

'A SPELL OF WHITE MAGIC':  
L. M. MONTGOMERY AND THE APPROPRIATENESS OF HER NOVELS  
FOR READERS' ADVISORY LIBRARIANS' USE WITH ADOLESCENT WOMEN

by  
Avena-Lyn Smith

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This paper describes Lucy Maud Montgomery's life, her written works, and the use of these works to readers' advisory service. Montgomery's life is detailed to show her suitability for writing young adult novels. Readers' advisory is explained to provide an understanding of how these novels might be used in this field. Six novels written by L. M. Montgomery are analyzed for their provision of role models for young women. Some of the literature related to these topics is also presented in order to give a more complete picture of these areas.

Headings:

Public libraries – Readers' advisory services

Young adult literature – Lucy Maud Montgomery

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‘A Spell of White Magic’:  
L. M. Montgomery and the Appropriateness of Her Novels  
For Readers’ Advisory Librarians’ Use With Adolescent Women

The field of young adult literature has a variety of contents and a multitude of uses. One of these uses is to give young adults characters with whom they can identify. One author who does this particularly well for young women is Lucy Maud Montgomery. In a time when young women are coming of age and facing new trials and hurdles in life, it is comforting to have someone else’s life to look at and say, “they did it – so can I.” L.M. Montgomery’s works give young women just that chance. Her main characters are also young women who are at the brink of becoming adults. These characters, who share similar ages with the readers and in some cases even the same troubles, make good role models for them. There is strength to be gained from reading about someone going through hard times in her life and then applying a similar view to one’s own life. The knowledge and techniques gained from the vicarious experience of reading about the other young woman overcoming life’s problems can help prepare the young female reader for problems in her life.

This paper looks at the uses of young adult literature, specifically its provision of role models for young adults, to show how L. M. Montgomery’s popular books for young women give the young female reader a character with whom she can strongly identify. The main questions this paper asks are: “Do L. M. Montgomery’s books offer characters with which young women can identify?” and “Can these books provide adolescent women with role models going through problems similar to their own

obstacles?” Six of L. M. Montgomery’s books will be evaluated for this paper on the criteria of strong female characters (strength of will, determination, bravery, and mental ability), similar ages to the readers, obstacles that the characters must face and success over these problems. The books chosen do not include the principal ones from the *Anne of Green Gables* series since they have been used as the basis of much of the research on L. M. Montgomery’s literary works.

This paper first analyzes literature pertaining to Montgomery, the topic of reader’s advisory and Montgomery’s novels. Next Montgomery’s life is detailed. After this the subject of readers’ advisory is explained and its use considered. Then this paper will present the books themselves including the characters in the books that make them suitable for usage by reader’s advisors for young women. The views of this researcher, mainly how the books measure up to the evaluative criteria, are discussed. After this the results and the points presented by the literature review will be compared to present the status quo and what this researcher has found in the novels. The conclusions of this paper are explained along with ideas for further research.

### **Literature Review:**

#### **L. M. Montgomery:**

L. M. Montgomery wrote, as she said, “...ostensibly for girls” (Gillen 3). This opinion put forward by the author has been supported through the books popularity with young women and researchers’ concurring opinions. One Montgomery researcher, Muriel Whitaker, expresses this by saying that L. M. Montgomery “...is one of those authors whom girls in their early teens cannot resist” (Whitaker 11). Whitaker bases this opinion on her own young experiences with the author’s works and those of her

daughters as well (Whitaker 11). Both generations were avid Montgomery readers in youth. Elizabeth Waterston, another Montgomery researcher might say that this appeal is the result of Montgomery's talent at universalizing her own life in her books (Waterston 9). It is Waterston's opinion that L. M. Montgomery had a talent for taking an event from her own life and "...exploit[ing] her experience in an enduring art form" (Waterston 9). She also states that it is Montgomery's remembered feeling from her youth that make her able to write about those feelings in other young women (Waterston 24). This writing from one's own knowledge does lead to a more complete understanding of a situation and how to describe it fully and authentically. Thus L. M. Montgomery's novels are popular representations of youth because she is able to present occurrences she has personal experience with.

#### Readers' Advisory for Young Adults:

It is a generally accepted belief that literature is good for young minds and that reading is a skill everyone should possess. Joan Kaywell states that books offer young adults education and literacy and through these a certain power in the world around them (Kaywell 92). Patrick Howard reinforces the importance of reading and says that literature can show young women that there are many possibilities in life and how to live it (Howard 17, 18). Howard also suggests that our current society has the tendency to negatively affect young women. He states that this happens because society is full of images of negative female stereotypes (Howard 18). Reading literature with positive role models is one way to bolster a young woman's will and self-esteem (Howard 18-22, 26).

Marsha Sprague's research also supports these ideas. She states that reading novels in which adolescents face critical issues can bolster the readers themselves (Sprague 641-642). The vicarious experience of reading about young women in situations analogous to real-life situations helps prepare young women for situations in their own lives (Sprague 642-644). Another researcher, Jean Boreen, says that young adult novels of historical fiction with female protagonists can offer young women role models (Boreen 14). Boreen is a proponent of the idea that novels can promote young women's thinking about the type of adults they want to be (Boreen 14). All of these researchers support the theory that young adult literature is beneficial to adolescents and comes to the point of saying that it can provide role models for these young readers.

#### Montgomery Novels:

Charlene Gates states how some of L. M. Montgomery's works can teach young adult women and help show them the path through this initiation into adulthood that is called adolescence (Gates 172). The ideas that she bases this statement on are the fact that the works are autobiographically based, are non-didactic, and occur during the same adolescent time that the readers are also experiencing (Gates 172). Eve Kornfeld discusses the female *bildungsroman*, or the story of female coming of age, in L. M. Montgomery's works and how this type of literature can show young women the power of womanhood (Kornfeld 140). Her research also concerns how this literature can show a framework in which adolescent problems can be solved (Kornfeld 151). Within this type of books scenarios can be played out and solved while providing an example for young women (Kornfeld 151). Ann Cowan also writes of Montgomery's works and how they are about "child-heroines who succeeded in winning respect from their peers

and superiors though confronted with the problems all children face” (Cowan 42).

Cowan speaks of the enduring quality of these books because they are literature and have an appeal to adolescents that lasts (Cowan 42). Some of this seems to stem from the fact that Montgomery ‘satisfies’ her audience. For the outcast reader she supplies the eventual social success of an outcast heroine, and in the case of the ‘ugly duckling’ she provides the later adult beauty of a formerly unattractive character (Cowan 42).

Montgomery’s novels appear, at least in part, to be attractive and helpful to adolescent females because the books provide what the readers desire.

### **L.M. Montgomery’s Life:**

Lucy Maud Montgomery endowed her characters with believable lives and attitudes because of her own life experiences. Lucy, called Maud by her friends and family, had an eventful life (Gillen 3). Much like the young lives of her characters, Lucy’s youth was somewhat unhappy, but it did give her much time to read which led to her later writing endeavors. Her experiences once she reached adulthood were not smoother. Romance for Lucy was also similar to those found in her books in the fact that she had two failed relationships before she married (Gillen 18). While Lucy’s personal life might not have been successful, her writing career was. When one has an eventful life, as in Lucy’s case, it gives one background for writing believable stories.

Lucy’s less than perfect youth makes her a prime candidate for writing of other young women facing life’s problems. She was born on Prince Edward Island, in Canada, on November 30, 1874, and just 21 months later her mother died. At this point Lucy’s father sent her to live with her mother’s parents, Alexander and Lucy Macneill (Gillen 4). Their homestead, in Cavendish on Prince Edward Island, was twenty-four



miles from a town and eleven from a railway (Montgomery 1) Like many of her novel's heroines Lucy had a trying childhood. In her youth she picked up an extremely hot fireplace poker. Her kitten, Pussy-willow, was also poisoned (Gillen 7). On top of these physically and emotionally painful occurrences, Lucy did not have any childhood playmates until she was six (Gillen 7). Another disturbing factor in Lucy's young life was her grandparents' rigid views about religion. One instance of this strictness was when her grandmother made her kneel and pray to God to be forgiven for being a 'bad girl'. This and other such occurrences left Lucy with a hate for religion and prayer (Gillen 20). Lucy's childhood gave her many reasons to be able to convincingly write about others' unhappy youths.

Through her young life Lucy was a reader. She read many of the books in the Macneill house, such as *Rob Roy*, *The Pickwick Papers*, Hans Andersen's *Tales*, and the poetry of Byron, Whittier, Burns, Scott, and Longfellow. On Sundays, which the strictly Presbyterian household kept sacred, she read such works as *Pilgrim's Progress* and books of sermons (Gillen 9). Though her usual materials were forbidden by religion, Lucy found a way to read even on the Sabbath.

Lucy was nine years old when she realized that like the authors she had been reading, she too could write poetry. At the age of eleven Lucy began writing stories. Her first attempts were tragic tales (Montgomery 1-2). When she reached the age of thirteen Lucy sent some of her poetic verses to the Prince Edward Island newspaper, but she never received a reply; this lack of response might have been on account of the fact that Lucy sent no return stamps with her submissions as she did not know this was required (Montgomery 2). Lucy was fifteen when she first had a poem published by a

newspaper. Even with this early accomplishment, and many following short story and poetry publications in American periodicals, it would be nineteen years before she wrote a novel (Montgomery 3). Between her youth and her success as a novelist, Lucy attended college, worked for a newspaper and wrote short sensational stories, called 'potboilers', for magazines in Canada and the United States (Bolger 140; Gillen 16-17). Occasionally during this time she found the time to write some of her beloved poems (Gillen 17). Through her youth and early adulthood there was rarely a time Lucy was not writing something.

When Lucy's grandfather died and left her grandmother alone in their Cavendish home, Lucy felt duty bound to take care of her. Thus she left her newspaper job and returned to her childhood home in 1902 (Gillen 17). In the years surrounding this date Lucy had two unsuccessful romances. The first of these was when she was in her early twenties. She was involved with a young man whom she cared very much for, but was forced to break off the relationship on account of his intellectual and social inferiority (Gillen 18). Her next romance was not long after the first. In this second relationship she became engaged to a man whom she respected. She broke this engagement when she realized that she did not love him (Gillen 18). At the age of thirty-two Lucy became engaged to a minister whom she liked and admired. He was handsome and well educated. Ewan Macdonald was a Presbyterian minister who had practiced in Cavendish for a time and met Lucy there (Gillen 19). Lucy did not love Ewan, but she felt that they could have a pleasant life together (Gillen 19). Romance for Lucy was not a smooth area, and even when she got married it was not for love.

Lucy sealed her reputation as a famous Canadian author with the immensely popular *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908. This novel went into six printings within its first five months (Gillen 3). After Lucy's success with *Anne* she went on to write twenty-three books of fiction, most of which are about young women. *Emily of New Moon* was published in 1923, the two subsequent books in the series, *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest*, in 1925 and 1927 (Bolger 229). As an earlier work *Rilla of Ingleside* was published in 1921. *The Blue Castle* was published in 1926 and *The Story Girl* in 1911 (Bolger 229). All of these works are still in publication today.

**Readers' Advisory:**

Professional readers' advisory is the librarian's art of placing the right leisure reading book in a patron's hands. For the librarian to suggest books that patrons might like to read he or she must have extensive knowledge of the many types of genre literature and a thorough understanding of the patrons' needs and reading preferences (Flexner 2-4). Genre literature is typically fiction such as western, romance, fantasy, historical, and mystery (Saricks 5). Readers' advisory librarians need to be somewhat familiar with most forms of this genre fiction in order to be able to match readers with the literature that suits the readers' tastes.

Readers' advisory has always been an area of debate because of its many different requirements. These librarians must have knowledge of a broad scope of literature genres, authors, and variations within genres. They must also be able to interview readers carefully in order to deduce the readers' typical tastes in genre and author as well as what the reader is currently in the mood to read (Ross 52). If a reader is at a hassled time in life they may be looking for a book in a genre they are

comfortable with, whereas if their life is calm they may be in the mood to venture into new reading territory (Ross 52). While it is good to know that a reader's mood may change about the material they are interested in, that knowledge does not always help the librarian because few patrons are known on such a personal basis for the librarian to automatically know what mood the reader is in (Shearer 60). Because of these requirements on readers' advisory the parameters and definitions of this service are subject to some change and debate.

**Book Examinations:**

In the *Emily of New Moon* series Montgomery traces the life of one character from girlhood to married woman. This series is made to appeal to any age young adult simply because of the time span it covers in the main character's life. The books show her obstacles as a child, young adult facing maturing hurdles, young woman attending an upper education institution, and the problems she faces in life as a more mature young woman. These three books give growing young women a character to watch and imitate.

*Emily of New Moon – Emily New Moon Series:*

The first book, *Emily of New Moon*, concerns Emily Byrd Starr's childhood from the age of ten through thirteen. Emily's father dies when she is ten years old, and as her mother had died when Emily was just four, the only family she has left to take her are her mother's relatives who disowned Emily's mother for marrying Emily's father. They thought that Emily's father, Douglas Starr - a journalist of little worldly wealth, was not good enough for their sister, Juliet Murray, and had nothing more to do with her once she married him (ENM 13-18). These are the relatives that Emily now

has to contend with as guardians who see raising her as duty rather than having any sort of affectionate attachment to her.

This beginning sets the stage for the obstacles of Emily's youth. She must first get over her father's death and learn to live with two strict aunts. Her indomitable spirit and at times quirky or "unnatural" character as her family is apt to say, are part of what help see Emily through this time (ENM 55). She will not back down from her point of view when she is convinced she is right, and she is not afraid to beg for something if she knows that is the only way.

One instance of this begging is right after it has been decided that she will live with her aunts at New Moon Farm. Her Aunt Elizabeth, the more strict and stony aunt, says that Emily may not take her cats and can not seem to understand why anyone would want to anyway. In this instance Emily attempts to reason with her aunt: Emily – "Don't you like cats?" Aunt – "No, I do not." Emily – "Don't you like the feel of a nice, soft, fat cat?" But when this does not work, she begs to be able to take them with her saying that "...they're the only things left in the world that love me. Please!"

Eventually Aunt Elizabeth relents enough to let Emily take one of her two cats with her to the New Moon farm (ENM 45-46). And so taking the cat that she thinks anyone else would be least likely to love, and would therefore have the hardest task of surviving if left behind, Emily is off to New Moon. This little problem is just one example of how Emily deals with problems when she has no power over the situation. And at the same time this instance shows young adults that there are different ways to deal with situations when you are young and that it is not always productive to throw a tantrum or pout.

The next problem that Emily must deal with in this book is the school she is to attend now. Aunt Elizabeth sends her off to this new school in an outdated bonnet and overlarge apron that had at one time belonged to Emily's mother. Thus she starts out as a target for the other children simply because she is new and dressed in a less than flattering or fashionable manner (ENM 77). Her teacher is also called a "strict disciplinarian" by the adults in the area, but in Emily's case this means a disagreeable woman who seems to dislike Emily from first sight (ENM 78). Emily overcomes the problem of the students by standing up to them and asking them directly why they don't like her. Eventually she comes to be on at least even, if not friendly terms with them because she won't let them get the best of her, and because she makes friends with the other outsider in the school, Ilse Burnley (ENM 81,83).

Her teacher, Miss Brownell, on the other hand, takes more time. Miss Brownell ridicules her spelling, slaps Emily for speaking out when Miss Brownell was reading poetry to the class, and then later reads some of Emily's young attempts at poetry out to the class for them to make fun of and laugh at Emily (ENM 81, 91, 161). All of this cruelty is endured by Emily because she knows she has no way to stop the teacher and that getting angry will only worsen her plight. So Emily tries to make the teacher like her. She brings Miss Brownell flowers the day after the teacher slapped her, and she later apologizes for reacting badly when Miss Brownell reads Emily's poetry to the class (ENM 97, 171). No matter how hard Emily tries to be good and friendly, Miss Brownell simply does not like her, so Emily just patiently puts up with the woman. Eventually Miss Brownell leaves the teaching of the school to get married, and Emily is finally spared the woman's harsh treatment (ENM 286).

Emily's tribulations in school show young adults that many children have to endure mockery and unjust treatment. It is often very comforting to know that one is not the only person going through a tough situation, and Emily's school problems give a young reader evidence of shared experience and possibly an example of how to deal with the instances. Instead of just getting angry and put out in the situations, Emily is willing to stand up to people and ask them why they would do mean things to her, and if there is no option for doing that then Emily is strong enough of spirit to know that she can put up with the person until the problem deals with itself.

There are other small problems in the book that Emily must endeavor to overcome. A couple of these are worth mentioning such as the time that Aunt Elizabeth commands that Emily's long hair will be cut, and the time that Emily thinks she has been poisoned. When Aunt Elizabeth attempts to cut Emily's hair, which was her father's pride and joy, Emily stands up to her and says, "Aunt Elizabeth, my hair is not going to be cut off. Let me hear no more of this." The words that Emily uses, as well as the fact that Emily's facial expression resembles Aunt Elizabeth's dead father's look when he was angry, convince Aunt Elizabeth that Emily should be allowed to keep her hair (ENM 106-107). Emily's poisoning experience turns out to be a joke that is being played on her, but at the time she thinks it is real. Through the whole ordeal Emily is calm. "She ceased to tremble – she accepted her fate –with bitter regret, but calmly" (ENM 136). These small occurrences further emphasize Emily's strength of spirit and determination when she knows she is right, as well as showing her ability not to panic in the face of possible death.

*Emily Climbs – Emily of New Moon Series:*

The second book of this series, *Emily Climbs*, continues the story of Emily's triumphs and challenges from late in her thirteenth year until she is about eighteen. In this section of Emily's life she faces the challenges of upper education in a different town and the social problems she has there. Though Emily's Aunts had been quite against her going off to school in the first place, as no Murray woman had ever had to work for her living, the rest of the family convinces them that this really is the best thing for Emily (EC 81). The first challenge she must face in this new situation is that she must not write any fiction. Now while this might not seem like much to most of us, it is a hardship for Emily because creative writing is what she does best and loves most. But for a chance at a higher education, and the agreement that she may still write fact, Emily agrees (EC 82-85). By using her wits and creating compromise Emily deals with the condition placed on her getting a higher education.

Emily's second hurdle is living with her Aunt Ruth, who has never thought much of her anyway and calls her "deep and sly" (EC 102). In exchange for letting Emily live with her while attending school, Ruth has arranged for Emily to do all the chores around the house, and Emily's Uncle Wallace is paying Ruth for half of Emily's room and board (EC 94). For this trade Emily gets an ugly little room toward the back of her aunt's rooming house. But Emily considers her education to be of high importance and shows her strength by making the best of it (EC 95-98). Emily also tries to make the best of living with her aunt in general by thinking of the good things that she can say about her: "She is honest and virtuous and truthful and industrious and of her pantry she needth not be ashamed." (EC 103). By doing this Emily shows a



young reader that when one cannot change the situation and one has to simply bear it, it is best to attempt to have a good outlook and think on the good aspects of the person or place.

One of the main difficulties that Emily must overcome in this book is the occasional peer who does not like her. One young woman whom Emily does not get along with, Evelyn Blake, goes out of her way several times to try and make Emily's life miserable. The first time is when she sees to it that one of Emily's poems does not get in the newspaper at the school by influencing the editor, Evelyn's cousin (EC 110). The next outrage that Evelyn commits upon Emily is to draw a black mustache across Emily's upper lips and cheeks when Evelyn catches Emily asleep one day. Completely unaware of the horrible design across her face, Emily goes to class in said makeup (EC 123, 275). The last thing that Evelyn does is beat Emily in a contest of poetry, but this last attempt to hurt Emily is what gives Emily her chance to gain her justice against Miss Blake. The contest was supposed to be of original poetry written by the girl entering it, but Evelyn copied a poem from an old book and turned it in as hers. Emily later finds the poem with its original author cited and confronts her adversary (EC 273, 275). Thus Emily shows that if one has strength of mind and heart and knows oneself to be in the right, justice will come in the end.

Emily's last main obstacle in this book is in the form of a decision. Should she go to New York and work on becoming a famous writer there or should she return to New Moon after she graduates from high school? Emily is offered the chance to go to New York and work in the office of a metropolitan women's magazine. The offer is given by the female editor of the magazine, who graduated from Emily's alma mater

(EC 299). This is a wonderful chance for Emily to further her writing career and get more experience in the writing and publishing world. Emily considers the offer for a few days and the benefits of the chance she is being given, but she eventually declines the offer (EC 309). She has realized now just how much her home means to her and that the more glamorous choice is not always the best one (EC 310). This example that Emily sets here shows a young reader that though a chance might seem wonderful at first glance, it is best to think on it and decide if one can bear to suffer the trade offs that always ensue.

*Emily's Quest – Emily of New Moon Series:*

In *Emily's Quest*, Emily is starting her adult years and is considered a very striking young woman, not precisely beautiful, L. M. Montgomery's heroines rarely are, but she is attractive in her own elfin way (EQ 4). This attractiveness is part of what causes Emily confusion and problems in this last installment of the series. Romance and men seem to be Emily's most recurring challenges in this book. Several men ask for Emily's hand in marriage, but she refuses them (EQ 36, 62, 110, 134). The two of importance are Dean Priest, a slightly hunchbacked man who is twenty-two years older than Emily but has been her friend for a long time, and Teddy Kent, the young man whom she loves but she is led to believe does not love her.

When Emily believes that Teddy does not love her, which happens as a result of some of his mother's jealous scheming, Emily turns to Dean (EQ 59-61). Dean has been content to be a friend for many years waiting for Emily to grow up so that he might ask her to marry him (EQ 63). There is one problem with this engagement, for while Emily cares for Dean, and knows he needs her affection and companionship, she

is not in love with him (EQ 60-61). Emily and Dean spend many a cheerful month decorating their house-to-be and are happy in general (EQ 70-85). After months of the engagement have passed, and fate causes Emily to realize how much she loves Teddy, Emily is forced by her heart and conscience to call off her planned marriage to Dean (EQ 94). Emily's courage and moral strength give her the power and backbone to do what is right in this case and would serve as a good example to young women in that Emily does what she knows is right even though it must hurt her heart and her friend's.

*Rilla of Ingleside – Anne of Green Gables Series:*

The next book, *Rilla of Ingleside*, is the seventh book in the *Anne of Green Gables* series. In this book Anne Blythe's youngest daughter, Rilla Blythe, must deal with a world turned upside down by World War I. At the beginning of the book Rilla is fourteen and immaturely wanting everyone to realize how grown up she is, but Rilla's fluttery, "lily-of-the-field", "vain" ways change during the course of the book (RI 12, 78, 195). When war is declared the Blythes are hit rather hard. All three of the sons go off to war and two of the three daughters head off for Red Cross work (RI 42, 115, 207, 209). This leaves Rilla worried about her brothers and missing them as well. Once the full reality of how long this war may take sets in, Rilla is ready and willing to help in any way she can. The first act of war support, and new responsibility, that she takes on is to start a junior Red Cross in her area (RI 52). She has never started or tried to run anything of this sort before, but she starts off planning who should have certain positions and goes from there with a brave face and determination. Her duties include such things as setting up the group, gathering the girls to be involved, canvassing for

money and donations, and collecting said donations. It is this last duty that brings us to her next large responsibility – adopting a war baby, in a soup tureen no less!

The story of Rilla adopting this child starts thus: Rilla was collecting the promised supplies for the Red Cross when she came to the house of a man who had gone off to the war while leaving his pregnant wife to fend for herself. The wife died in childbirth and a distant relative who cares little for the child was left there at the house with the baby, whom she was going to send to an orphanage. This is when Rilla comes along in a buggy with a run down horse; she had to drive this poor horse because her father's other horse was lame. Now that Rilla has appeared she can't very well leave this poor baby to be sent to an orphanage to possibly die there – so she takes the child home with her in the only container in the house that it can sit in – a soup tureen (RI 60-64). As there is no one else who can care for the babe, Rilla now has his care in addition to her junior Red Cross duties and household chores. Through childhood sicknesses, Rilla nurses and raises this baby. She and the child do make it through the war and then she returns him to his long absent and now remarried father (RI 268).

Rilla also goes through other trials such as losing her favorite brother in the war, having one brother missing in action only to be found again later, facing the constant fear that another one of them will die, confronting the typical problems of being on the home front during a time of rationing and limited means, and all the while making and gathering supplies. Through all of these painful or simply trying things Rilla grows up and learns what it is to be an adult with mature worries and requirements upon one's time.

Rilla is a role model who shows that even the young women whom we might have a tendency to look at and think that they are too shallow and self-absorbed to ever see what they can do in the world, really can break out of those shells and succeed in growing themselves and helping others at the same time. Rilla is a good character for a young woman who might see herself as not making much difference in the world because she can look at Rilla and see just how quickly she can change that outlook and kind of life.

*The Blue Castle:*

Valancy Stirling, in *The Blue Castle*, is a role model for the girl who has never been asked out. Valancy is twenty-nine and has never been chased or even approached by a man. Now most would assume that Valancy must be unattractive, but this is not the case, she is simply a little mousy and shy (TBC 12). At one time it depressed Valancy that she was not sought after by any man, but on her twenty-ninth birthday she decides to take her life out of the box it has been in and really live. Part of this change can be attributed to the fact that she is finally fed up with her whole family's overbearing ways toward her, but the main factor is that a doctor tells her she is dying.

For many years Valancy has let her family make fun of her lack of a beau, her quiet ways, and her less than gorgeous looks because she is afraid of all of them for one reason or another. She has always known that to speak out against them would lead to a loss of her peace and quiet and any harmony with her mother, as well as possibly result in her having no home or money (TBC 37). Her mother, her only living parent, has also always raised her to be quiet and not show her feelings (TBC 39, 41). Because of all of these things Valancy has been teased, joked and compared to her cousin whom they

think is the paragon of feminine beauty, until she is tired of it and starts answering back, something they never expected her to have the backbone to do (TBC 54-66). Valancy's new determination stems from the fact that Dr. Trent has told her she only has a short while to live because of a heart condition and that any sudden shock may kill her even sooner (TBC 34-35). Now that Valancy sees that all this time she has had nothing to lose, she is apt to say anything to her badgering relatives. These relatives have been an obstacle and a burden all of Valancy's life, but now that she has to deal with a greater and more alarming problem, Valancy finds the courage and strength of will to use her wit to put them in their place (TBC 65).

Valancy's next few obstacles are self-imposed. The first is when Valancy volunteers to help 'Roaring' Able Gay, a backwoods man with a wild reputation, take care of his dying daughter Cissy Gay. Cissy herself is a disgraced social outcast because of her low beginnings and the fact that she bore a child out of wedlock to a young man she has never named (TBC 77-78). This does not deter Valancy, who knew the girl when she was younger and liked her. Cissy is now dying of consumption, and her father can get no one to take care of her when he is away working. Valancy knows now that taking care of this pitiful young woman is the proper course of action. Her relatives of course think this is horrible and that one should not associate with people of low class or sinful reputation, but Valancy disregards their uncharitable views and heads off to take care of the dying young woman (TBC 80-83). While caring for Cissy, Valancy cleans house, cooks and does any extra chores that Cissy is no longer strong enough to attend (TBC 87). But most of what Valancy does is keep Cissy company and make sure that she is comfortable (TBC 89). Valancy's challenge in this case is simply

to care for a girl whom everyone would rather forget. When Cissy dies Valancy is faced with once again living with her family (TBC 121). Instead of this she decides to set another challenge for herself: marriage.

Valancy's approach to marriage differs from anything that would have been done in her time, the early nineteenth hundreds, because she asks the man to marry her instead of the other way around. Valancy thinks she may die soon, and therefore has no wish to spend her last months with her annoying family (TBC 127). With this in mind Valancy asks Barney Snaith, a friend of 'Roaring' Able's, to marry her and he, seeing her letter from the doctor that she does not have long to live and knowing what her family is like, agrees to her proposal (TBC 129).

Once Valancy's family hears about this new turn of events they are all aghast and disapproving. They were under the impression that she would return to her former mousy ways once Cissy Gay was out of the way. The fact that Valancy has not met these expectations, and has in fact married a fellow they consider to be disreputable, makes them think that she has finally gone crazy (TBC 143). Valancy on the other hand is now happy. She faces the challenges of marriage with a hopeful heart. However, all of Valancy's joy is shattered when she finds out that she is not really dying, and that the doctor sent her the wrong note (TBC 182). Now Valancy is faced with how to tell Barney, and the fact that she thinks she has married him under false pretences (TBC 177, 179). When Barney married her she had told him that she only had a short time to live, and now she is afraid that he may have married her out of pity and the fact that it would not be for long (TBC 127, 185). Valancy does what she thinks is the honorable action and leaves Barney a note. She then returns to her mother's

house because she does not want to bind Barney into a marriage she thinks he does not want (TBC 196, 198). Valancy's strength of will and determination to follow the right and just course of action, even when it may be frowned upon or hurt her, shows how she is a good role model with whom young women can identify.

For Valancy her biggest obstacle is her family and the way she has been taught and forced to let them badger her and make her life a horrible, dull, teased existence. When Valancy finally finds the determination and strength of heart to use her wit to counter their annoying attacks, she begins to be a role model for other young put-upon girls. Her next selfless act of taking care of poor disgraced Cissy Gay is a strong example of how being kind is the right thing to do even when society might say the person is not worth helping. The fact that at this time she is also supposedly dying makes this labor even more selfless and brave. Valancy's willingness to break with social tradition on the matter of her marriage is also evidence of her strength because she knows that her family will not approve, but she is brave enough to go through with it. Her honorable actions when she thinks that she has married Barney under false pretenses are also admirable because it is not for herself that she acts, but instead for Barney.

*The Golden Road:*

In *The Golden Road* the reader is given a storytelling young woman with whom to identify. This young woman is a motivator for others. Sara Stanley, the 'Story Girl', cheers her friends and entertains them during the dull times of life as well as teaching them lessons through her stories (GR 7, 27). One of these lessons is that no matter how hard things are they can always be worse and that there is always something to smile



about. Sara tells a story of a man and his wife to illustrate this lesson and to make the lesson memorable (GR 27-28). As *The Golden Road* starts Sara is around the age of twelve and living with some of her relatives because her mother has passed away and her father, Blair Stanley, must travel in his business and cannot care for his daughter at the same time (GR 15-16). Even though Sara has these burdens herself she still has the heart to amuse, distract and teach her friends with her stories and activities that she suggests. One activity that Sara engages them in is a newspaper (GR 1-5). This endeavor captures all of their imaginations for the long dull winter and teaches them responsibility and good editing skills all at the same time (GR 32-39, 68-74). Sara faces challenges in her life but not one of them is enough to make her not try to cheer and amuse her friends.

#### **Topic Examinations:**

The main criteria with which these books are evaluated are character strengths. These strengths are will power, determination, bravery, and mental ability. In addition the books were also evaluated on whether they presented young female character and whether the characters face obstacles in the novels. These two later points are evident in all of the books as the main characters are all young women and who are facing the challenges of growing up. The other criteria can be demonstrated by teasing the elements out of certain scenes in the stories.

Will power is a useful attribute for a young woman because it means that she has the ability to know that what she wants is right and see that it gets done. The character of Emily evidences this trait in many parts of the *Emily of New Moon Series*. The ways in which she stands up to her aunt, when she knows that what her aunt wants

is not reasonable, are some of the times when she shows her strength of will. One instance of this is when her aunt unreasonably wants to cut Emily's hair against the little girl's wishes. Emily stands her ground and keeps her hair. Rilla also exhibits this sense of strength when she has the will power to raise a child that is not hers through a war in which she had losses of her own and other responsibilities as well. In the *Blue Castle*, Valancy makes her will power visible when she stands up to her family to do what she knows is right, which is take care of Cissy Gay against their wishes. All of these young women give strong examples of how will power is a good trait for a young woman to possess.

In showing their will power these characters also show determination because to have the will to stand up to someone is good, but having the ability to keep it up is also a strength. Emily is determined to write. Her family looks down upon this habit because they think it is a waste of time and effort; Emily, however, feels differently. In *Emily Climbs* this character shows her strength of determination by continuing to write even though she is not allowed to write fiction. She instead writes non-fiction and vents her need to create through crafting words to best express the truth. Rilla uses her determination when she decides she is going to help the war effort and form a junior Red Cross. Her staying power in the face of the work that this causes her to take up, including raising the baby, is one way she shows determination. Another determined character is Valancy. She decides she is not going to go back to her family. Her determination to stay away from them, is shown in her asking a man to marry her and then moving into his home as his wife. The 'Story Girl', Sara, is determined her friends will not be saddened by negative occurrences in their lives. To distract them from

things such as several of the children's fathers being away, a mother deceased and the rough weather of the north, she tells them tales. Each in her own way, these young women are strong in their determination.

A necessary strength, to promote both will power and determination, is bravery. Bravery is when one might be afraid but instead of giving in to the fear, one faces the problem and strides forward. Even as a child Emily exhibits this quality. When Emily's father dies she bravely faces the move from their little home to the house of her duty bound aunts. She also bravely endures their dislike of many of her traits that they consider unnatural. In her school years Emily again uses her bravery when she stands up to the students who mistreat her. In different ways Valancy is also brave. Valancy has always been oppressed by her family, but once she realizes that she has wasted much of her youth by letting them have so much control over her, she changes her ways. Valancy bravely stands up to her family by not letting them change her mind about helping others. Another way in which she shows this strength is to enter into marriage against her family's wishes and to stand up to them when they openly show their disapproval. Again she is brave when she leaves her husband when she believes that she has tricked him into marriage. All of Montgomery's characters show bravery in some form, but these exhibit it in obvious fashions.

The last strength, mental prowess, is another intrinsic quality of Montgomery's heroines. With Emily this characteristic is made visible during her reasoning with her aunt, her creative writing talent, and her ability to complete upper level schooling. In Rilla's case her intelligence is exhibited when she organizes the junior Red Cross. Then she also shows it when she realizes that she has in truth matured from her experiences

and that she wasn't mature prior to the war. Valancy displays her mental talent when she begins to verbally fight back with her family and stand up for herself. Sara's memory and skill at relating stories are her keenest mental strengths. She is also smart enough to see how to deal with people and how to cheer them up as well. These scenes show the intelligence of the heroines.

Each of the heroines of Montgomery's novels is distinctive in her own way but they appear to share an underlying skeleton of similar traits. They could all be considered every woman at the stage of adolescence. These characters are young women facing the obstacles that any young woman must handle as well as a few problems all their own, such as their less than perfect families. Even with the individual problems they must overcome, these young women have the same problems as any adolescent female growing up. Emotions are in flux, romances blossom, and life is a confusing proposition for an adolescent. The longevity of these novels is derived from this use of a basic woman for the foundation of Montgomery's heroines. This universal foundation means that any female reader can relate to and then admire the characters in these novels. The strengths of these characters are qualities that the readers can emulate after they have established a kindred feeling with the heroines.

**Summary:**

The intelligent, determined, strong of heart, brave women of L. M. Montgomery's tales are good role models from whom young women can learn many good qualities and see favorable options on how to deal with situations. The young women in the stories are of similar ages with a young adult reader and are facing many of the same coming of age challenges. These books cover the youth of the character

and detail changes they are going through as the books progress. The stories in the books are not limited to a single year in the characters' lives, but instead show the young women's path toward adulthood. Many of the changes that they go through, and the obstacles of youth they face, are the same for any young woman coming of age. L. M. Montgomery's works show young women that there are different ways to solve problems, as is evidenced in Emily's handling of the cat debate and the school children. These works also show how starting out from an unfortunate beginning, such as being an orphan, or a child of an overbearing parent, does not have to inhibit one's life and success. Emily is a prime example of an orphan having a happy life, and Valancy shows that even an overbearing family is not an insurmountable obstacle. Sara provides a role model for how to be happy through tough times and make others happier too. Rilla's actions also support this idea because even during the worst times of her life she finds a way to help others. All of these female characters give examples to young women of how to learn good lessons about life and how to deal with its challenges.

The findings of this researcher support the main points of young adult and reader's advisory research. This research states that books are profitable to adolescent readers, and young adult women can be shown new directions for their lives in this literature. The research also states that role models have positive effects on these same readers. In addition the published research also indicates that literature can supply role models for adolescent readers.

The findings of this researcher expand this research by examining the work of a particular author. Lucy Maud Montgomery's writings offer strong women role models to young female readers by providing commendable actions and reactions to situations

that all female readers may face. These role models that the readers can identify with offer actions for the readers to emulate in the similar situations or when facing other tough problems.

Lucy Maud Montgomery's life was by no means perfect. Much like all of us she faced both life's problems and joys. Her experiences provided her with the balance necessary to write about other young women facing the world and its obstacles. With a less than perfect childhood herself, Lucy had a more personal connection to the trials and pains that young women face. This understanding allows for characters of a more realistic nature that readers can identify with easily.

In many pieces of literature there are good role models for young adults. Lucy Maud Montgomery's works provide many strong and determined role models for adolescent female readers to identify with. Because these characters are of similar ages facing similar challenges in life it is simpler for young women to feel close to and identify with them. These characters face hardships and challenges with intelligence, will power and determination. For these reasons the characters in these novels are strong women and serve as good models for young women to use in shaping their own lives.

It is sometimes thought that Montgomery's books contain characters that seem often 'too good to be true'. This comment can only be made if one only considers their triumphs. This paper does seem to support this idea, but this is on account of the fact that this researcher has pulled from the texts the places where the characters are at their best. These are the scenes that best show the value of these works to readers' advisory librarians. It is also necessary to consider the fact that while Montgomery wanted to

present realistic and worthy heroines, she was also in the business of selling her novels, and characters that appeal to the reader sells more books. This does not mean, however, that the texts do not contain occurrences where the young women in these novels are less than perfect and in fact sometimes selfish and petty. These instances show the human element of the characters, but the scenes were not pertinent to this paper and were therefore not included. The scenes, while interesting, do little to influence the nature of this study as they do not occur often enough to sway the overall impressions created by the characters in these novels. In reality Montgomery's characters are more well rounded than they might here appear.

#### **Future Research:**

L. M. Montgomery's work has much to offer any researcher looking at it from a young adult perspective. Future research concerning this author could take on the task of how young men are portrayed in the stories, how often they are presented as full, round characters and how often they are portrayed as flat, stereotypical pieces of the story only there to represent a feeling. There is also the question of L.M. Montgomery's settings – she often uses the sea, the inland, and the shoreline, which is the land that joins the two, to represent different elements of her stories – this could lead to research on just what she is saying about a young person's mind when she does this. The settings seem to mirror the emotions and mental state of her characters. The use of the 'strict woman in authority' character and its effect on the main young adult in the story, would also be a good topic for research. These are obviously just a few of the different ways that further research on this author could be taken, but they are some of the more interesting.

Further research in the topic of young women as role models would also be useful, as there are more novels than have been covered in this paper, and many of Montgomery's short stories also have young women as their protagonists. All of these works deserve to be looked at and researched on the grounds of what role models they offer young women. Many of the short stories have young handicapped women characters in them and would possibly be favorable reading for adolescent females who are either handicapped themselves, or who have handicapped friends or family. The topic of orphans in Montgomery's stories and how they can be role models would also be interesting since Montgomery's works contain many of these young adults without parents. All of these topics appear in many works by Montgomery, including her novels and short stories, and they would provide a useful focus for future researchers.

### **Conclusions:**

The objects of this paper are to provide an overview of L. M. Montgomery's novels and to examine them on their presentation of good role models for young women. To do this the life of the author was presented to show that she wrote believable characters based much on her own personal experiences. Readers' advisory librarianship was also presented in order to show how librarians might use these novels for young women.

These books have worthwhile, interesting young female characters that provide good role models for young women. The characters are good role models because they are going through the same timeless problems that many young women face. The ways that these characters handle these problems give readers examples to emulate in their



own lives. In these novels the characters show strength in many forms. It is these strengths that help them overcome life's obstacles.

L. M. Montgomery's writing provides an attractive presentation of young women maturing. While Montgomery's prose is lovely, it is her characters' qualities that make these books appropriate for young women. These books, while written between the years of 1908 and 1939, are still popular with modern readers, and will likely continue to be popular in the future.

Appendix  
L. M. Montgomery Novels Annotated

***Emily of New Moon:*** This book covers Emily Byrd Starr's life from age ten to thirteen. She is an orphan who is now going to live with her two aunts. She faces a new world and several trials. She thinks she has been poisoned, meets with a Catholic priest to save a small stand of trees, and has a teacher who does not like her. When the story ends Emily has reached the age of thirteen.

***Emily Climbs:*** Now Emily faces high school, which in the early 1900's, was considered higher education and a privilege to achieve. Emily must live with her aunt Ruth with whom she does not get along. Emily faces the challenges of schoolmates who do not like her, Aunt Ruth thinking she was kissing a young man at the window, and the whole town thinking she was drunk one night when she and her friends were snowed in at an abandoned house.

***Emily's Quest:*** In this novel Emily encounters romance. She has several offers from men she is not interested in, as well as one proposal that she accepts from a much older long time friend. But all this time she has had to watch the one man she really loves, Teddy Kent, slip away. Later Emily finds out that his mother had some effect on his not communicating with Emily correctly as his mother throw letters away and told Teddy things that were not precisely true. Then after Emily breaks off her engagement to her old friend, she has to watch her best female friend almost marry Teddy. Luckily the best friend jilts him to marry the young lawyer that she loves and leaves Teddy to Emily.

***Rilla of Ingleside:*** Rilla Blythe is the daughter of Anne Shirley and Gilbert Blythe. In this book she must deal with World War II, raising a child not her own, her brother's death, and the absence of the young man she loves. Rilla becomes a strong, responsible member of her family. She learns as a result of the war how to help her family and at the same time just what being mature means. In the end Rilla's young man returns from the war and even then everything is not perfect as when she greets him her occasional lisp shows up on the end of her words, but all in all the end is happy.

***The Blue Castle:*** Valancy Stirling has led a sad uneventful existence. Her mother wishes that Valancy had either been a boy or a beautiful young girl, but Valancy is instead an interesting child who is smothered down by her relatives through their teasing, insults, and constant comparing to her beautiful but 'salt-less' cousin Olive. Valancy sees a doctor about a heart condition she has had, he has to leave the office because his son is in a wreck and therefore sends her the results. The letter says that Valancy has at most a year to live. Valancy then fights back against her family, takes

care of a dying young woman, and has her proposal of marriage accepted. She finds out that she is not dying, regrets 'capturing' her husband, leaves him in an attempt to free him from their marriage, and finds out that he loves her very much. They express their love for one another and travel on their long awaited honeymoon.

***The Golden Road:*** This story is about a young woman with the storytelling gift. She can create stories or tell other people's in a way that cheers the listeners. This book starts in winter and goes through one year. The heroine encounters very few large obstacles other than keeping her family amused and learning, and not getting depressed about being separated from her father whose job causes him to travel.

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