

## FEMINISM THOUGHT IN LOUISA MAY ACLOTT'S *LITTLE WOMAN*

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**Abstract** : This research aims at analyzing the thoughts of feminism through the struggle that women faced in the 19th century reflected through Josephine March in Alcott's *Little Women*. In conducting this research, the qualitative method was used. This study can be classified as library research since the data were collected through reading the novel and reading some related books. The novel can be categorized as the primary source and the other sources as secondary sources. The data were analyzed based on the kinds of struggle and its impact and then the result was presented descriptively. In analyzing the data, the researcher used feminism approach. The result showed that the feminist struggle was shown in some aspects, like social relations, education, and job. The struggle brought a negative impact not only on women but also on societies. The struggle is caused by the negative treatment received by the women. Society taught that women are less important and should listen to what man says also woman can be happy with the support of man. The thought of freedom is so far away from her and other women in that era.

**Keywords** : *Thoughts, Feminism, Little Woman, Louisa May Alcott*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most imaginative and accessible ways to communicate the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual concerns of humanity is through literature. Experience is the primary source of literary content (Fessenbecker, 2020). An author uses literature to convey thoughts about things they have personally experienced or have observed in their environment, such as natural events or the daily lives of individuals in their society (Inayyah & Simanjuntak, 2022). Whether through poetry, fiction, or non-fiction, literature can evoke powerful emotions, provoke critical thinking, and inspire empathy and understanding, making it an invaluable tool for exploring the complexities of the human experience.

The term literature is essentially derived from the Latin term *littera* (which means *letter*), which denotes written or printed materials. It referred to any written work, including non-fiction, religious texts, and scientific treatises (Carter & McRae, 2016). However, over time, the term came to be associated specifically with imaginative or creative writing (Barbot, et al., 2012). Due to the fact that literature offers an unbiased foundation for knowledge and comprehension, it fosters intellectual and personal growth in readers. It helps individuals comprehend the aspirations, tribulations, and conflicts that people experience throughout history (Callista & Simanjuntak, 2022).

Literature can be found in forms of literary works such as poetry, drama, prose, or novel. A novel is "a form of

literary work that is characterized by its length, complexity, and narrative structure,” (Link, 2022) It typically tells a story that unfolds over the course of many chapters and is often divided into sections or parts (Aziza & Simanjuntak, 2022). One of the most significant aspects of the novel as a literary form is its ability to offer a deep exploration of character. Novels can take many forms and address a wide range of subjects and themes. One of the themes offered in a novel is feminism.

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for equal rights and opportunities for all genders, and it has been a recurring theme in many novels throughout history (Yin, 2022). Several researches have been conducted to analyze the feminism theme in various novels. Mirzayee (2019) and Yu & Li (2019) analyze the theme of feminism in Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*. Punniyamorthy & Varadharajan (2020) and Vaidhya & Warkad (2019) discuss the feminism theme in Walker’s *The Color Purple*. As many researchers focus on the theme of feminism found in various novels, it can be concluded that feminism is one of the interesting topics that can be found in a novel. The same goes for Alcott’s *Little Woman* which brings feminism as one of the main themes in the novel.

Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* is a classic example of literature that explores feminist themes (Ismail, 2023). The novel, which was published in 1868, tells the story of the March family, and in particular, the four March sisters (Jain, 2020). The novel is set during the Civil War era and explores the lives of young women in a patriarchal society (Byrne, 2021). Alcott's portrayal of the March sisters and their struggles against gender roles and societal expectations

reflects her own feminist beliefs and critiques the limited options available to women at the time (Sutrisno, et al, 2023). Through her portrayal of the March sisters, Alcott created a powerful and enduring vision of female empowerment and solidarity.

The character of Josephine March (Jo), in particular, has become an iconic figure in feminist literature (Kennedy, 2019). Jo is a tomboyish and ambitious character who struggles to fit into traditional gender roles and is determined to pursue a career as a writer. Her struggles against societal expectations and her desire for independence and self-expression have resonated with generations of readers. That is why, this research is aimed at analyzing the thoughts of feminism through the struggle that women faced in the 19th century reflected through Josephine March in Alcott’s *Little Women*.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The writer used library research to analyze the feminism-related aspects of Alcott’s *Little Women*. The author gathered that information from relevant books and other works of literature that were relevant to the subject of the investigation. The author used the internet to obtain relevant references while doing this analysis. *Little Women* Written by Louisa May Alcott published in 1868 served as the writers' major source for their essay through its characters, while other books on feminism served as their secondary source. The data were analyzed based on the kinds of struggle and its impact and then the result was presented descriptively.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of The Characters

Character is the person described in the story by using direct presentation or

can be through the indirect presentation. Abrams, as cited in Moge (2023), states, "Character is people who are appeared in a narrative prose or novel and it is interpreted by the readers as a person who has morality quality and certain tendency such as being expressed in what they say and what they do." A character becomes one of the important elements in a short story because by analyzing the character the readers will have an understanding of the main theme of the story. Besides, the character's existence can create the atmosphere of the story to be more interesting.

Based on the main topic the writers have to pair the basic information to find out the source of the problem that can lead the character to solve their problem. All the characters have their own style of living life. Start from the character Margareth called Meg who loves luxurious things because she has ever been rich before Mr. March lost his property in trying to help an unfortunate friend.

*"We should not enjoy ourselves half so much as we do now. But it does seem so nice to have little suppers and bouquets, and go to parties, and drive home, and read and rest, and not work. It's like other people, you know, and I always envy girls who do such things, I'm so fond of luxury," said Meg, trying to decide which of two shabby gowns was the least shabby.*" (Alcott, 1868, p. 37).

The character Josephine March, the second daughter of the March family that used to be called Jo, is a little bit different from Meg. Have independence in herself and the willingness to stand up for herself. Jo loves writing and like to act like a boy because she thinks that a boy can do everything on their own without any consideration from others. And being a

boy, she feels free to use slang words and do a whistle.

*"Jo does use such slang words!" observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug. Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle. 'Don't, Jo. It's so boyish!' 'That's why I do it.' 'I detest rude, unladylike girls!' 'I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!"* (Alcott, 1868, p.9).

The character Jo is a boyish girl that loves reading.

*"...I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy UNDINE AND SINTRAM for myself. I've wanted it so long," said Jo, who was a bookworm.*" (Alcott, 1868, p.7).

The character Beth is a quiet, kind young woman, and a pianist. She enjoys her dolls and cats. She prefers to be homeschooled and avoids most public situations.

*"Beth was too bashful to go to school. It had been tried, but she suffered so much that it was given up, and she did her lessons at home with her father. She was a housewifely little creature, and helped Hannah keep home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to be loved. Long, quiet days she spent, not lonely nor idle, for her little world was peopled with imaginary friends, and she was by nature a busy bee."* (Alcott, 1868, p.41)

The character Amy is a girl that interested in arts and always acts like a very proper young lady.

*"Little Raphael," as her sisters called her, had a decided talent for drawing, and was never so happy as when copying flowers, designing fairies, or illustrating stories with queer specimens of art. - She was a great favorite with her mates, being good tempered and possessing the happy art of pleasing without effort. Her little airs and*

*graces were much admired, so were her accomplishments, for besides her drawing, she could play twelve tunes, crochet, and read French without mispronouncing more than two-thirds of the words. She had a plaintive way of saying, 'When Papa was rich we did so-and-so,' which was very touching, and her long words were considered 'perfectly elegant' by the girls". (Alcott, 1868, p.42-43)*

Those are the differences among the character of March sister. These differences make this character unic, they will use their own thought to figure out the way to solving their problems. Next, the writer would like to show how women fight the patriacy to prove that women are not weak and to show that women are not a so-called second society.

### **Thought of Struggle**

#### **Struggle for Freedom**

The mindset of nineteenth-century society did not expect women to work to support themselves. Family obligations and duties take away from the woman's ability to attend to her own needs and want. The American nineteenth-century family often consisted of a man working outside the home, while the women took care of the house and the family. According to the old English Common laws, men had absolute power over the family. A woman who has turned into their puberty will be managed to marry a man who is usually her relative or acquaintance. Most of them were not permitted to enter school, even to work. The belief that a man has to work and women just wait to be chosen by the man and women marry for money, so men must have so much money.

*"... men have to work and women marry for money 'People don't have fortunes left them in that style*

*nowadays, men have to work and women marry for money. It's a dreadfully unjust world,' said Meg bitterly." (Alcott, 1868, p.152).*

The convention of the nineteenth century dictated that women should stay at home, marry, have children, and find happiness. For the people that live in that century, being married to a rich and wealthy man is rightfully proud because women have done the roles that are accepted by that society. As for Margareth, she has to face the negative thought from society by marrying John Brooke and believing that is a good decision for her even though society through Aunt March said that Margareth feels sorry for this thing.

*"I wish you well, my dear, I heartily wish you well, but I think you'll be sorry for it,' said Aunt March to Meg, adding to the bridegroom, as he led her to the carriage, 'You've got a treasure, young man, see that you deserve it.'" (Alcott, 1868, p.24).*

As the character Josephine "Jo" March consistently struggles with the boundaries of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society that stage women, not allowed able to fight in a war, not allowed to attend college. Society at that time believes that only a man is able to join the war, not a woman. But the fact that the character Jo wants to help in the war as the nurse to help the victim or even she can fight with her father. For education, a man got more proper education than a woman. Because in this era people believe that men will be the ones who can provide for the family and women just stay at home and wait for her husband. Jo wants to show that a woman can do everything either in the war or in the family.

*"...And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dyin to go and fight with Papa. And I can*

*only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!’* (Alcott, 1868, p.8)

*“Don’t I wish I could go as a drummer, a vivan—what’s its name? Or a nurse, so I could be near him and help him,’ exclaimed Jo, with a groan.”* (Alcott, 1868, p.13).

As Jo ever said before that she wants to be the man while Mr. March is gone to battle, but her determination takes off her negative thought, which is why Jo wants to be an independent woman.

*‘I don’t like favors, they oppress and make me feel like a slave. I’d rather do everything for myself, and be perfectly independent.’* (Alcott, 1868, p.283).

Jo should be the fighter for the March family.

*“.... But, you see, Jo wasn’t a heroine, she was only struggling human girl like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross, listless, or energetic, as the mood suggested. It’s highly virtuous to say we’ll be good, but we can’t do it all at once, and it takes a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together before some of us even get our feet set in the right way. Jo had got so far, she was learning to do her duty, and to feel unhappy if she did not, but to do it cheerfully, ah, that was another thing! She had often said she wanted to do something splendid, no matter how hard, and now she had her wish, for what could be more beautiful than to devote her life to Father and Mother, trying to make home as happy to them as they had to her? And if difficulties were necessary to increase the splendor of the effort, what could be harder for a restless, ambitious girl than to give up her own hopes, plans, and desires, and cheerfully live for others?”* (Alcott, 1868, p.411)

### **Struggle for Labour**

One of the central factors that organize one-third of waking life for individuals is

a job. In fact, a job has a critical contribution to the level and type of an individual’s life it can create various futures for each person. In other words, the job is one of the core factors for motivating individuals’ attitude and activity, and also it assumed as one of the most vital points for people.

In that era, finding a proper job are so hard, because most the workplaces are created for men, and the thought of women are not allowed to have a job make it harder for women to get a job. These difficulties make women restricted in society. As Jo and her family need money to stay alive, Jo sent her story to a newspaper to be published. Joe can earn money from her so-called “rubbish” story. The purpose of her writing a story is to satisfy herself by doing her hobby. She made it well as a woman even though she get paid too small.

*“As long as The Spread Eagle paid her a dollar a column for her ‘rubbish’, as she called it, Jo felt herself a woman of means, and spun her little romances diligently. But great plans fermented in her busy brain and ambitious mind, and the old tin kitchen in the garret held a slowly increasing pile of blotted manuscript, which was one day to place the name of March upon the roll of fame.”* (Alcott, 1868, p.227)

The lack of attention to the presence of women as active and knowledgeable human resources for finding jobs in society led to various problems for women and provide insufficient economic conditions among family members at that time. So the true purpose of the character Jo going to New York is to get money and can make her family and especially Beth happy and can get what Beth wants. Jo knows that with money she can buy an organ for Beth and fill her home with

comfort and going herself abroad. After deciding to write what is inside of her heart Jo finishes her new story and is sent by her father to a magazine and got paid for it. Jo dedicates her work to her family.

### **Thought to Find Happiness**

The fundamental aim of thought to find happiness is to fulfill gender equality. Gender equality efforts are to increase the opportunities available to women and girls, promote their right to self-determination, further their empowerment, and help to ensure that women gain a stronger position in the family, and in the community. Jo knows that she cannot sit still and be pretty just to impress a guy, that is why she makes her own fortune by sending her manuscript competes in a competition for a hundred dollars. with no one knowing what she has done. She waits for weeks after passionately waiting for the answer, finally, she got informed by a letter from the newspaper that she won the prize and she thought that the money can help her family.

*“.....Her experience and miscellaneous reading were of service now, for they gave her some idea of dramatic effect, and supplied plot, language, and costumes. Her story was as full of desperation and despair as her limited acquaintance with those uncomfortable emotions enabled her to make it, and having located it in Lisbon, she wound up with an earthquake, as a striking and appropriate denouement. The manuscript was privately dispatched, accompanied by a note, modestly saying that if the tale didn't get the prize, which the writer hardly dared expect, she would be very glad to receive any sum it might be considered worth. Six weeks is a long time to wait, and a still longer time for a girl to keep a secret, but Jo did both, and was just beginning to give up all hope of ever seeing her manuscript again, when a letter arrived which almost took her*

*breath away, for on opening it, a check for a hundred dollars fell into her lap. For a minute she stared at it as if it had been a snake, then she read her letter and began to cry. If the amiable gentleman who wrote that kindly note could have known what intense happiness he was giving a fellow creature, I think he would devote his leisure hours, if he has any, to that amusement, for Jo valued the letter more than the money, because it was encouraging, and after years of effort it was so pleasant to find that she had learned to do something, though it was only to write a sensation story.” (Alcott, 1868, p.254-255).*

For the character Jo and Meg, they belief that women can earn money too and help their family and they don't want marry just because of money but because of love like their parents did.

*“Jo and I are going to make fortunes for you all. Just wait ten years, and see if we don't,” said Amy, who sat in a corner making mud pies, as Hannah called her little clay models of birds, fruit, and faces.” (Alcott, 1868, p.152).*

Later on, Amy makes an independent decision that will affect the course of her life. Early in the novel Amy too makes her desires known. She wishes to “be an artist, and go to Rome and so fine pictures.” This wish is realized as Amy does go to Rome and keeps part of her life until the end. While in Rome on an excursion to be trained in arts and culture. Amy decides to marry Laurie without the consent or consideration of the opinions of others or her family.

*“Dear, how charming! I hope I shall go abroad someday, but I'd rather go to Rome than the Row,” said Amy, who had not the remotest idea what the Row was and wouldn't have asked for the world.” (Alcott, 1868, p.131)*

The independence of women is shown most frequently through Jo's character. Jo's wish is to "write books and get rich and famous someday". The character Jo then continues to realize her dream to write and continues to do so throughout the story. It must have been difficult for a woman to take on such goals at that time. Later in the novel, Amy makes yet another independent decision that will affect the course of her life. The character Amy finally realizes that a woman should not marry just for money but for love. As can be seen, while she left Fred Vaughn and accept Laurie because she loves Laurie despite the fact that Laurie is not as rich as Fred Vaughn.

*"If they love one another it doesn't matter a particle how old they are nor how poor. Women never should marry for money..." Amy caught herself up short as the words escaped her, and looked at her husband, who replied, with malicious gravity... 'Certainly not, though you do hear charming girls say that they intend to do it sometimes. If my memory serves me, you once thought it your duty to make a rich match. That accounts, perhaps, for your marrying a good-for-nothing like me.' 'Oh, my dearest boy, don't, don't say that! I forgot you were rich when I said 'Yes'. I'd have married you if you hadn't a penny, and I sometimes wish you were poor that I might show how much I love you.' And Amy, who was very dignified in public and very fond in private, gave convincing proofs of the truth of her words." (Alcott, 1868, p.431-432).*

Finally, the character Jo March shows the world that she can earn money in her own style and dedicate it to her family. A new carpet and gowns are the things that she can buy for the family, and she still thinks to make her parents don't be afraid of having any more money. Through the character of Jo, we can see that through

determination women can achieve everything that they put in mind. The character Jo continues to realize her dream to write and continues to do so throughout the story. It must have been difficult for a woman to take on such goals in the late 1800s.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted by the author, it can be concluded that in 1992 (Era) there many social inequalities occurred, as well as rampant patriarchal practices that occurred so that women's freedom was very limited, even women's happiness was described by how rich a man married by a woman was. But this is not an obstacle for the March Family. With the determination of each family member and also how hard the March family educates their children (Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy) to be independent and not dependent on others.

This teaching is applied by Josephine (Jo) March in achieving her desire to become a famous writer and provide a proper school for children. Not only girls but also boys. This is a challenge for us as humans to respect each other and respect every difference that we have. Gender does not determine how great we are, only ourselves can make us great and be known by many people. The good deeds we do will also lead us to good things.

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