection with nature on Prince Edward Island in terms of identity and belonging to the community. Finally, a reader-response study will provide interesting insights into the way contemporary readers perceive Montgomery's heroine.

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Appendices

Appendix 01

This figure visually introduces Anne's arrival at Green Gables, marking her entry into a new domestic and social environment. It establishes the initial encounter between Anne and the Cuthberts, foregrounding the dynamics of first impressions and belonging.



Source: *Anne of Green Gables*, illustrated edition, L.C. Page & Company, 1908, p.33.

Appendix 02

This figure captures Anne's emotional intensity within a domestic setting, reflecting her impulsive and expressive nature. It highlights her inability to conform fully to expected behavioural restraint in moments of emotional pressure



Source: *Anne of Green Gables*, illustrated edition, L.C. Page & Company, 1908, p.91.