

## Green Gables, revisited

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*Anne has a lot in common with her creator, prof says*

Last Wednesday, author **Irene Gammel** discussed perhaps the best-loved orphan girl in Canadian literature with two-dozen guests. Gammel, who published *Looking for Anne of Green Gables: The Story of L.M. Montgomery & Her Literary Classic* in 2008, appeared as part of the Hart House Alumni Committee's dinner series.

Born and raised in Germany, **Gammel** studied at McMaster University on exchange in her second year of university. She researched Anne from 2002 to 2007, publishing *Looking for Anne* in time for the centenary celebrations of Montgomery's novel. She is currently an English professor at **Ryerson University**.

Since it was first published in Boston in 1908, *Anne of Green Gables* has sold over 50 million copies worldwide, been translated into more than 35 languages, and generated a multi-million-dollar tourist industry. Anne is an orphan girl who is sent to two unmarried middle-aged siblings, who had requested a boy, but decide to keep her. Although Anne is ugly, she is smart, imaginative, and a chatterbox. She eventually wins over her adoptive parents and makes friends in the fictional town of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island.

**Gammel's** talk explored several similarities between Lucy Maud Montgomery and her red-headed fictional character. Montgomery was born in Clifton, PEI in 1874. Raised by her maternal grandparents, she married Ewan Macdonald, a Presbyterian minister, and had two sons. Some scholars argue that her death in 1942, of apparent heart failure, was actually a drug overdose due to her ongoing depression.

"*Anne of Green Gables* became a repository for [Montgomery's] own childhood," said **Gammel**. Montgomery was raised by strict grandparents and suffered loneliness because of the age gap. "[Montgomery] gives Anne the ideal family. That age gap is magically bridged; in fiction the generations connect." She added that the novel "celebrates that backward glance and is yet a distinct novel on the modern era."

Phillip Khaiat, chair of the dinner series sub-committee, said he was a fan of the spirited Anne. "My wife convinced me to take her to visit the Cavendish shrine in PEI this summer, and I read every word of the panel describing Anne's origins," he said. "It was a great pleasure for me to meet the people [Irene Gammel and Jean-Paul Boudreau] who had created and organized that exhibition."

Said another attendee, "We found the images and magazines from the early 20th century that inspired Lucy Maud Montgomery's creation of the character of Anne to be particularly fascinating."