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### **THE PORTRAYAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN “RILLA OF INGLESIDE” BY L.M. MONTGOMERY**

In “Rilla of Ingleside” by L.M. Montgomery, war is portrayed with a stark and deeply emotional realism, marking a significant departure from the idyllic settings typical of Montgomery’s earlier works. Set during World War I, the novel follows Rilla Blythe, the youngest daughter of Anne Blythe (née Shirley) from “Anne of Green Gables,” as she matures into adulthood amidst the turmoil of the war.

Montgomery herself was deeply struck by the First World War. Her emotional investment was such that she reported being unable to sleep or eat after reading newspaper headlines and learning about yet another devastating event. In her journal, she wrote, “This war is slowly killing me. I am bleeding to death as France is being bled in the shambles of Verdun” (10 June 1916) (Montgomery & Rubio, p. 185).

The portrayal of war in “Rilla of Ingleside” is multifaceted, highlighting both the personal and communal impacts of global conflict. Montgomery does not glorify war; instead, she emphasizes its tragedy, loss, and the heavy burdens it imposes on both soldiers and those left behind. The novel explores the war’s influence on daily life in the small community of Glen St. Mary, focusing on the emotional strain experienced by families as their loved ones depart for the frontlines. Upon learning that her brother Walter, a talented poet, has joined the army, Rilla cries, “Our boys give only themselves. We give them” (Montgomery, p. 124).

One of the most powerful elements of the book is how Montgomery conveys the fear, anxiety, and sorrow that grips the community. The constant waiting for news, the dread of receiving a telegram announcing a loved one’s death, and the uncertainty of the future weigh heavily on the characters. Rilla, in particular, evolves from a carefree, somewhat immature girl into a responsible, compassionate young woman as she takes on duties such as fundraising for the war effort and caring for a war orphan. Through her eyes, readers witness the gradual stripping away of innocence as the horrors of war become unavoidable.

As Elizabeth Waterston observes, Rilla “has no intellectual ambition, no desire to go to college like her sisters Nan and Diana. She doesn’t write, except in a girlish journal. She certainly doesn’t enjoy the kind of frank friendly exchanges that marked the development of Anne’s love for Gilbert” (Waterston, p. 106). However, Rilla’s intellectual and psychological evolution is reflected in her diary. The teenage girl’s diary provides a sincere and striking account of personal transformations unfolding against the background of gruesome war events. Thus, the individual, the local, the national and the universal are intertwined in Rilla’s journal.

Having taken in an abandoned orphan which she begins caring for, Rilla assumes a new responsibility and starts growing as an individual. Later, she also discovers leadership

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qualities and organizes the efforts of local youths to help the army. Montgomery writes, “Rilla did not sleep that night. Perhaps no one at Ingleside did except Jims. The body grows slowly and steadily, but the soul grows by leaps and bounds. It may come to its full stature in an hour. From that night Rilla Blythe’s soul was the soul of a woman in its capacity for suffering, for strength, for endurance” (Montgomery, p. 64).

Montgomery also touches on the theme of patriotism, illustrating the conflict between the sense of duty and the personal cost of sending sons, brothers, and friends to war. While characters like Walter Blythe, Rilla’s sensitive and artistic brother, grapple with their moral responsibilities, the novel also explores the harsh realities of combat. Walter’s death becomes a devastating moment in the story, symbolizing the enormous sacrifice demanded by war.

Moreover, “Rilla of Ingleside” highlights the war’s effect on gender roles. Rilla and other women in the community take on new responsibilities as they manage the home front, participate in patriotic activities, and support the war effort. This reflects the broader societal changes during World War I, where women were increasingly thrust into roles traditionally reserved for men.

In this novel, the image of Anne gradually fades into the background as more attention is given to her children – in particular her youngest daughter, Rilla Blythe. This provides a stark contrast to the previous books of the “Anne” series, where the image of Anne was at the centre of the narrative. At the same time, as Elizabeth Epperly notes, Anne “serves as a reminder in the novel as a whole of the millions of quiet, nameless women who watched their sons and brothers and lovers and husbands and friends go to the front. And Montgomery makes it clear that for this she is heroic, for this and for running the Red Cross and carrying on her daily life” (Epperly, p. 115).

In sum, L.M. Montgomery’s portrayal of war in “Rilla of Ingleside” is somber and reflective, capturing the emotional depth of the home-front experience during World War I. Through her focus on personal sacrifice, communal solidarity, and the painful realities of loss, Montgomery provides a nuanced and heartfelt depiction of how war reshapes lives and leaves lasting scars on both individuals and communities.

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