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Review: Emily Climbs

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Montgomery, L.M., *Emily Climbs*. Bantam/Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1983 (orig. 1925), ISBN: 0553233718, Grades 7-12.

Description

In this second volume of the trilogy, Emily Byrd Starr is finding direction on her path to success as a writer and she is growing up along the way. At “almost fourteen” when the book opens, the teenage orphan is rapidly approaching life-changing crossroads in her journey. Still compelled to write, Emily’s life is framed largely by school, church, and social events with her faithful friends Ilse, Perry, and Teddy. However, when all three of her chums finally find their own ways to attend high school at Shrewsbury, Emily is haunted by the specter of lonely fall and winter evenings without them. At the last minute, the Murray pride prods Aunt Elizabeth and the others who are responsible for their orphaned niece’s upbringing to shoulder the financial weight of the young lady’s academic training and they send Emily off to the realms of higher education. Boarding with somber, sarcastic Aunt Ruth is not without its moments of humor and chagrin, humility and pride, with the niece learning to use “the Murray look” to occasionally vanquish her indomitable aunt. Throughout her struggle to get just one piece published, Emily still spends magical evenings with the enigmatic Dean Priest, offers her writing for the caustic critique of Mr. Carpenter, and nightly fills her Jimmy-books with the triumphs and failures of her stormy days. Readers will cheer when that first acceptance letter arrives from a publisher, and sigh at future rejections, all the while knowing that Emily must become successful, because writing is her very breath. Resolution of most problems is satisfactory in the end, and Montgomery concludes with a tantalizing hook. Readers will want close at hand the final book in the trilogy, *Emily’s Quest* to begin when the final page is turned.

Critique

Although differing in temperament from her literary “cousin” Anne of Green Gables, Emily Byrd Starr steals the hearts of readers just as successfully. Her love—near worship—of nature, her passion for writing, and her strength under the strongest opposition are winsome traits. When Emily believes she is right, nothing will stop her assertion, and integrity drives her life choices. With twenty-first century female protagonists of ten caving in to peer pressure or compromising their morality just to have a man in their lives, Emily’s purity and ambition are worthy of imitation. Readers may wonder at her naivety in the relationship with Dean Priest, but that relationship finds resolution in *Emily’s Quest*. Negatively, there is a scene in which Emily and Teddy seem to be experiencing some sort of ESP, which may mislead young readers. However, in reality there is much documentation of strong friendships providing warnings when one pal is in danger and needs the other. Also, there is a time when Emily seems drawn by something that could be evil spirits in the wood. Again there is the reasonable explanation that her character has always been portrayed as being extremely sensitive to nature and, as a writer, she is keenly aware of both good and evil. There is also Mr. Carpenter’s warning about evil influences. These two observations are given here with intentions of presenting a balanced review. For readers who want to know more about the author, it is said that Emily’s life parallels Montgomery’s more than any of her other novels.

Descriptors:

Ambition

Friendship

Family relationships

Prince Edward Island

Becoming a writer