



ANALYSIS OF FEMINISM IN LITTLEWOMEN'S LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

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Abstract

An analysis of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women Through a Feminist Lens Louisa May Alcott, an American author popular for her domestic tales for children, wrote Little Women in 1868 as a reflection of her own domestic life projecting various social and personal struggles through the characters in the novel. The novel is popularly regarded as a 'woman's novel' and is a coming-of-age novel that focuses on the March family during the time of the civil war. The characters mainly involve the four March sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy respectively and the plot of the novel surrounds the four sisters and their struggles through life and age. Since the novel consists and focuses mainly on all female characters, the aim of this paper will be to explore all of the characters individually and analyze them to determine if Alcott kept any kind of feminist movements in mind while writing these characters. With the first wave of feminism formally beginning in 1848 and the novel written in 1868, this paper will try to analyze the novel to find any sort of formal feminist implications made throughout the novel as an influence of the first wave of feminism. The paper will try to answer the question of Little Women being a feminist novel. It will then proceed to scrutinize to see if the novel really served a purpose in terms of feminism during its time or did it just promote the domestication of women as a more comfortable idea.

Keywords: Female characters, Feminism, Little Women

INTRODUCTION

Little Women novel is a novel composed by American author Louisa May Alcott written just after the Civil War in response to a publisher's demand for a novel, which was originally published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869 it was originally published as two books: Chapters 1-23 were issued in 1868 with the title Little Women, and after the book became a sensational success, Chapters 24-47 were issued in 1869 with the title Good Wives. Today, both sections are set together as Little Women. Little Women talks about March family who has four daughters with different characteristics the fourth daughters named Margaret, Josephine, Elizabeth, and Amy. In the novel Little Women, we can find the main function of literary works that is to describe, reflect human life, while human life itself is always experiencing growth, as well as the equality of women who will be depicted through the novel Little Women.

This research is empirically essential to carry out as it tries to reveal the struggle of women related to feminism issue in literary work. It is a depiction of extrinsic elaboration which is closely related to the intrinsic element of the novel which is a theme of feminism. Basically, this feminism movement arises because of a wanting impulse equalize the rights between men and women who had been as if women are not respected in taking opportunities and decisions within life. There such thinking seems to have been entrenched so women should be struggling to show his own existence in the eyes of the world. The aims of the research are to elaborate types of feminism and their reflection on feminism in novel little women.

This study is prepared to present pearls and pitfalls of the feminist thought, and explain Virginia Woolf's ideas of equality between sexes. Woolf's first book A Room of One's Own and Orlando are very important for feminist thought. Especially in this study, I'll try to dwell on the book, having been accepted as the most important work of Virginia Woolf, called A Room of One's Own. virginia Woolf wrote many books and articles about gender apartheid during her life. Especially, she dwelled on the equality. Woolf gave lots of lectures about woman and literature. Woolf wrote Orlando in 1928, and in 1929 she wrote A Room of One's Own, Woolf's first book about feminism . The famous line of Virginia Woolf work on A Room of one's own

“women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice it's natural size”

In the second chapter of the book, it can be seen that women exclude themselves. Woolf suggests that women are like mirrors, “reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (p : 52).

Especially in this book, she dwelled on woman and literature; further more, she described the difficulties they had encountered. In Orlando, she describes the struggle between genders.

The first daughter of the March family and the Oldest of the March sisters, Meg March Is portrayed as the ideal daughter of the 19th century didactic novels. Her character is sweet-natured, feminine, and also romantic. Similar to her mother in character, Meg was also named after her. Meg is everything one would

expect an ideal American daughter to be during the 19th century. She is dutiful, responsible, and well-composed. Her feminine traits were what would generally be expected of anyone worth being called a lady at the time. Being the only child who remembered anything from the family's wealthy days, Meg was sort of nostalgic for the days of riches their family left behind and is always seen to be longing for everything fancy and lavish. Amongst all her dream-girl traits, the one flaw that her character displays at the beginning of the novel is avarice.

“Singapennay” This songs were composed and sung by A. R. Rahman, from the film Bigil. The song has a motivational theme for women, hailed as a women's anthem.

“Singapennae singapennae

Aaninamaeunnaivanangumae

Nandrikadantheerpatharkku

Karuvilaeunnaiyenthumae...hae

Orumuraithalaikuni

Nee rendusingamugaththai

Paarpatharkkumattumae”

Her struggle of overcoming her wants and her eventually ending up with John Brooke for love and not for wealth shows major character development for Meg throughout the novel. However, getting married and having children were the expected outcomes of every girl during the 19th century. Even though the development of Meg through her realization of what's important in life was spectacular, it still falls pale considering how women who were not choosing the path of life chosen by Meg were looked down upon. For a brief period in the novel, Meg's character can also be considered as a push-over. Her lack of protest at being dressed up like a doll at the Moffat's is an example that shows how Meg allows her yearning for a certain lifestyle to derive her from things that her family taught her were important.

Jo, short for Josephine, is the second March sister and the protagonist of the novel. With her tomboyish nature and disappointment over not being born as a boy, Jo March's character was somewhat based on Louisa May Alcott, the writer herself. The whole domestic life of the March family was somewhat based on Alcott's family life considering how Alcott had an older sister and two younger sisters as well. Alcott, like Jo, was also very much frustrated at the gendered world and what it meant to be a woman in the 19th century. Jo is also portrayed to be very outspoken about what she wants throughout the novel. Even though the readers anticipate something happening between Jo and Laurie, Jo turns Laurie down by establishing her independence and lowering her possibilities of being predictable. Jo's passion for writing and becoming a writer also shows great resilience as a character. Her headstrong personality is also very different from what conventional female

characters from the 19th century usually looked like. Her stance as a man shows how she wanted to go about the world and take it by his horns by being one of them in a man's world even after being a woman. Alcott drew Jo out to be a very original character with her bold, brave, daring but most importantly, real nature. Her annoyance with not being able to go fight in the war alongside her father also expresses her annoyance at the gendered world with its gendered roles. Even her preference of going by a more masculine name like 'Jo' rather than her feminine name Josephine shows her overall irritation in confining herself to everything that came with being a woman. Her unladylike behavior throughout the novel acts as a silent protest towards everything the society stood for when it came to women.

Based on the result of the research, it is described that there are four types of feminism from the novel *The Little Women*. First, the characters in the novel reflected in Liberal feminism, because of what the characters doing to fulfill their own life to earn money through hard work. Second, Marxist feminism, it reflects the characters show the value of women's work and encourage more equality and capitalism is the cause of women's oppression which is depicted through the role of character positions in the novel. Third, existentialist feminism, it reflects the character who have tomboyish and a woman must become a subject, transcends definitions, labels, and essences and need for total freedom. Fourth, Radical feminism, it reflects the characters who had a corporal punishment as well as all the manifestations of sexual violence or as one who "insist the sex or gender system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression. Feminism is reflected by the struggle of the characters in survival, in placing these lives in the world of men (patriarchy), as well as their protest form to no longer be the object of violence for men.

In *Little Women*, marxist feminism shows that the conception of a woman or herself is a result of her social life and is primarily determined by the kind of work she does because of Jo March's tomboy perception about herself as a guy who might substitute her father when her father was in service, she worked hard to helped her mother raise money to be a breadwinner for her family.

'I'm the oldest,' began Meg, but Jo cut in with a decided, 'I'm the man of the family now Papa is away.'

In the novel Marxist feminism suggests the characters display the price of women's work and encourage greater equality and capitalism is the purpose of women's oppression that's depicted through the function of individual positions inside the novel.

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