

A Female Bildungsroman in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

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Abstract

American literature has its influence from Britain. It has created its notions that remain favourable to its regional, cultural and traditional norms. Such flourishing oeuvres have given rise to several female writers who have carved their inscriptions in the field of American literature. Among such female writers, Louisa May Alcott has framed a niche for herself. Her works of fiction act as kindling elements to reveal the hidden spark of her readers, especially women. Alcott stands firm in creating such strong heroines who are packed with a beautiful array of wit. One such aspiring heroine of Alcott is Josephine March in *Little Women*, whose tender buds bloom amidst desperate gloom. Besides being a family girl, she firmly focuses on her sparkling passion, which results in earning her a fabulous fame as a renowned writer. Josephine is none but Alcott herself who moulds the novel *Little Women* into a semi-autobiography. This piece of fiction focuses on her strong determination for writing, which enables her to move through her self-path of encouragement. Despite her loss, sufferings, humiliations, desperation and obstructions, she shines as a unique gem through her enthusiastic exposure. The term *Bildungsroman* has its origin in German (bildung-education, roman-novel). It is a kind of literary genre in which the growth of the protagonist is developed right from childhood to adulthood, and it deeply focuses on the physical and psychological developments despite unexpected hindrances. It focuses on the liberating mind of Jo, whose little world gets dignified through her lavish works. The purpose of this research paper aims to capture how Jo, as a bud turns to blossom. Further, it attempts to prove how such a transition is manured through Bildungsroman.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, Feminism, American literature, Louisa May Alcott.

Introduction

American literature, which is predominantly written or produced in English, has been flourishing in the United States of America and its preceding colonies since the eighteenth century. Before the foundation of the United States, the thirteen colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States were heavily influenced by British literature. The American literary tradition thus began as part of the broader tradition of English-language literature. However, a small amount of literature exists in other immigrant languages, and Native American tribes have a rich tradition of oral storytelling. The American Revolutionary Period (1775–83) is notable for the political writings of Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson. An early novel is William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, published in 1791. This paper attempts to unveil the contribution of writers in the early period, especially a woman writer, and her struggles to bloom into a writer in a conventional era. Her growth from immature period to a mature one is traced in Alcott's *Little Women*.

When considered with other political entities in the world, the United States stands out in the sheer uniqueness of its history and socio-political growth. First discovered by European adventurers and explorers in the fifteenth century, the U.S. represented the crown jewel in a New World which encompassed North and South America and the Caribbean islands. The country soon became the preferred destination for oppressed religious sects (such as the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans) and victimised ethnic groups and nationalities (such as the Irish and European Jews). America ultimately became the land of opportunity where dreams could be fulfilled and aspirations met. Its literature is essentially a delineation of how America shares both symbolic and concrete realisation of such possibilities. Any study of themes and techniques in American literature depends crucially on how it has defined itself. This is vital because it can be categorised in a variety of ways through the utilisation of different criteria. Using historical periods, American literature may be split into six broad groups which correspond with significant periods of the country's history. These groups are Colonial Literature, (written between 1620 and 1770 when it eventually became the United States of America which was under British imperial rule), Revolutionary Literature (which was produced during the American war of independence between 1772 and 1776), Antebellum Literature (produced before the American Civil War of 1861 to 1865), Civil War Literature and the literature produced between the end of the Civil War and the end of the First World War in 1918, literature produced between the First World War and the end of the Second World War in 1945, literature produced between 1945 and the present.

In the late 19th and early 20th-century America, a new image of womanhood emerged that began to shape public views and understandings of women's role in society. With the suffrage and labour movements, the concept "new woman" emerged. These modern women were attending colleges, rejecting domesticity, asserting themselves politically in public, and becoming a part of the cultural landscape through literature. As the 20th century progressed, the voices of women pushed for more self-discovery and freedom from society's traditional limitations.

Toward the end of the century, Helen Hunt Jackson used the novel form for a different political purpose. Angered by what she learned about the United States government's treatment of Native Americans, Jackson researched and wrote a nonfiction account entitled *A Century of Dishonour* (1881) and mailed a copy to every United States senator. When she received no response, Jackson wrote *Ramona* (1884), a novel centred on the love story of a Native-American man and a young mixed-blood woman. Through the tragic experience of Ramona and her love, Jackson awakened the conscience of the American public. Like Stowe, Jackson was a white observer who used melodrama to achieve her purpose of rousing public opinion. Although women authors were popular and often critically admired in the 19th century, by the 1950s they had disappeared from most anthologies. The work of a large and diverse group of women was often dumped and then dismissed under one label – sentimental or domestic literature. Only by the 19th century, American women found their literary way back into bookstores, anthologies, and classrooms. Among such growing women, Louisa May Alcott has carved an inscription for herself.

Louisa May Alcott (November 29, 1832 – March 6, 1888) was an American novelist, short story writer and poet best known as the author of the novel *Little Women* (1868) and its sequels *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). Raised in New England by her transcendentalist parents, Abigail May and Amos Bronson Alcott, she grew up among many of the well-known intellectuals of the day, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

As an adult, Alcott was an abolitionist and a feminist. In 1860, Alcott began writing for *The Atlantic Monthly*. When the American Civil War broke out, she served as a nurse in the Union Hospital in Georgetown, DC, for six weeks from 1862-1863. She intended to serve three months as a nurse, but halfway through she contracted typhoid and became deadly ill, though she eventually recovered. Her letters were home-revised and published in the Boston anti-slavery paper *Common Wealth* and collected as *Hospital Sketches* (1863, republished with additions in 1869), bringing her first critical recognition for her observations and humour. This was her first book

inspired by her army experience. She wrote about the mismanagement of hospitals and the indifference and callousness of some of the surgeons she encountered. She also highlighted her passion for seeing first-hand as a writer during war times. Her main character, Tribulation Periwinkle, showed a passage from innocence to maturity and is a serious and eloquent witness. Her novel *Moods* (1864), which is based on her own experience, is also promising.

After she served as a nurse, Alcott's father wrote her a heartfelt poem titled "To Louisa May Alcott. By Her Father". The poem describes how proud her father is of her for working as a nurse and helping injured soldiers, as well as bringing cheer and love into their home. He ends the poem by telling her she is in his heart for being a selfless, faithful daughter. This poem is featured in the book *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters and Journals* (1889). This poem is also featured in the book *Louisa May Alcott, the Children's Friend*, which talks about her childhood and close relationship with her father.

Between 1863 and 1872, Alcott anonymously wrote at least thirty-three gothic thrillers for popular magazines and papers such as *The Flag of Our Union*, which began to be rediscovered only in 1975. In the mid-1860s, she wrote passionate, fiery novels and sensational stories akin to those of English authors Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon under the nom de plume A.M. Barnard. Among these are *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and *Pauline's Passion and Punishment*. Her protagonists for these books, like those of Collins and Braddon, are strong, smart and determined. She also produced stories for children, and after they became popular, she did not go back to writing for adults. Other books she wrote are the novelette *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1875) and a semi-autobiographical work in 1873.

Catherine Ross Nickerson credits Alcott with creating one of the earliest works of detective fiction, second only to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and his other Auguste Dupin stories, with the 1865 thriller *V.V. or Plots and Counterplots*. A short story published anonymously by Alcott concerns a Scottish aristocrat who tries to prove that a mysterious woman has killed his fiancée and cousin. The detective on the case, Antoine Dupres, is a parody of Poe's Dupin, who is less concerned with solving the crime than with setting up a way to reveal the solution with a dramatic flourish.

Alcott became even more successful with the first part of *Little Women: or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (1868), a semi-autobiographical account of her childhood with her sisters in Concord, Massachusetts, published by the Robert Brothers. After Alcott came back to Boston after travelling in Europe, she became an editor at a magazine, *Merry's Museum*. It was here where she met Thomas Niles, who

encouraged the writing of part one of *Little Women*. In 1867, the magazine's editor, Thomas Niles, asked her to write a book especially for girls. Alcott originally delayed writing a story for girls, despite her publisher Thomas Niles' urging her to do so. Part two, which is also known as *Good Wives* (1869), followed the March sisters into adulthood and marriage. *Little Men* (1871) detailed Joe's life at the Plum Field school that she founded with her husband, Professor Bhaer, after part two of *Little Women*. *Jo's Boys* (1886) completed the *March Family Saga*.

Little Women was an immediate commercial and critical success, with readers demanding to know more about the characters. Alcott quickly completed a second volume, *Good Wives*, which was also successful. The two volumes were issued in 1880 as a single novel titled *Little Women*.

According to the literary critic Sarah Elbert, when using the term *Little Women*, Alcott was drawing on its Dickensian meaning. It represented the period in a young woman's life where childhood and elder childhood were overlapping with young womanhood. Each of the March sister heroines had a harrowing experience that altered her and the reader. Childhood innocence was of the past, and the inescapable women's problems were all that remained. Other views suggest that the title was meant to highlight the unfair social inferiority, especially at that time, of women as compared to men, or alternatively, describe the lives of simple people, which was considered unimportant in the social sense.

For her books, Alcott was often inspired by familiar elements. The characters in *Little Women* are recognizably drawn from family members and friends. Her married sister Anna was Meg, the family beauty. Lizzie, Alcott's beloved sister, was the model for Beth. Like Beth, Lizzie was quiet and retiring. Like Beth, she died tragically at age twenty-three from the lingering effects of scarlet fever. May, Alcott's strong-willed sister, was portrayed as Amy, whose pretentious affectations cause her occasional downfalls. Alcott portrayed herself as Jo. Alcott readily corresponded with readers who addressed her as Miss March or Jo, and she did not correct them.

However, Alcott's portrayal, even if inspired by her family, is an idealised one. For instance, Mr. March is portrayed as a hero of the American Civil War, a gainfully employed chaplain, and presumably, a source of inspiration to the women of the family. He is absent for most of the novel. In contrast, Bronson Alcott was very present in his family's household, though he was unable to find steady work. While he espoused many of the educational principles touted by the March family, he was loud and dictatorial. His lack of financial independence was a source of humiliation to his wife and daughters. The March family is portrayed as dwelling in genteel penury, but the Alcott family was dependent on an improvident and impractical father,

which led them to suffer with real poverty and occasional hunger. Besides her childhood and that of her sisters, scholars who have examined the diaries of Louisa Alcott's mother, Abigail Alcott, have surmised that *Little Women*, as she found it, was boring, and she was not sure how to write about girls, as she knew only a few beyond her sisters. However, encouraged by her editor Thomas Niles, she wrote it within ten weeks.

Little Women has several textual and structural references to John Bunyan's novel *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Jo and her sisters read it at the outset of the book and try to follow the good example of Bunyan's notions on Christianity. Throughout the novel, the main characters refer many times to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The novel chronicles the gradual development of the protagonist Josephine March. This growth highlights a female bildungsroman.

Bildungsroman is a literary term describing a formative novel about a protagonist's psychological and moral growth from their youth into adulthood. Bildungsroman novels are generally written in the first-person and often feature the name of the protagonist directly in the title, such as *Emma*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield*. The Bildungsroman is a literary genre that originated in Germany. The German word "bildung" means education", and the German word "roman" means "novel." Thus, "Bildungsroman" translates to "a novel of education" or "a novel of formation."

The terms "Bildungsroman" and "coming-of-age" are sometimes used interchangeably, which is not always correct. A coming-of-age story is a catch-all term for a novel about growing up that can fall into nearly any genre; a Bildungsroman is a specific genre of literature about the growth and education that a character undergoes from being an immature child to a mature adult. Many novels about maturation can be considered coming-of-age stories, but not all of them can be considered a Bildungsroman. Here are some examples of Bildungsroman. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847) shows how Jane struggles to find a place and purpose in society. *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (1861) tells the story of an orphan named Pip who comes into money, leaves his life of poverty, and starts over, living the life of a gentleman. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce (1916) tracks a young man named Stephen and his religious and intellectual awakening.

Similar to the above-quoted examples, *Little Women* signifies the physical, social and psychological development of the female protagonist, Josephine March, who adds her feather to the crown of her passion. Despite facing innumerable struggles, she flies with her unique wings. This research paper highlights the

Bildungsroman of Josephine March, who stands out as a successful woman in the novel *Little Women*.

Research questions

The hypothesis of this research paper aims to provide answers to the probable questions: 1. What makes *Little Women* a female Bildungsroman? 2. In what ways does the character Josephine March mirror the author? 3. Does her choice of career as a writer go in a flow? 3. If not, how does she tackle those impediments to overcome the societal norms? 4. What are the factors that exemplify her life as a Bildungsroman? 5. What future scope does the paper suggest?

Review of Literature

A review of the literature analyses the existing research papers on specific topics that share frequent levels of observation. Further, it helps in comprehending the existing knowledge on the topic and fills the gap in research. The following research articles are picked for the review of literature to comprehend the gaps, helping to decode this research paper.

Dr. Arunthathi J, in her paper “Transcendental Feminism in Louisa May Alcott’s Novels”, decodes the March family saga by binding two separate movements of Feminism and Transcendentalism. While her paper broadly throws light upon all the women who belong to the March family, this research paper attempts to set its focus on Josephine March and tries to capture her life from her budding to the blossoming stage.

On the other hand, the research paper by Inamdar O N titled “Familial Concerns in the Select Novels of Louisa May Alcott” dives deep by applying Charles Strickland’s theory of Victorian domesticity into the familial concerns of Louisa May Alcott’s fiction. In contrast to these research findings, this research paper proposes to zoom the life and growth of the character Josephine March in particular through the lens of Bildungsroman.

Main text

A female Bildungsroman is a genre of novel that shows a young protagonist’s journey from immaturity to maturity, with a focus on the trials and misfortunes that affect the character’s growth. A Bildungsroman typically begins with the earlier life of the protagonist who feels embarrassed by her drudges, but ends with a positive note where the character finds a sense of belonging or self-realisation. In its early form, the Bildungsroman was regarded as a novel that had both educational and philosophical values for adults, as it portrayed characters who not only strove to better themselves, but who were able to overgrow or leave behind childish behaviours in the pursuit of higher ambitions.

The typical Bildungsroman has a three-part structure. The set-up is an initial structure which introduces the protagonist, most often during his/her childhood. The second structure focuses on the experiences that shape the protagonist's character, which often culminates in a spiritual crisis or loss of faith. The final part deals with the matured stage of the protagonist, which usually involves them finding a sense of peace with themselves or with their belongings in the world. The growth and development of the character Josephine March physically and mentally fit into the Bildungsroman genre.

The characterisation of Josephine March can be analysed through the concepts of Bildungsroman and Feminist Criticism. As a charming girl, Jo balances both her stamina for passion as well as her potential for domesticity. Though the entire novel is written from a third-person narrative, one can smell a strong connection between the anonymous narrator and the enthusiastic writer cum sister, Joe. Among the four ducky sisters, Jo stands as a unique gem. Her taste for books is specified very first in the introductory part of the novel. "I've wanted it so long", said Jo, who was a bookworm (*Little Women* 10).

She is one among the little birds who always gets surrounded by her lovely sisters and satisfying parents. Like her siblings in her circle, she, too, has a quenching thirst which makes her run miles away to pursue her ambition. Within her tiny circle, she meets different responses which she visualises as varying criticisms that help her tame herself positively. Throughout her journey from childhood to adulthood, she receives contrasting reviews, which domesticate her hands to scribble in an admiring way. Among many critics, Beth stands in her life as a shiny totem of inspiration. Her words stimulate her to write more and more, and she acts as a silent reader as well as a polite critic. Besides reading her works, Beth reads Jo's mental flow of ideals, which helps the latter to earn soothing guidance. "You're a regular Shakespeare!" (15) is the usual motto of Beth.

The character of Jo is framed in such a way that a young girl takes her part in satisfying the economic needs of her impoverished family. Jo's early activities (performing plays with her little, cute performances) stand as a base platform in building her passion. Her attitudes stand firm in binding her adoring passion with family. With single effort, she perseveres to give dual profits. Her very first publication (short story in a local newspaper) earns her name, fame and appreciation. Apart from it, her very first secret attempt brings her both financial satisfaction and persevering motivation. Her very first printed work gifts her three thousand dollars, which encourages her to explore more ideas through writing.

Jo's interest in writing reflects her extended notions and interests in literature. Her love for books improves her vision to create one for her bosom. Right from her early age, she has been maintaining constant attachment with books. Fortunately, tables turn around her by making her monotonous job a spirited one. Though she hates to read, Mrs. March, at regular intervals, enjoys the company of neat, blinded books during the repose of the old, rich widow. "She could wander where she liked, made the library a region of bliss to her." (48).

Jo cannot pass a day without visiting her portion of bliss in the library. This natural sense of smelling books stimulates her artistic hands to produce more ideas with literary skills. Anna Quindlen, a popular living American writer, finds a deep reflection in Joe's attitude, and she is satisfied with discovering how she is.

It's simple: Jo wants to be a writer. Her entire family assumes she will become a writer. And we understand, by virtue of the book we hold in our hands, that she has become a writer. As a girl, that made my own highly improbable professional dreams seem possible. "Little Women" is the first sign I ever had that I might someday become who I am today.

Jo March's life comprises both melancholy and merriment. It is only because of her indispensable thirst for passion, she persuades her fortune. Apart from being a young, adorable writer, she is also noted for her quick temper, which often gets exposed in the form of 'sibling rivalry' with her sister Amy. Despite all such domestic drudges, she shines as a cosy star amidst the underlying darkness. Such a sort of self-reliance makes her entire life a Bildungsroman.

Eventually, a Bildungsroman comprises five detailed factors which make the text a complete one. They are loss, journey, conflict, personal growth and maturity. These five elements help the protagonists to reach the highest stage of life. When success acts as the topmost position in a hill, these factors contribute as a staircase in reaching its top. 'Loss' acts as an inevitable factor in the life of the peppy protagonist. Jo's life is not at all an exceptional one, with struggles and suffocations. She has innumerable conflicts and afflictions, yet such sufferings guide her to achieve abundant achievements. As discussed earlier, 'sibling rivalry' acts as a major impediment in her life, which keeps her far away from achieving her passions and reasons for life. "She and Amy had many lively skirmishes in the course of their lives, for both had quick tempers and were apt to be violent when fairly aroused" (88).

Such skirmishes lead her to face deep agony that makes her feel the hardness of life. According to Jo, 'writing' is the best sort of bliss to be nourished, which remains unequalled. Her mind is framed in such a way, and so she justifies by

confessing that she cannot control such a piercing temper when something or somebody does mischief with her everlasting elation. Being snubbed by her temperamental sister Jo, Amy decides to teach her a good lesson, intending to snuff Jo with a mind full of vengefulness. After confirming that her elder sisters Meg and Jo are leaving the home for the theatre, the humiliated little girl starts creating her intrigue. When the sisters set off, with the naughty neighbour Laurie, to 'Seven Castles', Amy burns the papers of Jo, which the latter considers to be the most precious thing in the world. The little deceiver is quite aware of the fact that her punishment of burning the papers is the best as well as the worst thing which one can provide to an upcoming, energetic writer. Considering the papers as her emblem for euphoria, Jo usually places them safely in her attic like 'precious gems', which people usually treat with much importance. "Scold as much as you like, you'll never see your silly old book again", cried Amy, getting excited in her turn. "Why not?". "I burned it up" (89).

The arrant Amy later realises that she has not only flamed Jo's papers but also her sporting spirits. Unable to bear such deceit, Jo overwhelmed with uncontrollable rage, which makes her family realise her pain of loss. Her incomparable loss gets exposed in the form of anger. Apart from personal sufferings gifted by her sister, the pain of loss affects her entire mind. To Jo, they are not just papers to be flamed off but the reflections of her mental literary ability, which are qualified to be expelled with her artistic passion.

Amy got no farther, for Jo's hot temper mastered her, and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying in a passion of grief and anger. "You wicked, wicked girl! I never can write it again, and I'll never forgive you as long as I live" (89).

Jo's book always remains as of pride in her heart, and she is regarded by her family as a literary sprout of great promise. It may seem to be a small loss, but to Jo, it is such a dreadful calamity, and she feels that it can never be made up again. She says, "It was an abominable thing, and she doesn't deserve to be forgiven". "I never shall forgive you" (90) is Jo's stern answer, and from the incident, she starts to ignore Amy entirely.

She finds gloom in her little circle. Jo still has a resistance to discovering blooming gay within her own family. Mrs. March, whose potentiality claims norm of admiration to any woman, gives a soothing source of solace to Jo, which later makes the latter accept the loss and move further in her life. "As Jo received her good-night kiss, Mrs. March whispered gently, "My dear, don't let the sun go down upon your anger. Forgive each other, help each other, and begin again tomorrow". (90). Sonia

Sanchez, a popular American poet, also connects her personal girlish life with the domestic Jo.

I identified with Jo, the main character in “Little Women,” because not only was she independent, but she also wanted to be a writer. She was situated in the middle of a large family, but she was always alone, I thought, with her words amid everything — just as I was alone in a small family with one sister. She preferred her room of books, pens and papers where the morning and evening air circulated, and I preferred my small, shared room with my sister in Harlem, facing a blank wall where no air moved. But I knew and shared her spirit, and I laughed and smiled always when she spoke her words of independence and rebellion.

Beth, who acts as a gentle reminder as well as remedy for Jo, gives her sister a stage of desperation by accepting demise through substantiality. The quiet, meek and soft heart Beth sustains in Jo as her conscience. Her earlier death causes desperation to the entire family, especially to the pathetic, lovable sister Jo. The poor Jo cannot afford any of her sisters under any possible circumstances.

At the initial stage of realising Beth's dilemma, Jo remains too meek to accept the bitter state of her little sister. As a responsible sister, she makes attempts to confront Beth through her risky, impossible measures. A blind trust which arises in Jo's sentimental bosom gets expressed through her restless attempts to preserve her piteous Beth from the inevitable diabolic deeds.

It shall be stopped, your tide must not turn so soon, nineteen is too young, Beth. I can't let you go. I'll work and pray and fight against it. I'll keep you in spite of everything. There must be ways, it can't be too late. God won't be so cruel as to take you from me”, cried poor Jo rebelliously, for her spirit was far less piously submissive than Beth's (421).

Her little Beth, who retains her comforting attitude of tranquillity, patience and selflessness until her death, permanently leaves the sentimental Jo with her unique remembrance. Jo's poem to her innocent sister reveals her admiration for anticipating the nourishing deeds of Beth, and it evokes the sisterly bond which reflects Jo's maturity in comprehending the reality of the temporary life which cannot be paused for personal pleasures.

My great loss becomes my gain.
For the touch of grief will render
My wild nature more serene,

Give to life new aspirations,

A new trust in the unseen (469).

Despite all such irreparable loss, Jo frames her mind to compensate, appearing melancholy in merriment. Such strong ability is seen in the chapter titled The Valley of the Shadow, where Jo's mental activities get exposed through her painless peace and smiling tears. Along with the chapter, her mental trauma that strikes her mind a lot due to loss gets relieved, which can be seen through to setting well at last.

'Journey' performs as an indispensable element in the brimming life of the protagonist, which makes Bildungsroman a complete one. An appealing journey or an essential bon voyage becomes essential when the protagonist feels dejected, either due to irreparable loss or profound bitter experiences. The journey which the protagonist sets may be physical or metaphorical with the intention of finding an answer to a perplexing question. Such gaining experiences help him/her to understand the world in a better way. The profit of comprehending society tames the mind to explore the upcoming matters with a matured manifestation.

When it comes to *Little Women*, Jo longs for rejuvenation, just to enrich her mental abilities. The constant domestic trauma awakens her mind to taste refreshing lime by bidding her an encouraging bon voyage abroad. 'Travelling' does not make Jo quit herself with her family and friends, yet it gives her a unique opportunity to enrich her bond with them through constant exchange of letters quoting her debut working experience as a governess. According to Jo, 'travelling' is not at all an 'escaping mode' from reality to illusion, but a 'sense of enthusiasm' which helps her to make every attempt in future life without aversion.

Louisa May Alcott's art of characterisation is made in such a way that the protagonist Jo has grown up with less tender feelings, which usually accompany any teenage girl. Instead of focusing on luxurious attire, lavish make-up products and girlish aspirations, Jo concentrates on wild matters, which help her to encounter various new experiments.

Her journey to New York as a governess to the little children of her mother's friend, Mrs. Kirke, gives Jo what she expects. It is only because of her adaptation to the new environment, she can express her ideas in writing. Besides, she collects people with tender thoughts, which makes her heart more likely to approach the world in a better way. Jo's letter to her mother unwraps her comfort zone that soothes her soul with tenderness. "She gave me a funny little sky parlour – all she had, but there is a stove in it, and a nice table in a sunny window, so I can sit here and write whenever I like" (376).

Predominantly, the protagonists' path toward 'maturity' is not an easy task, especially in a Bildungsroman. They make mistakes and are usually at odds with society. But as the story continues, the protagonists slowly accept the ideals of society, and in turn the society accepts them back.

Jo's life in *Little Women* is not an exceptional one with neglect of tender troubles. Even though she proves herself to be better in every new attempt, she is still bound by conflicts which tie her legs of passion, leading her to feel such heavy hindrances. Minute psychological changes in Joe evoke her mental conflict not with the outer world, but with herself. Her new steps of taming herself in a refrained way led her to move in the wrong direction. "Jo soon found that her innocent experience had given her but few glimpses of the tragic world which underlies society, so regarding it in a business light, she set about supplying her deficiencies with characteristic energy" (394).

In order to show her masterly execution, Jo starts to search newspapers for accidents, dreadful incidents and crimes. She develops her new technique in writing through gaining information about poison, indifferent characters and so on. She starts introducing herself to follies, sins and miseries until her limited opportunities allow her.

In spite of her successful publication, she later realises the negative impacts of explicating the evil aspects in the minds of her readers, which an anonymous writer should not inflict on her pleasant, tender and sportive readers. Her appreciative attitude is seen when she makes up her mind to engage in self-criticism after gaining common comments from her surroundings, especially from Mr. Friedrich Bhaer and Mr. Dashwood, who try to domesticate her writings to make them unique. Her high-spirited bosom starts accepting the notions of her critics, which leads her to bloom beautifully. At a certain stage, her mental conflict gets reconciled through the words of Mr. Bhaer, who subconsciously pinpoints the follies behind such diabolic narrations.

They are trash, and will soon be worst trash if I go on, for each is more sensational than the last. I've gone blindly on, hurting myself and other people, for the sake of money. I know it's so, for I can't read this stuff in sober earnest without being horribly ashamed of it, and what should I do if they were seen at home or Mr. Bhaer got hold of them? (402).

When she chillaxes her mind after a tender transformation, she is forced to go into another mental conflict with her dear boy Laurie. The latter, whom Jo affectionately calls 'Teddy', mistakes the friendly deeds of a woman for deepened love. Such heartache adds fuel to the fire in the life of Jo, who is constantly laid upon domestic

drudges. Nevertheless, Jo's mental abilities help her to feel the oozing peace after the strange storm.

I've done my best, but you won't be any reasonable, and it's selfish of you to keep teasing for what I can't give. I shall always be fond of you, very fond indeed, as a friend, but I'll never marry you, and the sooner you believe it the better for both of us – so now! (411).

An appealing Bildungsroman gets fulfilled when the protagonist demonstrates immense psychological growth, change and maturity by the end of the novel. Sometimes, it may end with the protagonist giving back and helping someone else in the past to maturity.

In *Little Women*, all the characters, especially Jo, attain positive psychological change only after realising the burning impact of her scornful spirits, which blast out as lava from her volcano. Such huge spirits burn out, resulting in sorrow. Her sense of maturity starts getting restrained as soon as she realises her complications. "It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it, I think I have, and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, Mother, what shall I do? What shall I do?"(93), screams Jo in despair. To her expectation, she consoles Jo's burning fire through the smooth words of water, and such drastic change helps Jo to build her psyche firmly.

Jo's mental growth can be seen through her skilful manifestation of balancing both the domestic drudges and her writing skills. At times, Jo has to replace a pen with a broom and sometimes vice versa. Her willingness for refinement establishes her appreciating maturity, which is quite essential for a protagonist who creates her own Bildungsroman. She says, "There, I've done my best! If this won't suit, I shall have to wait till I can do better." (172).

A marvellous maturity can be achieved only if the protagonist pays constant wages to honesty. Such a characteristic feature is to be admired as well as to be appreciated. Josephine March is one such notable female writer who produces her oeuvre with complete virtue and honesty. Such a sort of attitude is seen when she openly confesses, "No, it's mine honestly. I didn't beg, borrow or steal it. I earned it, and I don't think you'll blame me, for I only sold what was my own" (182).

A steady mind with firm knowledge can be attained only after indulging in consequences. In spite of holding many unexpected disappointments, Jo still has her shiny rays, which help the plants of readers' to grow smoothly and steadily in the right direction. Her tiring heart gets tired after facing desperation. Apart from Beth's demise and writing struggles, Jo's little heart gets hurt during tiny trifles. She cannot bear even the neglect of Aunt Carrol, who selects Amy to accompany her abroad, leaving the piteous Jo behind. On the other hand, she faces little disappointments at

every part of her life's journey. Despite such infinite suffocations, she pays attention by searching for ways to mend her mind. Jo's mental maturity reaches its highest level when she realises that it is important to focus on intelligence rather than emotions, despite occurring circumstances.

Jo's Bildungsroman can also be viewed from a feminist perspective where a young woman proves herself not to be a gorgeous heroine, yet to be a brimming betty. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* gives a sense of satisfaction where the readers could feel the delicacy of a writer who can transform her struggles into happiness.

Janey Tracey, in one of her critical essays, *The Conflicted Feminism of Little Women*, shares her feminist concepts, which help in analysing Jo in a better way. *Little Women* is, in many ways, an unlikely candidate for a perennial feminist classic. Louisa May Alcott's 1868 novel is now in its 154th year, and it is a sentimental, didactic piece of literature that mostly celebrates traditional gender roles and places a rosy, wistful haze over its portrayal of domestic life. Alcott's well-rounded portrayal, however, is of an imperfect woman, particularly independent tomboy Jo, as well as her notable resistance to the conventional "marriage plot" of her time, which has afforded the novel a long-lasting, conflicted relationship to feminist thought.

Alcott's depiction of Jo is complex, subversive for her time, and, perhaps most importantly, palpably human. At one point in the novel, Jo cuts off all her hair, both to sell because it will do her brain good to have that mop taken off. When Meg finds her crying in the night, Jo admits her vain part. She tremendously misses her long hair, an expressive, womanly feeling which dissipates by the next morning. For all such romanticising of domesticity in the novel, Jo openly disdains the notion of getting married and having children. Instead, she dreams of a very different kind of homestead.

I'd have a stable full of Arabian steeds, rooms piled high with books, and I'd write out of a magic inkstand... I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle, something heroic or wonderful that won't be forgotten after I'm dead.... I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous, that would suit me, so that is my favorite dream (167).

This ambition and rejection of conventional domesticity make Jo a revolutionary character for the times, and Alcott says that she wants to write a novel that gives women more options than marriage and children. By the end of part one, Meg is engaged, but all of the girls are still unmarried. Alcott did this intentionally to demonstrate that the girls have their whole lives ahead of them and to reinforce that the novel, and especially Jo, wouldn't conform to the conventional "marriage plot."

“Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only aim and end of a woman’s life,” Alcott, herself, has written in her journal, quoting “I won’t marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone.”

As a perfect Bildungsroman, the art of characterisation of Josephine March nails the narration, which makes the readers compensate for the aspiring notions with feminism. Her ideology of becoming a writer, her adjustment with her family and friends, her maturity of differentiating friendly bond and deep love and her succeeding state of becoming a versatile personality (writer, governess, teacher) make the readers admire *Little Women* as a perfect Bildungsroman.

Josephine March, who cannot hold many praising words than a writer, is just a reflection of Louisa May Alcott, who willingly converts her monotonous life into beautiful womanly fiction. Louisa’s Jo is not a mirage to be forgotten easily, but a colourful halo who succeeds by destroying unpredictable encumbrances.

On the whole, Jo is not a bird in a cage to mourn with grief, but a seagull who flies with liberty, just to collect food to be fed. Her accomplished attitude is highlighted when Beth praises her. She says, “You are the gull, Jo, strong and wild, fond of the storm and the wind, flying far out of the sea, and happy all alone” (422). Jennifer Weiner, a notable writer, television producer and journalist, shares her genuine aspirations for Jo and wishes many other women to add feathers to their crowns.

It’s hard for me to imagine any woman writer who did not see herself in Jo March. Jo was a smart, headstrong, clumsy misfit; a loving sister and daughter who knew her own heart and could be brave, not just in service of her family but also in service of her own ambitions, a poor girl who turns down the rich, handsome dreamboat next door to pursue her ambitions. When I was 10 years old, Jo was everything I wanted to be when I grew up.

Further scope for *Little Women* can be visualised by keeping the novel under the views of Marxist criticism. Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer’s social class and its prevailing ideologies, such as outlook, values, tacit assumptions, and half-realised allegiances, have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class. So instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous ‘inspired individuals’ whose genius and creative imagination enable them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in ways. When such traits get framed up in the novel, strategies of poverty such as the impoverished condition of the March family, the contrasted

neighbourhood, Jo's struggle for existence due to weak economy and the inability of the family to live in luxury can be focused.

Summation

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott deals with the simple, domestic, yet satisfying life of the March family. One of the adorable little sisters in the family is Josephine March. The novel uniquely focuses on Josephine March, where the growth of her character is shown right from her early age to a mature stage. It highlights not only the physical development of Jo, but also her mental struggles that help her to create a totem among her family and surroundings. Though *Little Women* focuses on the varied lifestyles of four sisters in a single family, there seems to be a special feature in the art of characterising Jo. As Jo reflects the real-life writer Alcott, the nameless narrator finds it easier to demonstrate Jo's actions, intrigues and wit.

As discussed earlier, Bildungsroman is a variety of novel which highlights the growth of a protagonist, which makes the entire novel a full-fledged one. The purpose of a Bildungsroman is to make the readers accompany the life journey of the protagonist and to feel the experiences of the protagonist, which is usually an amalgamation of happiness and sorrow. All through the journey, the readers can analyse the complete growth of the protagonist amidst unexpected twists and turns. No matter how many impediments the character faces, the purpose of the protagonist is framed in such a manner that he/she should struggle as much as possible with the intention of finding a meaningful purpose in life.

When it comes to *Little Women*, Alcott makes the readers observe the improving lifestyle of Jo, which captures both her personal and professional life. According to Jo, responsibilities and achievements are like two sides of the same coin. She cannot neglect one for another and wishes to gain both within the given lifetime. At times her life is tossed, just to test her urgent necessity. This project highlights the capability of Jo, who stands fit as a fiddle by equalising her duties to family and her passion to entity.

Right from her early age, Jo cultivates the habit of writing. To Jo, her hobby gets accomplished with pleasure, which results in writing. As days go by, her keen interest is getting ready to overwhelm in the form of a printed version. It does not seem easier for Jo as she has many more personal problems to hold on. Jo is a shining diamond which cannot control its sparkles even after being thrown into dust. Her economic requirements do not drag her away from passion. She starts to fulfil her duties through various aspects, and among such attempts, writing plays a vital role. Keeping such perpetual potentialities as a compass to her journey, Jennie Weiner

succeeds in making another version of Joe in her fiction, which stands as a fabulous fact.

Jo March was one of the inspirations for the heroine of my most recent novel, *Mrs. Everything*. I'm not the only woman writer to have written a Jo of her own, and I imagine there will be other Jos to follow. Whatever we make of the grown-up Jo's marriage, the headstrong, ambitious girl will live on, to inspire generations of girls to come.

Jo's endeavour gets enriched along with her physical growth. She not only crosses age but also her limitations, which cannot keep her away from pursuing her passion for writing. Jo's perseverance towards writing and her ability to tame her mind according to the circumstances prove her capability as a quite embodiment of feminine contribution. Despite heavy domestic drudges, Jo still holds lamps of hope which brighten her dark, gloomy path.

Her entire life right from adolescence to marital journey, comprises of struggles, happiness, sufferings, loneliness, love, friendship, maturity and so on. Though the other sisters experience all the above emotions, Jo's journey is somewhat different which has to be admired. She builds a sense of maturity in each and every aspect of her upcoming life.

Her highest form of maturity is noted when she utilises the upcoming opportunities as an open challenge with the readiness of holding family in one hand and passion in the other. Her willingness to accept life is similar to the words of Shakespeare, who states, "Readiness is all". Besides, Jo stands as a lively example of "Ripeness is all".

As a fabulous feminist, Jo handles situations with her womanly style, which is both tender as well as courageous. Her physical and mental conflicts with her surroundings do injure her. Such injuries also heal her, leaving scars of tender lessons which are almost necessary for her life to cope with the environment. As a growing child, she toddles up and skids down to earth. Despite such hindrances, she finds herself to find a better place in her green environment.

This research paper highlights the essential features of Jo, which help her to make a perfect Bildungsroman. Her life is made in such a manner that she has to undergo varied situations to taste the nectar of her passion. Keeping her feminist values as a compass to her journey, she gains tremendous treasure, which brings her everlasting fame and satisfying settlement. On the whole, such feminist aspects guide her to achieve the passion, which makes *Little Women* a perfect Bildungsroman of Josephine March.

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