Reworking of Austen’s Legacy

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L. M. MONTGOMERY’S ANNE OF GREEN GABLES SERIES and Jane Austen’s novels share many things: international popularity, thriving film and merchandising industries—and the same group of devoted readers. Many “Janeites” are “Anneites” too, and for very similar reasons: Austen and Montgomery both write domestic romances in rural settings; both critique society’s mistreatment of women; and, most significantly, both create compelling, memorable heroines. Montgomery’s Anne Shirley, a red-haired, neglected orphan, sent by mistake to the elderly Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, has traits of many Austen heroines. Her first champion in her new home is male; she frightens herself with Gothic fancies; she is so romantic that she jeopardizes her life; she resents a boy who insults her appearance; she thinks she loves a charming, mysterious young man, but really loves the boy next door; and she has extreme physical responses to deep emotions.

These similarities are deliberate. Montgomery enjoyed Austen very much; she writes in her journal after rereading *Emma*: “There are some things I am not sick of, . . . and one of them is Jane Austen’s novels” (SJ 3.208). She owned at least three Austen novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*; these works are now housed, along with the rest of her extant personal library, at the University of Guelph Library’s Special Collections. As this collection comprises only part of Montgomery’s library, it is probable that she owned other Austen works. Montgomery scholar and biographer Mary Rubio believes that Montgomery “read all of Jane Austen many times” as she did with any work that she particularly enjoyed. Montgomery classed Austen with other great writers whom she admired. When describing the character Jane Gair in Mrs. Whitney’s *The Gayworthys*, a novel Montgomery liked despite its many “shortcomings,” she asserts that if “Anthony Trollope or Jane Austen had created her she would be one of the famous women of literature, instead of being forgotten . . .” (SJ 3: 206). In Montgomery’s novel *Emily’s Quest*, the heroine, an aspiring writer, is warned by a resentful suitor that if she “dream[s] of being a Brontë or an Austen,” she will “wast[e] [her] youth” (31).

The connections between Anne Shirley, Austen’s heroines, and Montgomery herself are extremely complex. Montgomery dramatized her experiences and feelings in her journals. She wrote much of herself into Anne, and Cecily Devereux claims that “in her journal and memoir [The Alpine Path], Montgomery herself compellingly linked [Anne of Green Gables] to her own experience (252-53). Devereux argues that *Anne* was Montgomery’s adult response to her remembered childhood unhappiness” and that it had a “therapeutic function” (253). Austen figures strongly, though subtly in this therapeutic—and literary—process. I believe Montgomery enjoyed Austen’s novels because she strongly identified—or in some cases *wished* to identify—with her heroines, and that she incorporates many elements of Austen’s plots and heroines in the first three *Anne* books to help rewrite her own life through writing Anne’s. In particular, Montgomery uses Austen’s romance scenarios involving quarrelling or conflicted lovers, and the three Austen heroines whom she uses most are Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliot. Montgomery does not, however, replicate these heroines and their experiences but alters them to reshape her fictional self and to comment on Austen’s treatment of her heroines.

To appreciate how Montgomery uses Austen, we must understand Montgomery’s own troubled romantic history. In June 1897, she became engaged to Edwin Simpson, a rich, handsome, well-educated young man (SJ 1.187-88). When Ed kissed her, however, she felt disgusted though she struggled for some time to conceal it (1.189-94). Eventually, she begged to be released from the engagement, to which Ed finally consented in April 1898 (1.221-23). In October 1897, Montgomery met Herman Leard, a son of the family with whom she was boarding, and the two fell in love. Montgomery writes that this was her first (and probably strongest) experience of physical passion (1.209). She and Leard had a clandestine relationship—stopping short of consummation due to her “fear of [his] contempt” (1.217). Montgomery didn’t consider marrying Leard: she wanted a spouse who was her intellectual equal and thought Leard “had no trace of intellect, culture, or education”; she felt that if she married him, she “would be deliriously happy for a year or so—and
Montgomery’s three romantic partners all shared a lack of respect for her literary talents. Simpson took no interest in her writing; Leard told her she was “too ambitious” (SJ 1.220); MacDonald, who married Montgomery after her first two Anne novels were published, was jealous of her success and fame, and, when they were engaged, “insisted” that she stop “writing for a month” because he was worried about her health and “feelings of dread,” even though she knew that writing alleviated her mental suffering (1.342). Montgomery’s frustration with these men was exacerbated by her own reticence about revealing what she considered inappropriate emotions, such as anger, despair, loneliness, and impatience (Gammel, “‘I Loved’” 139-41).

In Gilbert Blythe, Anne Shirley’s “beloved enemy,” friend, and eventual husband, Montgomery combines the desirable qualities of her three lovers, as well as traits drawn from Austen’s heroes. Gilbert is handsome, intelligent, ambitious, tender, and generous. Not only does he love Anne, he respects her intelligence and literary talents. Anne herself is an idealized version of Montgomery: sensitive, gifted, and compassionate but also strong-willed and outspoken. Irene Gammel notes the discrepancy between Montgomery’s skill with written and discomfort with spoken language, especially in her romantic life, contrasting her with Elizabeth Bennet:

For someone so adept with words, there was astoundingly little real talk with the suitors in her life. Unlike Austen’s Eliza Bennet, who confronts . . . Mr. Darcy . . . in an impassioned . . . confrontation, Montgomery summons the language of passion in her journals, yet equivocates . . . in her communications with Ed. (“‘I Loved’” 141)

Montgomery gives Anne—and thus her ideal self—Elizabeth’s wit and frankness, making the course of Anne’s true love run in a convoluted path similar to Elizabeth’s. Frank Davey notes that Anne’s relationship with Gilbert has “distant echoes of Austen’s Pride and Prejudice” (180). In fact, Anne and Gilbert’s relationship closely echoes that of Elizabeth and Darcy, and Gammel calls both Darcy and Gilbert “fictional male paragon[s]” (“‘I Loved’” 139). But neither man begins so, a deliberate choice of both authors. When Anne first meets him, Gilbert is, at thirteen, considered as much of a catch by the Avonlea schoolgirls as Darcy is by Miss Bingley. Anne’s friend Diana describes him as “aw’fly handsome. . . . [H]e teases the girls something terrible. He just torments our lives out” (AGG 109). Because of this adoration, Gilbert has Darcy’s sense of entitlement—at least to the hearts of whatever girls he fancies.

Just as Elizabeth doesn’t fall for Darcy, Anne does not fall for Gilbert, though both heroines do feel some attraction towards their future lovers. In Elizabeth’s case, this attraction is suggested indirectly. During the first half of his attendance at the Meryton Assembly, Darcy is “looked at with great admiration” by “the ladies” (10). Austen does not exclude Elizabeth from this admiration; thus it is safe to assume that she too is drawn to his “fine . . . person” and “handsome features” (10). This attraction, of course, is soon replaced by dislike when she hears Darcy slight her appearance (12). Elizabeth’s dislike of Darcy because he insults her looks is so intense because she was attracted by his; ironically, her overreaction to his insult makes her “perfectly unaware” of Darcy’s growing attraction to her: “he was only the man . . . who had not thought her handsome enough to dance with” (23). Long after Darcy has asked her repeatedly to dance, Elizabeth dwells on his initial insult, telling Col. Fitzwilliam of Darcy’s “very dreadful” failure to dance enough (i.e., with her) at the Meryton Assembly (175).

Montgomery makes Anne’s attraction to Gilbert much more obvious than Elizabeth’s to Darcy; Anne tells Diana that Gilbert “is handsome” (AGG 111), which might be Montgomery’s reading of Elizabeth’s early feelings for Darcy. Anne’s reaction to Gilbert is mixed, however, because she first sees him “tormenting” Ruby Gillis by pinning her braid to the back of her desk. After Ruby has tried to stand up, shrieked in pain, and burst into tears, Gilbert has taken out the pin and “winked” at Anne (110-11). Anne then declares him “very bold. It isn’t good manners to wink at a strange girl” (111). Significantly, Anne is more affronted by Gilbert’s “boldness” to her than by his teasing Ruby. Like Elizabeth, Anne sees the general shortcomings of the hero, but magnifies those shortcomings when they apply to her. Montgomery recasts this dynamic with hilarious intensity when Gilbert insults Anne’s hair:

Gilbert Blythe was trying to make Anne Shirley look at him and failing utterly, because Anne was . . . away in a gorgeous dreamland. . . .
Gilbert Blythe wasn’t used to putting himself out to make a girl look at him and meeting with failure. She should look at him, that redheaded Shirley girl with . . . big eyes that weren’t like the eyes of any other girl in Avonlea school.
Gilbert . . . picked up the end of Anne’s long red braid, and said in a piercing whisper, “Carrots!
Anne’s violent reaction to Gilbert’s teasing recalls Elizabeth’s response to Darcy’s first proposal, with its references to her “inferiority” (189). Elizabeth’s critique of Darcy’s less than “gentleman-like manner” (192) is verbally violent, and Darcy later admits that her reproof “tortured” him (367). That “torture,” however, enables Darcy to recognize and correct his manners, just as her “impertinence” (380)—coupled with her “fine eyes” (27) of course—attracts him to her in the first place. Just as Elizabeth realizes that she has intrigued Darcy because she refuses him the “deference” she had come to accept as his right (380), Anne’s initial indifference towards Gilbert intrigues him because he’s never experienced it, and it makes him determined to get her attention.

Of course, like Darcy, who stares at Elizabeth and makes her uncomfortable, Gilbert alienates Anne in his first attempt to get her attention. His calling Anne “carrots” gets him a negative response, just as Darcy’s staring provokes Elizabeth’s impertinence. But since they’re used to ladies’ adoration, both men unconsciously prefer rudeness—at least at first—and become drawn to these challenging women. Elizabeth’s refusal to dance with Darcy the first time he asks her does “not injure [her] with the gentleman” (27), and an adult Gilbert tells Anne that he has “loved [her] ever since . . . [she] broke [her] slate over [his] head” (AI 243). Like Elizabeth’s censure of Darcy, Anne’s condemnation of “mean, hateful” Gilbert causes him to change. Gilbert immediately tries to protect Anne from the schoolmaster, insisting, “It was my fault . . . I teased her” (AGG 112), and he apologizes “contritely” to her, something he has “never” done before (113). Gilbert tries to appease Anne, offering her sweets (115) and gazing at her while reciting a romantic poem (154), but, more significantly, he never again “torments” girls. As Elizabeth does to Darcy, but literally, Anne knocks good manners into Gilbert’s head.

It takes Gilbert five years to get Anne to forgive him, and like Darcy’s his success springs from an anonymous, altruistic act. Anne has turned down a college scholarship to stay with her guardian Marilla, who is going blind. Anne wants to teach, but the closest school she can get is too far away to let her stay with Marilla during winter. However, Gilbert, who had been accepted to teach at the Avonlea school, “withd[raws] his application” when he learns that Anne plans to teach and suggests that the school board hire her (305). Anne hears of this gesture only because a neighbor lets it slip. When she next sees Gilbert, Anne, speaking voluntarily to him for the first time, thanks him: “it was very good of you” (306). Gilbert, like Darcy when Elizabeth thanks him for saving Lydia, denies any claim to merit: “It wasn’t . . . good of me. . . . I was pleased to be able to do you some small service” (306). Both men follow up their demurrals with requests for intimacy: Darcy proposes; Gilbert asks if Anne will “be friends” (307). But it’s clear that both Darcy and Gilbert intend their services to be secret—Gilbert “would have passed on in silence, if Anne had not . . . held out her hand” (306)—and both men’s requests are worded very courteously.

Gilbert’s request for Anne’s friendship is the second he makes, and like Darcy’s second proposal, is much better than the first, which occurs when he rescues Anne from a pond after her flat sinks: “Anne, . . . look here. Can’t we be good friends? I’m awfully sorry I made fun of your hair. . . . I only meant it for a joke. Besides, it’s so long ago. I think your hair is awfully pretty now—honest I do. Let’s be friends” (AGG 225). Anne is briefly tempted to forgive him but more by the “expression in Gilbert’s hazel eyes” than by his words (225). Her subsequent refusal of his friendship, which she soon regrets, is as understandable as Elizabeth’s refusal of Darcy’s first offer, given Gilbert’s tone. His imperative “look here” and “Let’s be” echo Darcy’s command that Elizabeth “must allow [him] to tell” her of his love (189); his request to be “good friends” is impatient and presumptive; his apology for the “carrots” incident is weak; and his assurance that he

These lessons are reciprocal. Anne and Elizabeth gain almost as much from their lovers as they give, and their gains are the same: self-knowledge and an impetus to excel at performative activities. Both heroines learn to think before they speak or act, not to hold grudges, and not to trust first impressions. After reading Darcy’s letter, Elizabeth is as aware of her errors and the justice of her resulting wretchedness as is Darcy of his: “How despicably have I acted! . . . I, who have prided myself on my discernment!— . . . How humiliating . . . !—Yet, how just a humiliation!” (208). Anne learns that holding grudges hurts the subject more than the object. After she refuses Gilbert’s first offer of friendship, Gilbert ignores her as pointedly as she has ignored him, and Anne “found out that it was not pleasant to be ignored” (AGG 245). Anne feels the loss of Gilbert’s friendship even more when she realizes that Gilbert is also ambitious and imaginative (283). She envisions the “merry conversations” that she and Gilbert “might have had about the new world . . . opening around them” (283). Anne’s musings echo Elizabeth’s realization that Darcy “was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her” (312).

Even before she realizes how well they would suit each other, Elizabeth benefits from Darcy since what she
Gilbert finally accepts that his dream of marrying Anne stems from remembrance of his earlier offer and gives her an easy way to refuse him: “...responsibility for his feelings and considerately leaves. ...” (AI 144). Paradoxically, Gilbert becomes worthier of Anne the moment he thinks he has lost her. He accepts him to “...forgive” her does he realize “...I want your love” (AI 144). Gilbert unjustly places the burden of his desire on Anne; only when she asks him to “...no for an answer, demanding “some hope” that Anne will change her mind and asking if she loves anyone else (AI 390). The mutual benefits Anne and Gilbert enjoy link them unquestionably with Elizabeth and Darcy.

These benefits continue in the next two Anne books, especially Anne of the Island, where Anne and Gilbert finally become engaged. Montgomery didn’t intend Anne of Green Gables to be the first of a series, which is the novel has a feeling of completion, with Anne reconciled with Gilbert in a friendship that will lead to marriage (Davey 173). Montgomery wrote to a friend that had she known Anne’s story would become a series, she would have “stopped” Anne of Green Gables rather than “...ending” it (Gerson 150). Writing Anne of the Island, Montgomery continues to reference Elizabeth and Darcy, but in a less confrontational way since Anne and Gilbert have become best friends. Montgomery keeps Austen’s double proposal schema but uses it to show that Gilbert does not completely respect Anne and must do so to win her. There are signs of this need for growth at the end of Anne of Green Gables. Gilbert holds up of Anne’s hand after she tries to withdraw it, announces that they will “...be the best of friends,” and tells her that he will walk her home (307). When Anne of Green Gables was written, Montgomery was not yet engaged to Ewan and perhaps was nostalgically fictionalizing Herman’s physical and sexual control over her in Gilbert’s gentle dominance over Anne. By the time Anne of the Island was written, however, Montgomery had been married to Ewan for several years and disliked his dominance (SJ 2.68). Though she deferred to him, she resented his failure to perform his share of domestic tasks and resented even more the tedious and time-wasting social duties obligations imposed upon her as a minister’s wife (Buchanan 158). Anne of the Island, therefore, could be her fantasy wish fulfillment, where she makes Ewan/Gilbert wait and suffer until he gives her the respect she deserves.

Gilbert, like Darcy, shows his lack of respect by forcing his proposal on the heroine and continuing his suit when refused. When Gilbert comes to propose, Anne tries to stop him; however, he “...tak[es] her hand in a clasp from which she could not free it” (AI 143). When Anne “...pleadingly” begs him not to speak, he insists, in a self-dramatizing manner reminiscent of Darcy: “...I must. Things can’t go on like this. ... Anne, I love you. You know I do. ... Will you promise me that some day you’ll be my wife?” (143). The wording of his proposal is possessive and selfish—asking Anne to be his and never referring to her feelings. Gilbert’s language links him with an earlier suitor for Anne: Charlie Sloane, a stolid, smug, young man, whose person and proposal resemble those of Mr. Collins and who asks Anne to “...promise to become Mrs. Charlie Sloane some day” (AI 64). Like Mr. Collins, who stresses how lucky Elizabeth would be to get him, Charlie acts as if he is “...confering a great honor” (64). Gilbert is not smug, but the wording of his offer is too close to Charlie’s. Montgomery deliberately words their proposals similarly, just as Austen makes Darcy’s first proposal echo Mr. Collins’s in presumption. Gilbert’s proposal, in its selfishness and taint by association, shows he is not yet worthy of Anne.

Like Austen, Montgomery highlights an underlying selfishness in the hero. If Gilbert loves Anne as selflessly as he does passionately, he would cease proposing once he knows it distresses her. But like Darcy, Gilbert refuses to accept no for an answer, demanding “some hope” that Anne will change her mind and asking if she loves anyone else (AI 143). Gilbert even blames Anne. When she tells him she wants to remain friends, he replies “...bitter[ly]”: “...Your friendship can’t fail before Gilbert Blythe ...!  Her fright ... vanished; and she began her recitation, her ... voice reaching to the farthest corner of the room without a tremor or a break. (271-72)

Gilbert also helps Anne scholastically. From the moment he insults her, she determines to best him in every subject, a resolve which helps her achieve academic success. Anne realizes their rivalry is “...inspiring,” and when she hears that Gilbert isn’t going to college, she feels “...dismayed surprise. ... Would not work ... be rather flat without her friend the enemy?” (390). The mutual benefits Anne and Gilbert enjoy link them unquestionably with Elizabeth and Darcy.

Gilbert’s second, successful proposal is similar to Darcy’s second proposal. He words his proposal obliquely, as does Darcy—who refers only to “...last April,” and his “...affections and wishes” (366)—in order to spare Anne the remembrance of his earlier offer and give her an easy way to refuse him:

I have a dream ... I persist in dreaming ... although it ... seemed ... it could never come true. ... I asked you a question over two years ago, Anne. If I ask it again today will you give me a different answer? (AI 242)

Gilbert finally accepts that his dream of marrying Anne stems from his desire and that Anne’s response must be rooted in hers. Gilbert has hopes that Anne’s feelings have changed as he proposes on the advice of a mutual friend (AI 244)—a
However he might have disregarded her desires, though, Gilbert, like Darcy, admires his beloved’s talents. When Anne and Gilbert are about to leave for college, Gilbert cheers Anne up after several Avonlea matrons warn her that college is a waste of money that will make her conceited, exhausted, and lonely. He reminds Anne of these women’s “narrow . . . outlook” and calls her a “pioneer” (AA 13). He supports her literary efforts and recognizes her uplifting spirit: when Anne declares that she wants to “add some beauty to life, . . . make [people] have a pleasanter time because of me,” Gilbert responds “admiringly” that she is “fulfilling that ambition every day” (53). Darcy admires Elizabeth’s wit and musical skills and pays sly tribute to her love of books by making “extensive reading” one of the attributes of a “really accomplished” woman (39). Montgomery uses Darcy’s admiration of Elizabeth to make Gilbert even more worthy, creating a fantasy mate who, unlike Ewan, Ed, or Herman, supports her ambitions.

But there is an Austen hero who at first does resemble Ewan: Mr. Knightley. Emma and Knightley have a mutually beneficial relationship though Knightley never realizes it. He helps Emma change for the better, but Emma, though more subtly, helps Knightley “change[ ] also” (474). As Theresa Kenney astutely shows, Knightley must become more “amiable,” less overbearing, and more eager to serve his beloved in order to win her (110-19). Knightley also, ironically, must experience being “in love, and in some doubt of a return” (41) for much longer and more intensely than Emma. In dismissing and criticizing Emma’s intellectual and artistic efforts, Knightley reflects the dark side of Montgomery’s lovers. Montgomery probably enjoyed Knightley’s suffering, his gradual realization that Emma is perceptive about certain matters —such as Harriet’s innate worthiness—and his apologies to Emma for “blam[ing] . . . and lectur[ing]” her (430), perhaps imagining Ewan apologizing to her. In any case, she infuses Anne and Gilbert’s relationship in An of the Island with elements of Emma and Knightley’s romance, especially Emma’s ignorance of her own heart and Knightley’s protracted suffering. At the same time, though, she slightly diminishes the depth of their love by the intensity of Anne and Gilbert’s as well as the latter couple’s more open, equal relationship. The overbearing, blunt, Knightley, and the snobbish, self-satisfied Emma, despite their generous, warm natures, are not as sympathetic, even at the end of the novel, as are other Austen couples, and certainly less so than Anne and Gilbert. Montgomery makes Anne and Gilbert’s suffering parallel but exceed that of Emma and Knightley, implying that her couple’s love exceeds that of Austen’s.

Anne is superficially similar to Emma. They have active imaginations, take pride in their matchmaking skills, and become infatuated with romantic ideals until unexpected events thrust amorous self-knowledge upon them. Emma decides to fall in love with Frank Churchill sight unseen, based on reports of his appearance and charm as well as her suspicion that the Westons wish them to marry: she “had . . . pleasure in the idea of their being coupled in their friends’ imaginations” (119). Emma’s interest in Frank springs partly from her love of being observed; it is more a public than a private affection, and thus shallow. Anne has imagined her own handsome, dashing Prince Charming—“very tall and distinguished-looking, with melancholy, inscrutable eyes, and a melting, sympathetic voice” (AA 62)—and refuses to consider any man who doesn’t meet that description. When Diana asks her if she loves Gilbert, Anne reminds Diana that Gilbert isn’t her “ideal.” When Diana notes that “ideals change,” Anne insists, “Mine won’t. And I couldn’t care for any man who didn’t fulfill it” (235). Anne’s fantasy man, however, comes entirely from her imagination, and though she, like Emma, loves imagining “very romantic and beautiful” proposal scenes with her ideal suitor (AI 62), her fancies are located in the private sphere and so, while misguided, are more sincere than Emma’s.

Anne’s friendship with Gilbert, however, is firmly in the public sphere since it’s obvious, as one friend remarks, that she and Gilbert “are made and meant for each other” (AI 157). Montgomery takes the subtle cues that Austen uses to signal Emma’s feelings for Knightley and makes them overt. When Emma first criticizes Mrs. Elton, her most prominent complaint is that Mrs. Elton is disrespectful towards “Knightley!—never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley!—and discover that he is a gentleman! . . . I doubt whether he will . . . discover her to be a lady” (279). Two-thirds of the way through her rant, Emma wonders, “[W]hat would Frank Churchill say to [Mrs. Elton],” concluding that Frank is “[a]lways the first person” she thinks of (279)—even though the first person she thinks of, obsessively, is Knightley. Austen’s arrangement of this speech fools the reader into thinking that Frank is Emma’s object.

Montgomery does the reverse. Fantasizing about her future marital home, Anne finds that “Gilbert . . . persisted in hanging about, . . . helping her accomplish . . . tasks which a proud and melancholy hero . . . considered beneath his dignity. Anne tried to banish Gilbert, . . . but . . . he went on being there” (AA 268). When Anne responds “viciously” to a friend’s remark that she would marry Gilbert were he rich, Philippa teases, “We don’t like that idea a little bit, although we don’t want Gilbert ourselves” (138-39). Anne’s reaction recalls Emma’s dismay at the idea of Knightley’s marrying Jane Fairfax, which she lamely ascribes to concern for her nephew’s inheritance and, more tellingly, fear that he couldn’t spend time with her if he married (288). When Philippa finds Anne weeping after she has refused Gilbert, she perceptively sums up Anne’s delusions: “You’ve tricked out something . . . that you think love, and you expect the real thing to look like that” (AI 144).

While Austen fools her readers about Emma’s feelings until the end of the novel, Montgomery makes hers believe that Anne is just too stubborn to see her love for Gilbert—then pulls the rug out from under them when Anne meets Royal
Anne's response to Gilbert differs very much from Emma's saying "[just what she ought"] (431) to Mr. Knightley, and this reaction, along with her drawn-out longing for Gilbert and Gilbert's two years of hopeless yearning for Anne, privileges Anne's love for Gilbert over Emma's for Knightley. Indeed, Anne's intense response to Gilbert's illness and to his second proposal recalls another Anne—Austen's Anne Elliot. Anne Elliot also receives a second proposal when she believes all "hope is gone" (235) from the only man she can love: a man who has thought he'd stopped loving her just as Gilbert "tries to stop" loving Anne but cannot (A/241). Anne's and Gilbert's jealousies over Christine and Roy echo Anne Elliot's and Wentworth's jealousies over Louisa and Mr. Elliot. Anne Elliot also feels an "overpowering happiness" that gives her much "agitation" when she reads Wentworth's letter (238). She too can speak only with her eyes when they "were nothing to her—absolutely nothing" (175). Yet Anne still thinks she's in love with Roy though her reasons for loving him become more specious and though she makes uneasy comparisons between him and Gilbert:

Was he not her ideal? Who could resist those glorious dark eyes, and that pleading voice? . . . And what a charming sonnet he had sent her. . . . Gilbert would never have dreamed of writing a sonnet. . . . But then, Gilbert could see a joke. She had once told Roy a funny story—and he had not seen the point. (176)

Part of Anne's suffering is relieved in a manner similar to Emma's. Like Emma, Anne goes outside after her sleepless night for a walk in the now-tranquil summer morning and sees a hired boy who tells her that Gilbert is out of danger (A/238). But Anne must wait longer than Emma before all her distress is assuaged. Several weeks pass as Gilbert slowly recovers; his manner towards Anne is "too friendly"; and she worries that he is engaged to Christine (241). It is only in the antepenultimate page of the novel that Gilbert proposes, and, in a neat twist on the Jane-and-Frank subplot, reveals that Christine has been engaged to someone else since before he met her (242). But if Anne's anguish is longer and more intense than Emma's, her joy is far greater. When Gilbert proposes again, Anne is speechless from "[h]appiness . . . breaking over her like a wave" that "almost frightened her" (242). She can only "lift[ ] her eyes, shining with . . . love-rapture . . . and look[ ] into his" (243). The reader believes it too.

But soon Anne discovers that Gilbert is escorting a Miss Christine Stuart "constantly" (A/169), and her infatuation with Roy stops; she "did not blush and thrill" when he "murmured a poetic compliment" to her the evening she learns the news (170). Instead, she blushes "hotly when any one mentions Gilbert Blythe or Christine Stuart" even though they "were nothing to her—absolutely nothing" (175). Yet Anne still thinks she's in love with Roy though her reasons for loving him become more specious and though she makes uneasy comparisons between him and Gilbert:

She loved Gilbert—had always loved him! . . . And the knowledge had come too late. . . . If she had not been so blind—so foolish—she would have had the right to go to him now. But he would never know that she loved him. . . . If Gilbert went away . . . she could not live. Nothing was of any value without him. . . . Oh, what a fool she had been. . . . And now she must pay for her folly as for a crime. (237)

Part of Anne's suffering is relieved in a manner similar to Emma's. Like Emma, Anne goes outside after her sleepless night for a walk in the now-tranquil summer morning and sees a hired boy who tells her that Gilbert is out of danger (A/238). But Anne must wait longer than Emma before all her distress is assuaged. Several weeks pass as Gilbert slowly recovers; his manner towards Anne is "too friendly"; and she worries that he is engaged to Christine (241). It is only in the antepenultimate page of the novel that Gilbert proposes, and, in a neat twist on the Jane-and-Frank subplot, reveals that Christine has been engaged to someone else since before he met her (242). But if Anne's anguish is longer and more intense than Emma's, her joy is far greater. When Gilbert proposes again, Anne is speechless from "[h]appiness . . . breaking over her like a wave" that "almost frightened her" (242). She can only "lift[ ] her eyes, shining with . . . love-rapture . . . and look[ ] into his" (243).

Anne's self-castigation strongly echoes Emma's, especially Emma's blaming herself for "folly" and "blindness" (413, 411). Montgomery, however, ups the pathetic ante. Knightley is in no danger of death, so Emma cannot lose him as completely as Anne might lose Gilbert. Emma has more to blame herself for—notably her misguided encouragement of Harriet—while Anne's only fault is self-delusion. The narrative of Anne's agony is also briefer and more intense than that of Emma's, which takes up eighteen pages (405-23) and is interspersed with Emma's interrogation of Harriet and her talk with Mrs. Weston about Jane. Austen's diluted narrative takes away some of the poignancy of Emma's situation, though it does add to its suspense. This suspense, though, is relieved quickly when Knightley returns from London the next day and matters are settled between him and Emma within an hour.

Emma is in no doubt of Knightley's superiority to Frank, even when she fancies herself in love with the latter (412), and she realizes early on that she doesn't love Frank though she continues to flirt with him out of vanity. However, although "it was not just what she had imagined love to be" (A/224), Anne believes herself in love with Roy until he proposes when, "as if she were reeling back from a precipice," she suddenly realizes, "by a blinding flash of illumination," that she doesn't care for him (224-25). Though Anne persists in her delusion much longer than Emma, her behavior is less blamable since she ends the affair once she realizes her error.

Both women require harsh, startling information to recognize whom they do love, and the recognition staggered them both. Emma's revelation "dart[s] through her" (408) when Harriet reveals her love for Knightley. Anne's comes when her tactless young ward announces abruptly that Gilbert is dying from typhoid (A/236). In an episode that parallels Emma's discovery of her love for Knightley and the stormy night she spends regretting her errors, Anne spends a sleepless, "agonized vigil"—complete with thunderstorm—castigating herself:

Anne's self-castigation strongly echoes Emma's, especially Emma's blaming herself for "folly" and "blindness" (413, 411). Montgomery, however, ups the pathetic ante. Knightley is in no danger of death, so Emma cannot lose him as completely as Anne might lose Gilbert. Emma has more to blame herself for—notably her misguided encouragement of Harriet—while Anne's only fault is self-delusion. The narrative of Anne's agony is also briefer and more intense than that of Emma's, which takes up eighteen pages (405-23) and is interspersed with Emma's interrogation of Harriet and her talk with Mrs. Weston about Jane. Austen's diluted narrative takes away some of the poignancy of Emma's situation, though it does add to its suspense. This suspense, though, is relieved quickly when Knightley returns from London the next day and matters are settled between him and Emma within an hour.

Part of Anne's suffering is relieved in a manner similar to Emma's. Like Emma, Anne goes outside after her sleepless night for a walk in the now-tranquil summer morning and sees a hired boy who tells her that Gilbert is out of danger (A/238). But Anne must wait longer than Emma before all her distress is assuaged. Several weeks pass as Gilbert slowly recovers; his manner towards Anne is "too friendly"; and she worries that he is engaged to Christine (241). It is only in the antepenultimate page of the novel that Gilbert proposes, and, in a neat twist on the Jane-and-Frank subplot, reveals that Christine has been engaged to someone else since before he met her (242). But if Anne's anguish is longer and more intense than Emma's, her joy is far greater. When Gilbert proposes again, Anne is speechless from "[h]appiness . . . breaking over her like a wave" that "almost frightened her" (242). She can only "lift[ ] her eyes, shining with . . . love-rapture . . . and look[ ] into his" (243).
With her bouts of depression, intense physical reactions to emotion, repressed feelings, even her dark, petite looks, Montgomery herself most resembles Anne Elliot, which may be why she named her fictionalized self Anne. It’s likely that Montgomery saw in Anne and Wentworth’s reunion a happy alternative outcome to her relationship with Herman Leard, a reason why Anne and Gilbert’s relationship ultimately resembles Anne and Wentworth’s. Just as Montgomery felt intellectually superior to Leard and wouldn’t marry him, the Elliots and Lady Russell feel socially and intellectually superior to Wentworth. Anne’s decision to break her engagement to Wentworth is misguided just as was Montgomery’s to break with Leard. But just as Anne only realizes her error—as well as how much she loves Wentworth—after she thinks him irrevocably lost, it is probable that Leard’s death made Montgomery realize the depth of her love for him and perhaps regret that she had broken off their affair. In making Anne Shirley’s sensibilities most like those of Anne Elliot’s, Montgomery highlights the intensity both of her Anne’s love and of her own enduring love for Leard.

Thus, though Montgomery mingles allusions to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* in Anne’s romance, the allusions to *Persuasion*, though subtlest, are strongest. Anne Elliot’s love is more poignant than that of either Elizabeth or Emma, both of whom are less sensitive than either Anne, and more resilient. Elizabeth and Emma would have rallied had they not married the heroes: Elizabeth determines that she “shall soon cease to regret [Darcy]” if he doesn’t propose (361); Emma would be “satisfied” if Knightley keeps up “their precious intercourse of friendship” (416). Anne Elliot, however, never rallies after she breaks with Wentworth; it is his gradual return of love that causes her second bloom, and had he not proposed again her spirits would probably have sunk lower than before. Montgomery never received such a second chance, and she was depressed for much of her life. But by infusing her Anne’s story with that of Anne Elliot, in making Gilbert recover from a grave illness and having Anne realize how much she loves him, Montgomery gives Herman Leard a second life and herself a second chance to right her wrong and experience lasting love.

Montgomery uses Austen to rewrite her own life, but she also rewrites some of Austen’s characters to give them second chances: most notably Mary Crawford, whom Montgomery recreates in Philippa Gordon, Anne’s pretty, clever, flirtatious—and verbally edgy—college chum. Philippa, whose “brown” complexion and “vivid, irregular, bewitching type” (33). Philippa initially, like Mary, finds love in marriage unnecessary and even disturbing: “Being in love makes you a perfect slave. . . . And it would give a man such power to hurt you. ’I’d be afraid” (32). As does Mary, Philippa inadvertently falls in love with a clergyman, one who is not only poor but “ugly” (159). Unlike Mary, however, the usually indecisive Philippa determines to marry Jonas as soon as she realizes she loves him, and she lives a frugal but blissful life with him in the slums. When Anne reminds her that she will “have to give up a good many things . . . when you marry Mr. Blake,” Philippa replies, “I’ll have him. I won’t miss the other things” (174). Perhaps Montgomery, a self-described “harum-scarum” and flirt (SJ 1.287) in her youth, felt Austen was too harsh toward Mary Crawford and wished to show that a person’s better nature can overcome her flawed upbringing.

L. M. Montgomery uses Jane Austen’s legacy in ways that are sometimes at variance with Austen’s own agenda. But her love of and kinship with Austen is always present in the *Anne* series, and her deft weaving of so many varied Austenian threads into her narratives results in a rich, vivid homage that enhances and celebrates both authors’ works.

NOTES


2. In 1919 Montgomery cut out a picture of a handsome young man in a magazine because he strongly resembled Leard (Gammel, “I Loved” 136-37).

3. It also closely echoes the wording of Austen’s description of Elizabeth and Darcy’s post-proposal talk, where there is also “much to be thought, and felt, and said” (366).

WORKS CITED


Anne of Green Gables is a story of profound hope and optimism, a story about the power of story, a story above all about the transformative nature of love. Anne Shirley is so happy to live in a world where there are Octobers. I’m so happy to live in a world where Anne Shirley’s legacy won’t be defined by this ham-handed adaptation. It is a fact that LM Montgomery suffered from depression, and there are those who claim she took her own life in an institution where she lived at the end. Anne reflects today’s bare-bones realities in a way in which the predecessor did not, however, it was brilliantly conceived in my opinion to give hope to those who live in like surroundings, and still capture the sense of the book.