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Gender Expectations in May Alcott's Little Women

Dissertation submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Master* in
Literature & Civilization

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

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A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Bouderbala Houaria".

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents; may God protect them. To my brothers Houssam and Mohamed. To my sister Yamina. To all people who supported me near or far. To my friends, and to myself.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to my supervisor Dr MEHDAOUI for her help in completing this research work.

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Abstract

Little women was and still is one of the finest novels in American literature. Though considered as children novel genre, it holds many feminist insights. It sheds light on the important issues that are deeply rooted in American society in the nineties. Among the issues presented in the novel: the importance of the family, women roles, and gender stereotypes. This latter was the main focus of many researchers, scholars, and feminists during the past decades. Thereupon, this study seeks to examine gender expectations and roles throughout the novel and how Louisa May Alcott challenged gender stereotypes via female and male characters. Hence, this study is conducted in the light of the feminist theory through the point of view of Judith Butler as an adopted scope through the qualitative analysis. This method allows to dig deeper into the novel and understand its main themes and implicit messages. As a result, this study ended with three main findings: First, May Alcott broke the gender stereotypes of both males and females at the time. By doing so, she overthrew her community's expectations about men and women. Second, Alcott challenged traditional gender roles in the nineteenth century. Third, she aimed, through her novel, to preserve the position of women in her society and to achieve gender equality. In sum, the findings of the current study will benefit the readers, whether male or female. To better understand how gender is represented through Alcott's works and in American literature as a whole.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

During the nineteenth century, American women enjoyed few social rights and freedom. But many responsibilities and expectations were placed upon them. Despite the deprivation from their own properties and voting rights, society expected them to serve their families with no right to say anything.

Moreover, there were great changes around that period and one of those was the Civil War. This had a tremendous impact on American society, especially women. Thus, many women started to work in factories as well as other fields to support their families, in addition to their domestic roles which became an enjoyable subject that attracted many writers and feminists to tackle in their works.

Further, this war led to the rise of numerous female writers and feminists; among them Louisa May Alcott who is best known by her feminist masterpiece *Little Women*. She tried to portray the society in that era by recounting her personal and familial experiences through the characters by dealing with the major themes including: marriage, family, the importance of work, and gender stereotypes.

There are two motives behind choosing May Alcott's *Little Women*. First, the book is considered as a feminist work that depicts gender as learned experiences rather than innate acts and behaviours. Second, it was and remains one of the best novels in American children literature that was interpreted into many movies and cartoons.

The present study aims to shed light on how gender is presented in American literature through *Little Women* by using Judith Butler's perspective about gender. Whereas, the other two objectives are: to examine the issue of gender expectations as well as to spotlight on how Alcott challenged the traditional gender roles.

The current work aims to reveal the issue of gender expectations in *Little Women* through an attempt to answer the following questions:

- ✓ How gender roles are presented in the novel?
- ✓ To what extent is the concept of gender stereotypes present in the novel?
- ✓ Does *Little Women* challenge or reinforce the traditional gender roles?

To pursue the research questions above, the following hypotheses are addressed:

- Through *Little Women* Alcott explores the various roles of women most importantly the new challenges brought by the war.
- Alcott breaks many stereotypes and confronts them by using two of her main characters “Jo” and “Laurie”.
- *Little Women* is merely a children's story; yet one suggests that in *Little Women* Alcott challenges the traditional gender roles and pushes the boundaries of expectations that are placed on both men and women.

To answer the research questions, the researcher adopted qualitative research methods. First, the researcher collected sources by going through what other researchers and writers recorded about the topic. In the light of the obtainable documentation including: books, electronic books, magazines, articles, and websites; the analysis occurred. Along with the practice of the qualitative analysis, the researcher faced a lot of subjectivity in data due to the delicacy of the topic.

Besides, in this dissertation, the researcher intends to use the critical feminist theory which best investigates gender expectations and provides a critical analysis of the concepts from Judith Butler’s point of view.

The present research will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter entitled *Historical Background* will be devoted mainly to The American Civil War, covering the

social and the political events in the nineteenth century America where the novel takes place. The second chapter entitled *Gender and Feminism* will contain two sections; while the first will give an overview on gender and its components, the second will explain in brief the scope of feminism in terms of types, waves, theory, and feminist theorists.

The third chapter entitled *Analyzing Gender through Little Women* will be concerned with the analytical side of the study. In this respect, it will focus on the interpretation of gender through the novel.

Chapter One:

Historical

Background

1.1. Introduction

Since Alcott's novel *Little Women* depicts the American society during the Civil War, the first chapter entitled *Historical Background* aims to examine the historical context of the literary text. Thus, it will discuss in brief the American Civil War including its main causes, its outbreak, the contribution of women in that war, its effects on both economy and society, and the Emancipation Proclamation.

1.2. Causes of the War

The American Civil War was one of the bloody wars throughout American history that lasted from 1861 to 1865. It blew up between two opposite sides: The North and the South due to many differences. While the North was urban, industrial, and had many economic advantages; the South was rural and focused basically on agriculture. However, this Civil War had direct as well as indirect causes. What follows are the most important and significant reasons for its outbreak.

1.2.1. Slavery

Throughout human history, the institution of slavery took place and was participated by different cultures. Thus, many people were enslaved for several reasons including being taken as a prisoner of war; because of debts, and some of them born in a family of slaves.

However, slavery appeared in America dating back to 1619, when the Dutch brought twenty African slaves as prisoners of a battle with the Spanish. By doing this, their ship docked on Virginia's James Town colony in North America for repairs and through exchanges of goods, they sold the African slaves to the American. (history-of-slavery-in-America)

Later on, from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, many Africans were taken by westerners forcibly. They forced them to move from their homeland to America. They were

also treated as free workers, contributing to economic growth through crop production, including tobacco and cotton.

During their journey in American states, African slaves faced many hardships and difficulties. The Americans forced them to work all day without salary. They provided them with food. They lived in very humble places that were not suitable for human life. Even if the slave was lucky to live with his family, their time together was too short. As the master had the right to sell his slaves; consequently, they lived constantly in fear of losing their families. Besides, any objection was considered by law a rebellion which exposed its owner to punishment; including, severe beatings, whipping, and food deprivation. In his book *American Slavery*, Kolchin (1995) asserted:

There were rules which told slaves when to rise in the morning when to go to the fields, when to break for meals, how long and how much to work, and when to go to bed. Rules also dictated a broad range of activities that were forbidden with special permission from living home, to getting married, and rules allowed and did not allowed a host of privileges including the right to raise vegetables or garden plots, trade for small luxuries, hunt, and visit neighbors (94).

Ultimately, the Civil War was the result of the confederation's struggle to preserve southern society, considering slavery an integral part of it. The whites, especially the slave traders, denounced the idea of freeing slaves that would destroy the economic system because of the huge capital invested in slaves as well as the fear that both whites and freed slaves would live equally in the same place.

1.2.2. States Rights

The concept of state rights is an old idea dating back to the 1860s, which means that every state has the right to govern itself as well as freedom in its decisions. The thirteen American

colonies separated from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, made their own decisions. By doing so, they ignored the laws imposed on them from abroad. As the following quotation indicates:

I repeat that the principle is the right of each state, and each territory to decide this slavery question for itself, to have slavery or not, as it chooses, and it does not become Mr. Lincoln, or anybody else to tell the people of Kentucky that they have consciences, that they are living in a state of inequity and they are cherishing an institution to their bosoms in violation of the law of God. Better of him to adopt the doctrine of judge not lest ye shall be judge (Douglas "Lincoln-Douglas debates" (1858).

Since the desire of the South was that every state has the right to secede from and leave the Union whenever they want, they considered the American constitution a treaty or agreement between states, but the North rejected this idea.

Moreover, the power struggle between the federal and the state governments became acute from 1820 to 1830, which the Missouri Compromise in 1820 temporarily resolved. In addition to the increasing number of the abolition of slavery in the North and rebellion of slaves such as the Turner Rebellion, the south felt a constant threat to their way of life.

1.2.3. Lincoln Election

Abraham Lincoln was one of the presidents of the United States of America and the first republican to succeed in entering the White House. He was the first to become president of the Republican Party, which was against slavery. He also worked at the beginning of his career in the law firm. The election of Abraham Lincoln on November 20, 1860, left many southerners in a state of panic and intense fear for their future. As a member of the Republican Party, he as well as other republicans supported the idea of fighting slavery. So, southerners were sure that republican elections and victory meant a fundamental change in their lives.

Thus, the southern states were quick to leave the Union and start the war. In his speech at Chicago Illinois, Lincoln said:

“I have always hated slavery, I think as any abolitionist I have been an old-line wing, I have always hated it but I have always been quiet about it until this new era of the introduction of the Nebraska evil began. I always believed that everybody was against it, and it was in course of ultimate extinction.”

This quote confirmed Lincoln’s attitude towards slavery as well as his constant and persistent hatred towards it.

1.3. The Outbreak of the War

In 1861, the American Civil War broke out and lasted for more than four years, just after a long period of tension and disputes. This war rose from two main events: the secession crisis of the southern states as well as the battle of Fort Sumter. Thus, the newly elected president Abraham Lincoln was forced into a bloody solution to respond to both the secession of the south and the formation of the confederacy as well as the confederate army’s bombardment of the Union Fort Sumter and the acquisition of it. In a step to resolve the crisis and restore control to the rebels, Lincoln waged this war.

1.3.1. Secession Crisis

After Abraham Lincoln won the election, southern states seceded one by one from the Union. South Carolina was the first to split up just one month after Lincoln took office. Then, six other states withdrew from the Union within months including; Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Later, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina as well as Tennessee followed the steps of their neighbors and announced their secession too. Finally, the eleven states formed a union known by the Confederate States and considered themselves outside the nation.

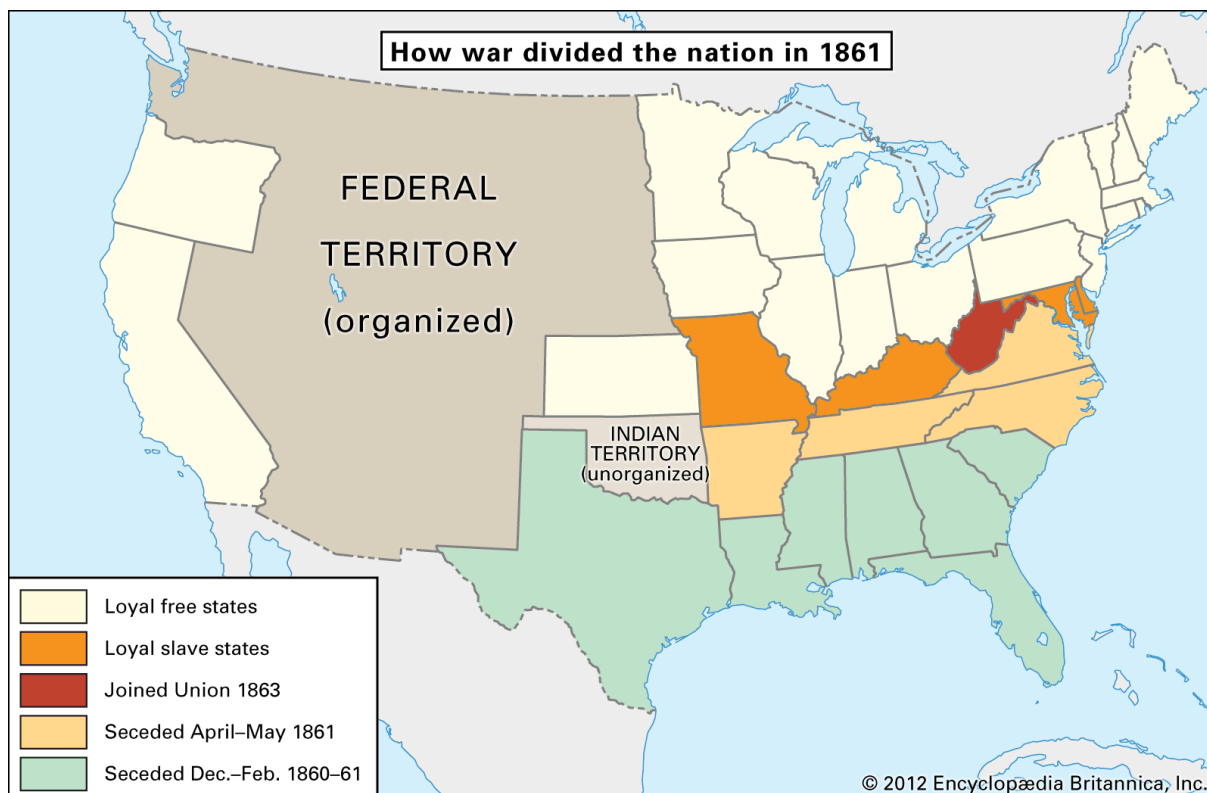


Figure 1. Confederate States of America (Encyclopedia Britannica)

1.3.2. Battle of Fort Sumter

The battle of Fort Sumter was the turning point in American history. This first battle in the Civil War was an intense artillery bombardment by the Confederate Army on one of the most important forts of the U.S. Army in the South, near Charleston, South Carolina. Thus, intending to control the fort, they opened fire on it and forced the Union Army to surrender as well as led the nation to war. So, how did this battle start? How long did it last? Who were the officers who served at that time? And what are its main results?

The battle began on April, 1861, and lasted for thirty-four hours. At that moment, the fort was under Lincoln's control and the southerners wanted the fort to surrender. Lincoln refused to abandon the Fort Sumter. He attempted to send a supply ship to it. Yet, the Confederate Army shelled the ship and was unable to reach the fort.

On April 11, 1861, the General and the Confederate Commander Beauregard asked the officer in charge of the fort Robert Anderson to either evacuate it or their army would force

them to leave. He refused to give up the fort despite many disadvantages: including the shortage of ammunition, number of soldiers, and even the delay of supplies. Consequently, the Confederacy opened fire on April 12, at 4:30 am and the Union Army responded as well as. However, Anderson was forced to raise the surrender banner at 2 pm on April 14. The war ended with the victory of the Confederate Army due to its military superiority.

1.4. Women Contribution in the War

With the outbreak of the Civil War in America, new responsibilities had emerged for women either at home or on the battlefield. While some women became the sole breadwinner for their families, just ran farms and such jobs due to the service of their husbands in the army; many women participated in the Union and even the Confederation. Some of them collected money and supplies as well as created committees like the US Sanitary Commission which had a role in the victory. Others joined the war as nurses like Louisa May Alcott. The bravest women, however, preferred to hold weapons. They wore uniforms and served as soldiers by concealing their identities.

1.4.1. Women Fought in the Frontlines

Working as nurses was not enough for some women so they resorted to disguising as men to join the army and fight. By doing this, they put themselves at risk of captivity or even imprisonment if the authorities discovered their true identity.

In other words, in the military, not everyone who wore a uniform was a man. Where an unlimited number of women were soldiers motivated by patriotism and even to stay next to their husbands or loved ones. While other female soldiers fought for several reasons including helping to eliminate slavery, to earn money, or even to flee from the harsh domestic conditions. Since the army's policy only imposed a military duty on male citizens, women who joined the army did so by hiding their identities. The following examples introduce some female soldiers from both the Union and the Confederation armies.

Loretta Velazquez wore the confederacy uniform and was recruited as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford. In 1862, she enlisted again with 21st Louisiana infantry soldiers after she fled from the authorities who discovered her gender. According to Loretta (2003), her greatest military victory was her participation in the battle of Shiloh. She said:

We had not long been engaged before the second Lieutenant of the company fell. I immediately stepped into his place, and assumed the command. This action was greeted by heartily cheer from the entire company... this cheer from the men was an immense inspiration to me ... encouraged me to dare everything and to shrink from nothing to render myself deserving of their praises. (p. 208)

However, after the battle ended Velazquez was injured by a shell and again a military doctor knew that she was not a man from the beginning. Consequently, she left the army by giving up her uniform.

The second female soldier Lizzie Compton was loyal to the Union who fought within its army. She was recruited in the 25th Michigan infantry. She was also wounded in the battlefield that is why her true identity was discovered.



Figure 2. Women fought in the Civil War disguised as men

1.4.2.Reducing Suffering and Treating Wounds

Women played a major role in war medicine across the country. As their great awareness and keen desire to help the sick people led them to break into the nursing profession that was previously dominated by males. Thus, they showed great courage and valor on their part. They applied just home remedies due to their lack of experience.

One of those courageous women was Kate Cumming who left her family in pursuit of her career as a Confederate Army nurse in Mississippi. She was appointed to the duty in Corinth, Mississippi and treated the wounded soldiers in the battle of Shiloh. Then, she joined a mobile hospital as an official.

Although the nurses worked mainly in public hospitals some of them shared risks in field hospitals such as Mrs. Jersuha. R Small who followed her husband; a soldier in the Iowa unit and worked as a nurse. In Shiloh, a tent of the wounded soldiers was shelled, forcing her to transfer the injured to a safe place. But after several weeks of hard work, she could not endure

and passed away because of illness. She was one of the American wives who sacrificed her life to help her husband. She once said:

“I feel I have acted right, for by going I think I have been the means for saving the life of my dear husband, which I considered of far more value than mine; because now he can help defend our country in its times of need” (National Park Service, Shiloh 69)

1.4.3. Sharing Difficulties and Tragedies

Women contributed to the support and competence of the armies by caring for the patients. They were considered as a workforce that provided support through working at home and in the issue of calling volunteers throughout the war. Thus, they did not only push their husbands, sons, and brothers to join the army but also themselves.

Besides, they shared hardships of the war like all men; they sacrificed their families, themselves, and lost their lives. One of those who lost their husband for their country was Ann Wallace. She was the wife of General William L. Wallace of Ottawa, Illinois. She went to Shiloh on April 6th, 1862 but she could not meet him because of the battle. In the afternoon, he was severely injured and just before sunset, Mrs. Wallace was informed about her husband's death. But the next day Mr. Wallace was found alive and died three days later. Despite her husband lost, she kept helping the patients. She stated:

“I was quite alone that fearful night. God gave me strength and I spent much of the night in bathing the fevered brows and limbs of the sufferers around me and it was slight help to aid men who were suffering in the cause of which will had given his life” (Isbell, 2007.69).

1.4.4. Designated as a Secret Agent and Spy

Having information about the enemy was a key to victory in several battles as well as an important weapon in any war. Thus, many women spied for both the union and the

Confederate. Those who were arrested either be imprisoned or released such as Harriet Tubman.

Despite the success of men in the field of espionage, women have proven their ability and effectiveness in this field because of their indisputable nature and innocent appearance. No one expected women to join in such dangerous and sensitive jobs. Initially, men questioned the ability of women to do this mission, but it turns out that spy women are indispensable. Like male spies, they are calm, clever and often more cautious and misleading. Among those female spies who faced dangers were the Confederates Rose O'Neal Greenhow and Belle Boyd. Whereas, the Union recruited many women like Elizabeth Van.

1.5. Economy in the Civil War

During the Civil War the American economy was divided into two sides: The Northern economy and the Southern economy. While in the North, the war accelerated the industrial and manufacturing business, and even led to the creation of transcontinental railroad, in the South, the war ruined many farms and plantations until their economy collapsed.

1.5.1. The Northern Economy

To cover and finance the high costs of the war, the North borrowed 2.6 billion dollars. By doing so, they sold the government bonds and money was not enough. The congress also resorted to increasing tariffs and creating new taxes such as primary income taxes. Then, the issuing of more than 430 million dollars in a currency called the greenback that could not be exchanged for gold, which had a role in inflation and prices increase of about 80%. Also, congress created a national banking system in 1863 to facilitate revenue movement into and out the treasury which was the first unified banking network. (Effects of the Civil War on Civilian Life Political Change)

Besides, the Republicans launched an economic program that included a set of reforms. First, they established the federal banking system. Second, the Morrill Tariffs Law was passed

in 1861 which raised customs duties to improve and raise revenues and protect manufacturers. Third, the government granted 160 acres of public land to every person who cultivated it for five years through Homestead Act 1862, which promoted the settlement of the Great Plains. Fourth, the Morrill land Grant Law provided support to states to use the sale of federal land grants to maintain agricultural fields. Fifth, the Pacific Railroad Act 1862 built a transcontinental railroad to connect California as well as western territories with the eastern states.

1.5.2. The Southern Economy

By contrast, the South suffered from heavy burdens in both economic and environmental sides during the war. Whole cities were destroyed and were under rescue as well as thousands of people became poor and could not get food or shelter. The federal government could do nothing except providing little help to the needy.

Moreover, the free labor disappeared forcing the farmers and landowners to either pay workers or farm by themselves. Consequently, they raised the prices of their products to make more money although agricultural corps incurred heavy losses especially in the cotton which the South was unable to supply anymore.

1.6. Social Impact of the War

The Civil War was more than just some battles. It was an unprecedented national disaster that had a profound and powerful impact on American society in all aspects of life. Besides, one nation was torn apart as it was divided into two conflicting parts. Men were taken from their homes and business and forced to fight against their brothers. By doing so, they left their families including wives and children behind.

In fact, heavy casualties and high material losses were left by these battles and massacres on both sides. In the areas where the battles took place; home, farms, shops, and even schools were destroyed and burnt as well as many cities and villages had been completely wiped out.

However, abroad the battlefields people were also affected and touched by the war. The most affected were primarily women of all ages and from different social classes. Their works became more difficult and even their responsibilities multiplied. Second, African Americans were freed from slavery but fell into another hell called racism and discrimination.

As millions of men made their journey to the war, their wives who left behind faced hardships and difficulties. In addition to the responsibilities of women inside home, with men absent from their jobs and daily chores, many women need to fill the work vacuum that men created in both the north and the south. They managed and operated farms and fields by themselves which were often occupied by men. Besides, women ran the factories due to the high demands for goods by the government to meet the needs of soldiers.

On the other side, the group of people whose life has changed radically and completely due to the war were African Americans. After the thirteenth amendment in 1865 passed, about four million people were released and got their freedom; including 3.5 million in the confederate states. Despite the end of slavery which represented a great achievement as well as an unexpected step for the former slaves who had no right before, these people and their heirs will continue to be difficult for them and face different challenges such as political repression for generations.

1.7. Emancipation Proclamation

Since the beginning of his term, the president Lincoln was pressured by republicans and abolitionists to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. He agreed and pledged to bring an end to slavery but he did not take a step against it until he was sure of getting broad support from the American public. As the following quotation confirms, Lincoln (1863) states:

That on the first day of January, in the year of our lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion

against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do not act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom. (Lincoln “Transcript of the Proclamation” para 2)

After two years of bloody battle, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and this was on January 1, 1863. He declared as the president of the nation as well as the Commander in chief of the Union army that all slaves within separate and rebel states were free from now on. The proclamation was not global but limited and the freedom depended on Union victory. It included only the confederate states without prejudice to slavery in the loyal border states. Besides, it exempted parts of the confederacy that were controlled by the Union.

Although Lincoln’s declaration did not completely abolish slavery, it helped reverse the course of the war as the Emancipation Proclamation allowed freed slaves to join both the Union Army and navy after the congress passed a military act in 1863. It allowed thousands of black soldiers and sailors to become liberators. Thus, the proclamation affirmed that the struggle was not only to preserve the nation, but also for freedom. It provided moral support to the Union and strengthened its army.

Finally, this proclamation paved the way to the total abolition of slavery in America. As Lincoln felt immediately after the end of the war that this proclamation had no constitutional background, he started working on a solution to support the abolition of slavery. On January, 1865, the congress with its both chambers passed the Thirteen Amendment and ratified in December.

1.8. Lincoln Assassination

Abraham Lincoln was one of the most prominent and greatest presidents who ruled the United States. He gave all citizens the right to equality and freedom without any consideration of their social class or skin color. Moreover, he was the first to abolish slavery, save the union, protect the nation, and most importantly lead the country in its times of need to safety.

Five days after North Carolina surrendered to the Union Army making an end to the war, President Lincoln came under a deadly attack in which he was killed. On the evening of April 14, 1865, Lincoln and his wife were present at the Ford Theater in Washington to attend the play *Our American Cousin* but a famous confederate actor surprised him, shot a bullet in the back of his head as well as stabbed one of his companions and then escaped to a warehouse. The next morning Lincoln died of his injuries. After that, the president assassin was killed while fleeing Union soldiers.

1.9. The End of the War

After five years of fighting, the Confederate armies surrendered one by one and were obliged to sign the surrender terms with the Union. On April 9, 1865, the Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered with his soldiers at Appomattox, Virginia. He met with the unionist General Ulysses S. Grant to make an end for the conflict with conditions for the surrender of his troops.

However, as the last confederate General Joseph Johnston kept fighting and did not give up with a faith that the confederacy could win this war, consequently, his troops were defeated by the Federal Army and he surrendered to general Sherman on April 26, 1865. By doing so, Johnston made the union victory and brought an end to the Civil War.

1.10. Conclusion

As a historical part, the first chapter focused entirely on highlighting the American Civil War, which was considered one of the most important and cruel wars throughout American

history. At first, this chapter explained the main reasons behind this internal war including slavery, states rights, and also the election of Abraham Lincoln. It also dealt with the outbreak of the war as well as the secession crisis that led to the battle of Fort Sumter. Then, it discussed the contributions of American women in the war and their roles such as nursing and recruiting into the army. It also shed light on the impact of the war on both the American economy and society; in its various classes and parts. Finally, it dealt with the Emancipation Proclamation that had a great role in abolishing slavery in the United States which led to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the end of the war.

Chapter Two:

Gender and

Feminism

2.1. Introduction

This dissertation will be concerned with gender expectations that fall within the theoretical background of feminism. Thus, this chapter will provide briefly the theoretical frameworks that guide its study. First of all, it will explain the main concept entitled gender; its definition, its roles, its stereotypes, and its identity. Second, it will give an overview of feminism; including its definition, its main waves, its types, its literary criticism, and its main theorists in gender studies.

2.1.1. Gender as a Concept

Gender as a concept emerged during the early 1970s to draw a line between the biological sex differences and the social roles that men and women play. It refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, responsibilities and even expectations that are imposed by a given society on both men and women. As Zimmerman (1987) asserts: "Gender is the activity of managing situated, conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (p. 127). Thus, Zimmerman views gender as an act of controlling different situations and behaviors concerning the relevant and pertinent works of both males and females.

2.1.2. Gender and Sex

Sometimes, it is difficult to understand the exact meaning of gender and how it differs from the closely term sex. Though both terms are used interchangeably by sociologists they are completely different from each other.

Sex is used to describe the biological and physiological features of both man and woman regardless of age, ethnicity, and other variables. It is also one's biological categorization as male or female, which is fixed at the moment of birth. Moreover, scientists define sex accurately at the level of genetics by either XX being female or XY being male. In this respect, Zimmerman (1987) argues: "Sex is a determination made

through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (p. 127).

By contrast, gender is the other face of the same coin. It refers to the differences that are constructed by families, societies, and cultures to distinguish between the sexes. It also indicates the cultural expectations of women/girls, men/boys, and how masculinity and femininity are defined. Moreover, gender is used to examine the relationship between men and women in regard to their different life opportunities. Yet, it is used when describing the differences between men and women in regards to their age, ethnicity, social background, social class...etc.

Furthermore, many sociologists and psychologists defined gender in their works such as Judith Butler and Robert Stoller. As the sociologist Coltrane (1998) states: “gender describes how, in a particular culture, the typical man is supposed to present himself as a masculine and how the typical woman is supposed to present herself as a feminine” (p. 7). Millett from the other hand argues that: "gender is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (qtd. in Mikkola, 2016, p. 24).

In this manner, each of both sociologists views gender from different perspectives. Coltrane considers gender as the way both men and women are expected to show either their masculinity or their femininity while Millet perceives it as the suitable acts, behaviors, demands that environment or the surroundings appointed to the persons depend on their sex.

2.1.3. Gender Roles

Since their birth, people are categorized either males or females. Their biological, physiological and sexual characteristics are fixed. However, the roles, responsibilities as well as the duties that are expected from them vary among societies, cultures, and can change over time and space. So, what is meant by gender roles?

Gender roles are the activities ascribed to men and women based on their biological differences. It is also the responsibilities that are imposed on both sexes by society; through its political and educational systems, and through families. As gender determines the roles that women and men, girls and boys have in a given context or culture: at home, in the workplace, and that is why sociologists categorize gender roles into three types. Among those authors who worked on gender roles are Beere, Ulrich, and Cosell.

2.1.3.1. Productive Role

It is every job or work that produces money as well as generates income for an individual or a community. The productive work of men is usually done outside the home: in political, economic, and even military spheres. It generates more income. As it is more powerful, valuable, and well recognized by society, most of them depend on the physical structure of the man. Some of these productive jobs that men perform: a merchant, businessman, worker, judge, politician, and even a soldier. As for the productive role of women, it is usually within the family such as sewing but with an exception for women who work outside the home, their work is often limited: in health, educational, or administrative fields.

2.1.3.2. Reproductive Role

It is any activity outside the public sphere that people do for themselves in their private lives. It is usually identified by society as the duty and responsibility of women and men. As it encompasses all household work including cooking, cleaning, laundry, and

housekeeping. It also includes raising children by feeding, caring for them, and even educating them. Meanwhile, men also have some reproductive tasks: like fixing things and cleaning the car. Hence, it is a private business that does not produce any money, and people are not paid, but most importantly, it is fundamental to people's maintenance and survival.

2.1.3.3. Community Role

It refers to work devoted to the political, religious, and social spheres in which both men and women participate voluntarily and charitably. It is also free and unpaid for communities. Likewise, it is a form of social solidarity, sympathy, and compassion towards members of society. Hence, it is so important for societies to survive and develop as well as for the cohesion and interdependence of its members. There are many community activities that both men and women perform.

While, men volunteer in health and social organizations and provide help to the homeless, the poor, and refugees; women tend to donate money, blankets, and clothes to the needy, or even volunteer to cook in charitable restaurants. Besides, this work exists in the environment side by cleaning the street and save animals, for example.

2.1.4. Gender Stereotypes

A stereotype is a generalization, an assumption or a prejudgment made by people about a person or a group based on the categorized image. Depending on the context in which a stereotype is used, it can be positive, negative or neutral. However, stereotypes, in general, are negative that usually lead to segregation, discrimination, and inequality. Beere (1979) defined stereotypes as "perceptions of persons, objects, activities, or concepts that are based on relatively rigid, oversimplified, over-generalized beliefs or assumptions regarding the characteristics of males and females" (p. 221). Besides, the sociologists Kay Deaux and

Laurie Louis (1984) categorized gender stereotypes into main types including personality traits, roles behaviors, occupations, and physical appearance (as qtd in Lips 12).

2.1.4.1. Personality Traits

The word personality arose from the Latin expression *persona* that means mask. It can be defined as one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in different situations. As Hiriappa (2018) states "personality refers to the distinctive and relatively enduring way of thinking, feeling, and acting for a particular individual" (p. 3). In this regard, many sociologists including; Boele de Raad, Jerry S. Wiggins, and Robert R. McCrae refer personality to five dimensions of the personality called the Big Five.

First of all, neuroticism as a personality level refers to the one's tendency to experience negative and strong feelings. It is a reaction to realize threat, punishment, and even failure. It includes stress, anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, and emotional lability. Hence, women score higher than men when it comes to anxiety. Whereas, anger is one of the facets of neuroticism in which women do not always have higher rates.

Second, agreeableness involves traits that are associated with altruism or otherness like empathy, kindness, pity, and mercy. As it means the tendency to preserve social harmony by respecting other's interests and liberty. Women are expected to be more agreeable than men as well as have a high score on other linked measures as tender-mindedness and trusting.

Third, conscientiousness requires self-discipline, planning, and control of movements. It tends to reflect the ability of self-control to follow the rules. It includes also carefulness, respect, being dutiful, and obedience. Thus, women get more rates in some facets such as order and self-discipline. Whereas, men are higher in self-control and achievement oriented.

Fourth, extraversion determines one's strong desire to interact with others and the external surroundings. It shows the human tendency to be outgoing, sociable, active, and warm. Consequently, extroverted people search for social stimulation by joining others. They are full of energy, optimistic, and positive. Therefore, as seekers of excitement, men are often extroverted but women are usually gregarious and talkative.

Fifth, openness aims to appreciate the esthetic experiences. It covers fantasy, creativity, and curiosity. It describes people who have a strong imagination and understand the value of art. In openness level, there is no significant gender advantage but women are expected to be more esthetic and emotional.

2.1.4.2. Domestic Behaviors

Gender stereotypes are also based on the domestic roles that women or men should do for their families. In every community, women are employed to perform all household chores including washing, arranging, and cooking. They are also the carers, the housekeepers, and most importantly the supporters. Hence, they are destined to be a daughter, wife, and mother, while men are the breadwinner who must earn income for their families.

2.1.4.3. Occupations

There are a lot of tasks, jobs, and activities that both men and women occupied outside their homes. The stereotypes about occupations exist anywhere which often leads to discrimination and inequality at workplaces. While men can enjoy more excited and valuable jobs that require bravery and daring including pilot, shipmaster, and astronaut; teaching and nursing are more popular jobs for women.

Moreover, men involve in military jobs such as soldiers and can occupy security chores as cops. Furthermore, they even have the supremacy and total ability to access to high political positions. Meanwhile, being stereotyped as emotional and irrational often prevent women from making decisions or to gain high jobs positions.

2.2.3.4. Physical Appearance

Most of the people use other's appearances to form a judgment about them and to determine their responses. This tendency to perceive other personality characteristics based on their external appearance is called stereotyping. It leads many people to treat each other unfairly because it focuses usually on skin color, the height, the weight, the clothes, as it can affect one's employment and opportunities. Besides, physical appearance exists in gender stereotypes. Men are expected by society to be strong, tall, with short hair and strong voice whereas, women should be small, beautiful with long hair, and a soft voice.

2.1.5. Gender Identity

Gender identity is one's awareness about being either a male or female. It is also how someone distinguishes himself or herself as a man, a woman or even other 'since there are now who identify themselves with either/neither'. Hence, it is an important part of one's personality that people develop just starting from early childhood. They learn to be man or woman starting from their families to their social and personal experiences.

2.1.5. Factors Influencing Gender Identity

From a young age, the person lives in a social environment that includes many people, including parents, relatives, colleagues, and neighbors. Where s/he influences and get influenced by them, which contributes in shaping his/her identity, either as a man or a woman. In addition to these social factors, there are also biological and psychological factors that the individual is exposed to them.

Initially, biological factors such as hormones and genes play an important role in shaping the individual's gender identity. Sexual differences lead both males and females' bodies to produce different hormones: testosterone for men, progesterone and estrogen for women. Thus, at puberty, the effects of these hormones start to transform the physical structure of each of them, and consequently their identities.

Next, there are social factors that influence also gender identities such as the family and the social environment. The individual first acquires an understanding of his/her gender identity through his parents: the boy learns to be a boy through his father, and the girl learns to be a girl through her mother. The child continues to develop his/her gender identity through his experiences in the community, at school, on the street, in the park, etc.

Some psychological factors contribute to the formation of this identity and any mental disorder that may lead to a defect in it. Among those psychological aspects, there are one's beliefs and thoughts whether positives or negatives as well as self-estimation and admiration. This latter is the most important part of gender identity which determines one's image within his/ her self.

2.2.Introduction to Feminism as a Concept

The term feminism derives from the French word *feminism*. According to the *Oxford Printed Dictionary* (2006), feminism is the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. It is also used to describe a political, economic, and even social movement in an attempt to achieve equality and justice for women and make a balance between sexes. Besides, the term feminism itself can be complicated or without a specific definition but it can be defined and has different meanings from different perspectives.

Offen (1988) argues that "Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male

privilege and women's subordination within any given society" (As qtd in Pyle, 1990, p. 155). In this manner, Offen describes feminism as a theory as well as a set of social and political activities depended on male supremacy and women's submission.

The American scholar and feminist Hooks asserts: "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (1). Through this quote, Hooks views feminism as a movement not only for women but also for men who are discriminated based on their sex. It strived to eliminate injustice, persecution, inequality, abuse, violence, sexual exploitation and domination.

2.2.1. A Brief History of Feminism

Throughout Western history, women were bounded by their domesticity while the public space was kept for men. In both the United States and Europe, women had no right to own property, to be educated, and even to participate in public life. Yet, they had no right to vote or even to express themselves. Moreover, European women were denied from doing business without a male representative; their fathers, brothers, and even their sons. (*The Britannica Guide to Political and Social Movements That Changed the Modern World*, 2009, 326)

As a result, feminism came to defend woman by supporting women's rights and interests. Also, seeking equality between men and women in different domains; social, economic and political. France in parallel with Great Britain and the United States were the first countries where women started struggling for their rights. In *A Room of One's Own* essay, Virginia Woolf states: "Those nineteenth century women were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the tyranny of the fascist state (qtd. in Walters, 2005, p. 2). It was until the 19th century when women began to gain changes in their societies.

Besides, the history of feminism is very complicated because it was shaped by many political events as well as many feminist activities. It began asserting women's rights by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. Then, other important women's events followed, including the Declaration of Sentiments which passed in 1848. This document described women's hardships, objections, and interest. It also called women to strive for their constitutional right of equality as American citizens. Further, Sojourner delivered her famous speech in 1851 in which she spoke about the rights of American Black women. Later, the law allowed American women to vote through ratifying the Nineteenth Amendment 1920.

2.2.2. Feminism Waves

Feminism as a movement was categorized by feminist activists and scholars into three significant waves. Each of these waves dealt with a particular issue, achieved different goals and had a deep impact on women and gender studies.

The first wave of feminism in the 19th century emerged in the United States as well as the United Kingdom. It was political that is why its main focus was on women gaining the right to vote, fighting against the chattel marriage, and the rights of married women. By doing this, it paved the way for girls and women to get an education, to have a property, and even to make them economically independent by overcoming all the struggles in front of them.

The second wave of feminism took place after the Second World War, from 1960 to 1970. Since its main purpose was ending discrimination and reach social equality, it is known by the Women's Liberation Movement. While the first phase aimed to gain the political rights of women, the second one was more cultural that covered every aspect of women's life, including family, workplace, and even sexuality. It is also characterized by sex and gender issues which led to a sociological investigation about the distinction between gender and sex. Yet, it failed to cover the voices of women of color because both

waves strived only for the rights of upper or middle class white women and neglected the working class, the poor, and women from different ethnic groups.

As a result, the third wave of feminism emerged in 1980 as a general wave which is not directed to a specific class of women but to every woman in the world. It took the responsibility to deal with what the first and the second phases failed to solve. In other words, it was the consequence of those failures. Though, it is more academic rather than political, it succeeded in achieving changes for all women, obtaining justice and finding equality within their societies and with their voices.

2.2.3. Types of Feminism

Feminism as an ideology encompasses several branches and forms that support women but in different ways. Among these branches, there are: liberal or the individualist; radical, cultural, material, separatist; the socialist or Marxist feminism. This study will focus on the following three types: cultural, social and radical feminism.

2.2.3.1. Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminism as a theory seeks to examine and to understand women's social positions in society. By doing this, it focuses on gender differences between women and men as well as on the liberation of women through the recognition of women within culture, and the reinterpretation of both femininity and masculinity. Besides, it sees women's differences as unique and special characteristics that should be respected. That is why it struggles against sexism, celebrates the lifestyle of women and even gives values to the social roles played by women; including caring, cooking, and nurturing. The radical feminism Brooke Williams of Redstockings was the first to introduce and use the term cultural feminism.

2.2.3.2. Socialist Feminism or Marxist

Socialist or Marxist feminism is a theory that explains women's status and oppression from the viewpoint of Karl Marx. It believes that capitalism is the root of women's oppression. It also considers the capitalistic mode of productions as one of the main causes of male domination and supremacy in society. Thus, it views women under capitalism as slaves, a reserve army of labor, confined to the domestic work, and mother's right overturned. Therefore, Marxist theorists believe that the creation of private and public spheres of both genders has a great relationship with the mode of production.

The concept of social feminism dates back to 1969 when William L. O'Neill introduced it in his history of the feminist movement *Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America* (1969). Besides, there are many socialist feminists among them are: Annie Besant, Mary Agnes Chase, Ida Crouch-Hazlett, and Eleanor Marx.

2.2.3.3. Radical Feminism

Radical feminism focuses on patriarchy as a source of oppression. It considers that kind of women's oppression as an essential one. According to Shelton and Agger the liberal feminists focus on workplace and legal changes; radical feminists focus on the patriarchal family as the key site of domination and oppression (qtd. in Lindsey 19). Moreover, women's oppression derives from male domination, if men themselves are the cause, neither capitalism nor socialism will solve the problem. Thus, women must invent their independent institutions that are women centered. Within the radical feminism, several feminists activate such as; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Vivian Gornick, and Valerie Solanas.

2.2.4. Feminist, Female, Feminine

For many decades, scholars used the three terms feminist, female, and feminine interchangeably. However, to understand what feminism really is, people should first

distinguish between feminist as a political position, femininity as a group of cultural aspects, and femaleness as a biological feature.

At first, feminist is a term that comes from the word feminism and it can be defined as a person who supports and struggles for the sake of the women's movement whether is a male or a female. Thus, feminist criticism represents a theoretical and critical exercise which aims to challenge patriarchy and sexism.

Second, the fact of being a female is not necessary to be a feminist. Though a man cannot be a woman but he can be a feminist. Also, the male has a different point of view toward patriarchy. Therefore, this biological state is always seen as inferior to the opposite sex. As Freud said: "when you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male' or 'female'" (qtd. in Ellis et al. xi).

Third, femininity or womanliness refers to the special behaviors and social roles of girls and women. It is also an influence of women's biology, and according to Simone de Beauvoir: "one is not born but rather became a woman" (qtd. in Butler 7). Thus, gender is not fixed but rather a social practice. However, patriarchy defines being feminine as a sort of kindness, weakness, alienation, and even submission. Ann Snitow says: "woman is my slave name; feminism will give me the freedom to seek some other identity altogether" (qtd. in Hirsch and Keller 9).

2.2.5. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is the literary analysis that steams from the viewpoint of feminism and feminist theory. As a product of the feminist movement, feminist criticism uses the feminist theory to examine the women's representation through literature, and to shed light on women's image in books by male writers and females. Besides, feminist literary criticism has basic methods including; examining the way female characters are

portrayed, reevaluating the literary work and even by examining how a piece of literature supports patriarchal attitudes or challenge them.

While feminist theory means the way of looking at literature through a feminist perspective, feminist literary criticism is the use of this theory to interpret and analyze books, short stories or any different works of literature. Among those feminist literary scholars are Mary Wollstonecraft, Elaine Showalter, and Simone de Beauvoir.

2.2.6. The Feminist Theorist Judith Butler

Depending on the conceptions of the feminist literary theorist who is well known by her contribution in the field of gender studies; this study is based on the theorist Judith Butler and her work entitled *Gender Trouble* (1990) which gives the basic background for the study.

Judith Butler is an American feminist and scholar who was and still the pioneer of the theories of the performative nature of gender and sex; including cultural theory queer theory and some schools of philosophical feminism during the twentieth century. She is well-known for her prominent work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990). This latter introduces various concepts and notions in relation to gender but this study will focus only on two concepts.

2.2.6.1. Gender Identity According to Butler

Butler's interpretation of the concept of identity is distinct largely from the typical notions of identity. As Lloyd (2007) asserts: "Butler prefers to view the concept of identity as the performance of repetitive set of acts that women and men come to express in agentic but constrained terms" (qtd. in Hough, 2010. 35). In this manner, identity in the light of Butler's perspective means the conduct of repeated behaviors and actions that people show either men or women.

Correspondingly Butler (1999) argues that gender identity is an agentic process of achievement that we come to create only as a result of social pressures (qtd. in Hough 35). This conceptualization emphasizes that gender is socially formed by social norms and laws such as patriarchy.

2.2.6.2. Gender Performativity

Gender Performativity is a concept which is first introduced by the feminist sociologist Judith Butler 1990. Performativity according to Butler is the repetition of acts in time, as she asserts: “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 43).

Besides, Butler argues: “gender proves to be performative... that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be... gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (1990 33). In this regard, the fact of being a male or a female has no relation with one’s doing and does not determine his/her gender, but rather gender is created or constructed through the stylization of one’s body including; gestures and movements.

2.2.7. Conclusion

To sum up, the second chapter was devoted to the theoretical grounds of the study. It covered two main sections: feminism and Gender. The first section shed light on the concept of gender including its roles and stereotypes. The second section discussed the notion of feminism in terms of its meaning, its branches, phases, and feminists theorists.

Chapter Three:

Analyzing Gender

through the Novel

3.1. Introduction

The third and the last chapter will be devoted to the analysis as well as the interpretation of Alcott's novel *Little Women*. It also will shed light on the main themes discussed in this study which reflect gender exploration.

3.2. Gender Roles in the Novel

In the nineteenth century, American society encountered various political, economic, and even social challenges and confrontations such as the Civil War. Hence, both American men and women sustained unprecedented roles and functions that were pretty different from their usual or traditional roles.

3.2.1. Female Roles

During the Civil War, American women experienced new roles and responsibilities with regard to their typical roles. Hence, May Alcott portrayed the development of women roles in America during the nineties through her novel *Little Women*.

First, Mrs. March's character is both the mother and the head of the house instead of her husband. She plays the role of the master of four little ladies, a role which the father is supposed to fill. By doing this, she challenges the expectations about women in the nineteenth century America. Through the novel, Marmee proves that a house can be managed adequately without a man while her husband is far away in the war.

Subsequently, Josephine March, or as she likes to be called Jo, hates acting like a lady. She is a hard-working girl who accompanies her aunt as a job to support her family. At one point, she sold her hair to provide a train ticket for her mother to join her sick father as the following quote denotes: "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." (Alcott 150). This brave step was an attempt to fulfill her duty towards her parents rather than begging or borrowing money from her aunt.

Thirdly, like many American women at that time, Meg took responsibility to help her poor family. She had to work inside and outside the house; she took care of her sisters being the elder, and also worked hard as a governess for the King family. Although she had a small salary, she used all of it to pay the rent correspondingly to what Jo said: “Meg gave all her quarterly salary toward the rent” (Alcott 151). Altogether, every member of the March family had a defined role to accomplish, to keep the homogeneity family.

3.2.2. Male Roles

The duties of men have always been the protector, provider, guide, guardian, and supervisor. Although the Civil War changed many roles and responsibilities men have always played an important role both in the private sphere and in public life. They can be a husband, father, brother, and even son. Each of these positions had responsibilities to take on.

Mr. March is the father of the four daughters as well as Marmee’s husband. Despite his absence from most of the storyline, he was present through the daily conversations of his daughters and wife. During the Civil War, he served in the Union Army as a chaplain to maintain the spiritual and religious condition of the soldiers. He often sent letters to his daughters to comfort and encourage them, and even to express his pride in his young women. He advised them to work hard and overcome all challenges together. However, he encountered difficulties like many Americans in the military until he fell ill and was hospitalized.

Besides, he was kind-hearted, helpful, and compassionate to his daughters and wife. He knew the interests, needs, and dreams of each of them. He kept encouraging Josephine to fulfill her dreams and be what she wants. He named her son Jo in a step to show his acceptance and approval of her atypical personality. He was always sympathetic to her and never forced her to act womanly. Additionally, he agreed that Elizabeth's nature was weak, shy and sensitive. He even tolerated little Amy's selfishness and self-indulgence.

After that, Laurie Laurence entered the life of the March sisters. He played an influential role in their lives by adding the male concept to their strong female story. He became the closest friend to Jo and her sisters as well as the son to Marmee. As Jo mentioned in the beginning of the novel the men or boys are unknown creatures to the Marches family and the only man in their lives was their father. Therefore, Laurie brought excitement, joy, adventures, and happiness to them. He also provided them with all kinds of support in many problems and difficulties.

3.3. Gender Stereotypes through the Novel

Gender stereotypes can be defined as the beliefs as well as the assumptions about masculinity and femininity. In Alcott's *Little Women*, men are portrayed at that time as powerful, fearless, rational, and belonging to the public sphere. By contrast, women are depicted as weak, shy, passive, emotional, and most importantly devoted to the private sphere.

In the nineteenth century, women were seen by society as belonging to the domestic environment and these stereotypes obliged them to serve men by cleaning, preparing food, and raising children. Therefore, Alcott used the character Elizabeth to describe the typical female role which is determined as being meek, dependant and subordinate. As indicated by Josephine when she mentioned:

There are many Beth's in the world, shy and quiet, sitting in the corners till needed and living for others so cheerfully that no one sees the sacrifices till the little cricket on the heart stops chirping, and the sweet sunshine presence vanishes leaving silence and shadow behind. (p. 38)

The quote above denotes that typical women like Elizabeth still exist in this world. They are living in the shadow or behind the lights and committing themselves to their relatives. Thus, Beth represents the image of the pure traditional women of that era through her timidity, isolation, shyness and dependence on her sisters as the following quote indicates: "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” (Alcott 37).

In the other hand, Alcott employed many male characters to give the true image of the typical male such as Mr Laurence, Mr March, and even Mr Brookie. She represented the typical male who was identified as strong, brave, and independent. Thus, Mr Laurence was described as being old, wealthy, lonely, and rough man but he had a soft part towards his grandson and the Marches girls. He seemed scary to Elizabeth at first sight but later he became a friend to her. Additionally, his occupation as a businessman made him the true man of America. He was even generous and charitable who loved the benevolent works.

In addition, Mr March was a loyal man who volunteered in the Union Army as a priest. He contributed in the comfort of many soldiers and provided them with religious support. Like any American man at the time, he preferred to make his trip to the battlefield rather than stay at home like women. By doing so, he emphasized the idea of the typical man who should be brave, fearless, and most importantly patriot.

3.3.1. Josephine’s Reaction Towards Female Stereotypes

In *Little Women*, the protagonist Jo challenged the traditional assumptions about females. Unlike her sisters Meg and Amy, she refused to fit in the society as well as to escape like her sister Beth did. Starting from her physical appearance, she never adjusted her hair and never cared for the way she dressed. She had a manly figure, with oddly long arms and an extremely tall height. Her temper and stubbornness defined her manly character, along with her independence and determination in accomplishing things in her life, unlike her contemporary fellow women.

Additionally, Jo possesses a short temper and behaves impulsively. She even states that she has a dreadful temper which is her biggest trouble, as the following quotation indicates: “You don’t know, you can’t guess how bad it is! It seems as if I could do anything when in a

passion; I get so savage, I could hurt anyone and enjoy it. I'm afraid I shall do something dreadful someday, and spoil my life and make everybody hate me". (Alcott, 75), so Jo is afraid that her bad temper makes her an evil person or could harm her surroundings. Further, Jo hates marriage and the fact that every woman has to grow up and leave her family to live with her husband. This can be seen from this quote: "Then we will be old maids said Jo stoudly" (Alcott, 171).

3.3.2. Laurie's Reaction Towards Male Stereotypes

From the start, Alcott showed that Laurie was an atypical character who did not fit the image of idealistic men in nineteenth century America. In this regard, he challenged society's expectations about males similarly to the way Jo did towards female expectations. Unlike his grandfather Mr Laurence who was a traditional man, Laurie was unusual.

At first, Laurie was portrayed as having a womanly and delicate look rather than being masculine and rough. He possessed elegant manners for a boy, feminine features, and softness. As Jo depicted him: "Curly black hair, brown skin, big black eyes, handsome nose, fine teeth, small hands and feet, taller than I am, very polite, for a boy, and altogether jolly" (28). Moreover, he was isolated and lonely, preferring to stay in his private sphere and not interfere in public places.

Besides, Mr. Laurence's grandson had plans for his life that were completely different from his fellows, and most importantly, from the other boys of the time. He struggled with him to pursue his dreams of becoming a professional musician and to fulfill his desire for music. This latter, made Laurie a less than a man in his grandfather's eyes who wanted him to run the family business and become a businessman. Thus, his feminine tendencies towards music and musical instruments such as piano as Elizabeth did, led him to be an atypical boy.

3.4. Gender Identity in the Novel

According to Judith Butler: “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results” (*Gender trouble* 1990, 33). May Alcott challenged the notion of gender identity through two of her characters Jo and Laurie. So, which gender identity do Jo and Laurie fit in?

First, by employing names she is deviating from the concept of masculinity as well as femininity. As stated in this quote:

““Laurie Laurence, what an odd name! my first name is Theodore but I don’t like it for the fellows called me Dora, I made them say Laurie instead” - “I hate my name too, so sentimental! I wish everyone would say Jo instead of Josephine.”” (Alcott27).

So, it is obvious that adopting the nickname Laurie has a feminine sound. Even it is a new name but it remained the same as Dora, which made Laurence kept in his effeminacy. In this manner, the reason why Laurence is regarded by others as effeminate is being handsome and very polite for a man as Jo described him (28). Thus, Alcott using names of the reversed sex for Jo and Laurie defined them as untypical man and woman. As well as the opposite of what society expected them to be and act.

Despite Alcott’s specific using of names, the identity of both Jo and Laurie established from their ways to act and behave and even speak. In this regard, it affords Jo a manly identity, while gives Laurie a feminine identity and that is why gender requires a performance that is repeated (1990, 178). Thus, in *Little Women* gender is remarkable through Jo’s performance of her plays.

She is continuously writing short stories and plays that’s why she and her sisters act different roles. Jo volunteered constantly to act on male roles. Unlike her sisters who are womanly and pretty who always play roles of beautiful ladies. Jo plays the male characters whole heartedly as mentioned in the following quote: “No gentlemen were admitted, so Jo

played male parts to her heart's content and took immense satisfaction in a pair of russet-leather boots given her by a friend, who knew a lady who knew an actor" (17).

This was the only way for Jo to fulfill her desire of being a man, to dress, and act masculine. Her performance of the male role resembles her gender performance which reinforces Butler's view about "gender is a performance".

3.5. Main Themes in *Little Women*

As a feminist novel, *Little Women* discussed various themes in relation to women. Among those themes: marriage, the importance of the family, struggling with gender stereotypes, and the necessity of work.

3.5.1. Marriage

In the nineteenth century America, marriage indicated maturity and success of women in life. It was also the path of any girl to motherhood and family establishment, as well as achieving social and emotional stability. Thus, from birth, the girl was destined to become a wife and a mother. They should prepare themselves for marriage by learning household chores. Since the goal of every girl in life was to have a husband and build a family. That is why society viewed every unmarried or childless woman as a deficient, worthless and even pathetic.

Therefore, society's viewpoint differed on marriage. Some of them believed that the girl should marry a rich man who provided her with a house and a perfect life, like the case of aunt March. Whereas others saw that the best gift that life gives to any girl was a loving loyal good man. As Mrs March confirmed when she said:

I want my daughters to be beautiful, accomplished and good, to be admired, loved and respected, to have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married and to lead useful, pleasant lives, with a little care and sorrow to try them as God sees fit to send. To be loved and chosen by a

good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman,
and I sincerely hope that my girls may know this beautiful experience
(92).

So, through Marmee, Alcott insists on the concept of the ideal woman that is beautiful, married, and dependant woman.

3.5.2. The Importance of the Family

Through the novel, Alcott emphasizes the importance and the value of the family in one's life. It is the source of strength and courage due to the moral and the material support it provides to the individuals. It also bestows security, safety, protection, comfort, guidance, and understanding. Hence, the family members help each other, serve each other, support and protect each other. But most importantly, they share the same blood as well as everything in life; including happiness, sadness, sorrows, pain, poverty, and wealth. Besides, the family also teaches people the principles and rules they need to achieve a perfect future. As it complements their imperfections and makes them better.

In this respect, the March family is the best example of the value of familial life. Despite their poverty, they remained happy and united. They helped, supported and also depended on each other, as Elizabeth depends on Jo. Their unity kept them stronger to overcome all the problems and hardships that they struggled within their daily life, including sadness and their father's sickness.

Although their father was absent for a long period, they always derive moral support and guidance from their mother and even though their father's letters. As Beth said: "we've got father and mother and each other" (3). This quote confirms that family is more worthy and priceless than any gift on Christmas day.

3.5.3. The Struggle with Gender Stereotyping

From the beginning of the story, Jo is fighting traditional female stereotypes. These latter are considered as an unavoidable part of her daily life, and have a terrible impact on her well being. Therefore, gender stereotypes affect also women's appearances, especially young girls and how they feel about their dresses.

Jo has an unexpectedly strong personality for a young woman of her time. She has a strong desire and ambitions to become a female writer. Despite her volition and stubbornness, the traditional female stereotypes mean that Jo is expected to get married rather than pursue her dream. This continuous struggle made her isolated, miserable, and sorrowful.

Alternatively, not only women suffered from gender stereotypes but also men were affected too, such as the case of Laurie. Laurie in *Little Women* is a kind of a romantic and soft hero as his nickname denotes. His personality does not depict a typical male figure of nineteenth century America. Laurie's ambition is to become a musician, against his grandfather's desire to enter the business world. This ambition makes him less of a man in his society's eyes, and gives them a reason to despise him.

Incidentally, his physical appearance and beauty make the March sisters wonder if he is a man. For instance, pressures to be and behave in a specific way affect as much as it does to women. In short, gender stereotypes which May Alcott tackled in her novel more than two centuries ago are still affecting people today whether males or females.

3.5.4. Necessity of Work

Little Women illustrates the importance of work in people's life. It is not just for material benefits but also for the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. As for the March family, work is an integral part of their daily life; whether housework or outside the home. Every member of the March family has work to do. Meg works as a governess, Jo occupies as Aunt March's companion. Whereas Beth helps in keeping the house tidy and do house chores.

At first, the Marches were unsatisfied due to their hard works but later they started to feel the value of their works and know how much they are blessed. As Mrs March mentioned: “work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone; it keeps us from ennui and mischief, is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion” (Alcott, 110).

3.6. Conclusion

In short, this chapter explored the novel *Little Women* through the perspective of Judith Butler on Jo and Laurie’s acts and behaviors, in the light of gender performativity theory. In this respect, it dealt with gender roles, stereotypes, and gender identity. Then, it discussed the main themes addressed through the novel; such as marriage, family, work, and the impact of gender stereotypes.

General

Conclusion

General Conclusion

Louisa May Alcott is better known for her feminist works and children's literature. She emerged during and after the American Civil War. Her works focused on gender expectations and brought to light the traditional roles of both males and females. Among her famous books: *Little Men*, *Flower Fables*, *Under the Lilacs*, *Jack and Jane*, *An Old Fashioned Girl*, and *Little Women*.

Overall, the representation of gender through Alcott's masterpiece *Little Women*, as well as the challenge of typical gender roles make up an essential part of the whole work. Through the perspective of a Tomboy girl, Alcott carries out a critical look on her society at that time, when women lived in the private sphere, with no connection to the public life.

This study has examined the gender expectations being represented in *little women* through Butler's perspective on gender, and by employing her key theories of gender performativity and identity. It has analyzed the impact of gender stereotypes on Alcott's characters both male and female. By doing so, it strived to study the historical background of the literary text. It intended also to explore how Louisa May Alcott emphasizes on typical gender roles or how she confronts and criticizes them through the characters.

To respond to these investigations, it has been hypothesized that Alcott breaks down the gender stereotypes by using the characters of Jo and Laurie. It has also been assumed that she is challenging the traditional gender roles of nineteenth America.

Thus, the first chapter covered the American Civil War being the historical context of *Little Women* novel. It tackled the important motives behind this war, and the events that led to it including; the issue of secession and the battle of Fort Sumter. It dealt also with the women roles and their participation during this internal conflict, as well as the social and

economic effects of the war. Additionally, it spots light on the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln assassination, and the end of the war.

The second chapter exposed the theoretical frameworks of both gender and feminism. In one hand, it reviewed the gender concept through its definitions, roles, stereotypes, identity, and most importantly the distinction between sex and gender. In the other hand, it explored feminism in terms of definition, waves, branches, and theory. Further, it concentrated on Judith Butler as the main feminist theorist and explained two basic concepts of her.

The final chapter focused totally on a feminist analysis of the novel. It analyzed gender through male and female characters. In this regard, it examined the characters' roles, expectations, stereotypes, and identities.

As a result, by analyzing the characters Jo and Laurie, it was exposed that May Alcott broke the gender stereotypes of both males and females of the time. In this way, she flipped her society's expectations about men and women, and put an end to the social boundaries around them.

Therefore, for further investigations and studies, the researcher can reinterpret the novel through the psychoanalysis and apply Freudian psychoanalysis on the characters. Thus, the researcher can delve deeper into the character's mind and how they perceive their gender identity. It can help in understanding the reactions, actions, and behaviours of the characters, especially Jo and Laurie. It paves also the way for discovering the different aspects of their personalities.

Finally, like any research, this dissertation has come under many limitations. The first was the unavailability of some books and documentations that were not possible in printed forms or online copies. The second limitation was gender bias, as the novel is based on gender

differences. The third was the delicacy and sensitivity of the subject that has been a subject for centuries.

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Appendices

Appendix 01

A Short Biography

Louisa May Alcott was an American novelist, writer, poet, biographer, and most importantly a feminist. She was born on November 29th, 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania. She was the second daughter of Amos Bronson and Abigail May. Alcott and her sisters Anna Bronson, Elizabeth Sewall, and Abigail May grew up in a literate family. Her father was a philosopher as well as a teacher. Whereas, her mother Abigail was a hardworking housewife, and a responsible mother. Thus, she was home schooled and well educated by her father.

At an early age, Alcott's family moved to Boston where her father formed a school. However, in 1840 the family was forced to leave and go to Concord where they lived for three years. During this time, Alcott met many famous authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau who had a great influence on her later. Despite Mr. Alcott's efforts at Concord, he was unable to return the financial security to his family which prompted his daughters, including Louisa, to take more responsibility towards their parents and take every possible job to earn money. However, financial problems and failures could not cease and for this reason the Alcott's family has lived in perpetual poverty.

As a result, in her childhood Louisa took several tasks and jobs including; teaching, stitching, working at home, and writing. Additionally, she worked as a military nurse in Washington D.C in 1862. Like many women of her time she felt dutiful towards her country when the civil war broke out. She served in the army for a short period until she became sick, and stayed at the hospital for weeks.

Later on, with the publication of the first part of her novel *Little Women* Alcott achieved great financial and literary success. Despite her poor health, she continued to write and

produce many works. Among her famous works; *Moods* (1864), and *A modern Mephistopheles* (1877). She also supported women's suffrage being the first woman who registered to vote in Concord.

In short, Alcott, unlike her heroine Josephine, did not marry or get engaged. She devoted her entire life to her family and to pursue her career as a writer. She died on March 6th, 1888 in Boston; Just two days after her father's death. By doing this, she left behind a tremendous literary legacy that is still popular and famous.

Appendix 2

A Short Summary

Little Women is a popular story written by American writer Louisa May Alcott, and published in two parts in 1868, 1869. It highlights the journey of four sisters towards womanhood. It also narrates their struggle to overcome various difficulties and challenges as well as to end their poverty.

The first part of the novel begins in the living room where the sisters Margaret, Josephine, Elizabeth, and Amy, complained about their poverty. By Christmas, each of them wanted to buy a gift for themselves to add pleasure, but soon they changed their minds and decided to buy gifts for their mother instead. At that time, Mrs. Marsh returned, carrying a telegram from her husband in the war, urging the girls to take responsibility and work hard.

On the Christmas morning, the girls woke up and found a book for each under the pillow. They decided to work out to be better and to leave angry, laziness, and selfishness. Margaret decided not to complain about poverty or work again. Jo promised to control her temper and act like a girl from now on. Elizabeth wanted to overcome her fears and be bravest. As for Amy, she sworn to end her selfishness and take care of others. Next, the Marches gave their food to the poor Hamel family. That is why, rich old neighbor Laurence sent a banquet to thank them for their generosity.

Later, Meg and Jo received an invitation to attend the New Year's party at the house of a friend named Sally Gardiner. At the party, Jo isolated herself in the garden, where she met a boy named Laurie who lives in Mr. Laurence's house. But while Meg danced, she hit her ankle that is why Laurie accompanied them to the house.

After, Laurie fell ill and Jo visited him. She met his grand father Mr Laurence who admired her personality and bravery. Then, Mr Laurence met the four sisters including Elizabeth who became his favourite and gave her a piano.

Subsequently, the girl faced various challenges. Young Amy left the school after she was beaten by the teacher. She also burnt Jo's manuscript in revenge for not taking her to the theater. Meg attended a friend's party and borrowed elegant clothes but she soon realized that appearance is not everything. Whereas, Jo was very happy for being able to publish her first story.

One day, the March family received a telegram informing them of Mr. Marsh's illness. While, Marmee decided to go and take care of him, Jo sold her precious hair and brought a ticket for her mother instead asking from her aunt.

After Marmee left, the house became chaotic and the girls neglected their jobs again. Soon, Elizabeth became ill until she almost died. Meanwhile, Amy stayed in the aunt's house to avoid infection. Mrs March came back and Beth recovered. As for Laurie's tutor, he fell in love with Meg and kept his feelings for his self.

Finally, Mr March returned to his family again, being proud of his little women. As he found them completely different and better. Consequently, Mr Broukie confessed his love to Meg with the blessings of Mr and Mrs March but Jo did not accept him and wished if she could marry Meg instead.

Appendix 3

Female and Male Characters

Female Characters

Josephine March

“Jo” is the protagonist of the story, representing the author herself. Alcott represents her character as a self-confident tempered tomboy and a bookworm. Besides, she is the second child of the March family. She is fifteen years old girl who hates the idea of being a girl growing up into a woman.

Margaret March

Meg is sixteen year old pretty girl with big eyes and a soft hair. She is an elegant young lady who is very proud of being the eldest of the March family, who loves lecturing her sisters about the good behaviours and manners. She is very hard working and ambitious, and looks forward to being rich and have a luxurious life. Eventually, being the eldest had served her in a way that she was convinced that a happy life does not necessarily mean wealth, and therefore she got married to a tutor and lived a modest life.

Elizabeth March

Beth is the third sister in the family. She is a fourteen years old shy and sociable girl who prefers to stay at home with her family. That’s why she is home schooled unlike her sisters. She lives in her own peaceful world because of her timidity which made her father call her “little tranquility” (Alcott p, 6). In fact, she did not like to trust many people or even talk to them, which made her very dependent on her sister Jo in every aspect of her life.

Emily March

Amy, the youngest twelve years old girl, is the most selfish among her sisters and thinks that she is the most important person of the family. She is in constant comparison of herself with all the people surrounding her. Therefore, she is the only member of the March family who had to work a lot on herself.

Mrs March

The mother, the conductor, and the guide of her four daughters in their lives. She is portrayed as a religious, responsible, trustworthy and self confident woman; and a very supportive wife. Her daughters call her "Marmee". She is very generous and volunteers for the good at every chance. She eventually manages to control her short temper and starts telling her daughter to do the same.

Aunt March

The aunt of Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy. She is a very wealthy childless widow. This old lady had Jo and Amy to work for her as a companion. She is tempered and tenacious but also generous for paying for Amy's studies in Europe and leaving her house to Josephine.

Hannah

She is both the maid and the housekeeper of the March family. She helps Mrs March to take care of her four daughters. She is kind hearted, and very loved by the girls.

Male Characters

Mr March

The father of the March family, he is away fighting in the Civil War. He is very proud of his little women, and is always sending letters to them to comfort and inspire them. Unfortunately, he got sick in the battlefield and Marmee left the girls to take care of him.

Laurie Laurence

His full name is Theodore Laurie Laurence. He is the wealthy orphan neighbour of the March family, who lives with his grandfather. He is the best friend of the four sisters. He proposed to Jo who refused him, and later married Amy whom he met in Europe.

Mr Laurence

He is the grandfather of Theodor. He is an old generous wealthy man who admired the March family. Although he seems to be mean, he is a very good and loving person.

Mr John Brooke

He is Laurie's tutor who falls in love with Meg to whom he gets married. He helped the March family when the father got sick, and helped Mrs March to get to her husband. He is a well mannered gentleman, to the point that he never confessed his love to Meg, and told her mother instead; to get her approval along with Mr March's.

Friedrich Bhaer

He is Josephine March's husband. He is a German professor. He supported his wife to pursue her dreams of opening a school for boys.

Glossary

-Greenback: A US legal- tender note printed in green on the back since the Civil War, originally issued against the credit of the country and not against gold or silver on deposit. (Thesaurus. Com)

-Missouri Compromise: It was an act passed by the Congress in 1820. It accepted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. It made a beginning to the sectional conflict that led to the Civil War.

-Neuroticism: It is one of the Big Five personality traits that is identified by fear, anxiety, doubt, insecurity, depression, and other negative or bad feelings.

-Thirteenth Amendment: It refers to the Thirteenth Amendment to the American Constitution in 1865. It admitted that slavery or the involuntary servitude was illegal, and officially banned slavery.

-Turner Rebellion: The rebellion that Nat Turner started with other enslaved men of Virginia in 1831 against the whites. It caused a massacre of black people around two hundred including children.