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**TÍTULO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN:**

A Feminist Literary Analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*: Gender, Identity, and  
Resistance in the Nineteenth Century

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## **Abstract**

This study presents a feminist literary analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, exploring the themes of gender, identity, and resistance within the context of nineteenth-century American society. The novel follows the lives of the March sisters as they navigate the expectations and limitations imposed by a patriarchal culture, revealing the delicate balance between societal norms and personal aspirations. Through the experiences of each sister, this research highlights the ways in which women cultivate resilience, self-awareness, and agency, demonstrating that the journey toward autonomy is often gradual, complex, and deeply personal.

The analysis emphasizes that resistance in the novel is not always expressed through bold or overt actions. Preferably, it often takes subtle, internal, and relational forms, emerging in the sisters' choices, creative endeavors, and moral reflections. Additionally, this study explores how family bonds, emotional support, and ethical guidance shape the characters' identities, showing that self-definition is influenced by both societal pressures and nurturing interpersonal relationships. By combining feminist literary theory with historical and cultural context, this research illustrates how *Little Women* engages with early feminist ideas while portraying the nuanced tensions between conformity and individuality.

Ultimately, Alcott's novel continues to resonate today, offering insight into the ongoing struggles for gender equality, personal agency, and the pursuit of self-realization within social structures.

## Resumen

La novela *Little Women* fue escrita por Louisa May Alcott en 1868. La autora logró cautivar a los lectores con la historia de las hermanas March. Desde su publicación, la novela ha seguido interesando a muchas generaciones porque ofrece una trama que engancha al lector desde los primeros capítulos. Muchas personas se sienten atraídas por la obra debido a la forma en que combina las experiencias cotidianas, los desafíos personales y los sueños de cada hermana. La popularidad de la novela ha sido tan grande que se han realizado numerosas adaptaciones cinematográficas y televisivas basadas en ella.

La novela combina varios elementos literarios, incluyendo el realismo social, la ficción doméstica y la exploración moral y emocional de los personajes. Esta combinación crea una experiencia de lectura envolvente que mantiene al lector interesado en conocer el desarrollo de los personajes y descubrir cómo cada hermana enfrenta los retos de su vida. La clave del éxito de Alcott radica en su habilidad para retratar la vida de las hermanas de manera cercana y emocionante, mostrando sus aspiraciones, valores y crecimiento personal.

El objetivo de esta investigación es examinar la novela *Little Women* desde una perspectiva literaria feminista, con el fin de identificar cómo su narrativa, personajes, temas y otros elementos reflejan los desafíos de las mujeres en el siglo XIX a la actualidad. Asimismo, se analizará cómo las hermanas March negocian su identidad y autonomía frente a las expectativas sociales, familiares y culturales de su época. La investigación demostrará cómo la obra de Alcott ofrece una visión profunda de la vida de las mujeres jóvenes, la construcción de la identidad femenina y la importancia de la resiliencia y los vínculos familiares.

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## Chapter I

### Introductory Framework

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–1869) has accompanied generations of readers as a tender story of the March sisters' lives. Yet beyond its domestic charm, the novel raises profound questions about women's roles in the nineteenth century, the limits placed upon them, and the ways they sought to carve out space for themselves. As Showalter (1988) observes, the text moves along the edge of tradition and change, balancing an idealized vision of family life with the desire for independence.

Each sister represents a different response to the obstacles of her time: Meg embraces domestic stability, Jo fights to claim her voice as a writer, Beth embodies moral selflessness, and Amy pursues social and artistic recognition (Elbert, 1987). These choices, far from simple, reveal the strategies many women needed to employ to move forward despite the persistent weight of gender inequality (Clark, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

Seen through a feminist lens, *Little Women* is more than a beloved novel: it is a story of survival, agency, and sisterhood. It shows how women, even when bound by structural inequality, discovered ways to claim identity and move forward. Ultimately, studying *Little Women* from a feminist perspective means seeing it not only as a sentimental tale, but as a narrative of negotiation: between tradition and progress, duty and freedom, restriction and choice. It is in this exploration that the voices of the March sisters continue to resonate across generations.

Therefore, the novel's impact today lies not only in its literary status but in its ongoing ability to provoke reflection about gender, identity, and freedom. By revisiting *Little Women* through feminist criticism, we recognize how a nineteenth-century text continues to shape contemporary conversations on resilience, choice, and the pursuit of autonomy for women.

In this context, it becomes essential to consider how literature functions as a bridge between historical realities and present-day interpretations. *Little Women* offers a valuable

opportunity to examine how gender roles were constructed and internalized during the nineteenth century, while also revealing the subtle ways in which those roles could be questioned or redefined. Through the experiences of the March sisters, the novel illustrates that identity is not imposed entirely by society, but rather negotiated through personal decisions, emotional growth, and individual aspirations.

Moreover, the relevance of this study lies in its ability to connect past and present perspectives on gender. Although the social conditions faced by women in the nineteenth century differ significantly from those of today, many of the underlying tensions remain recognizable. Issues such as the balance between personal ambition and social expectations, the search for independence, and the value of female relationships continue to be part of contemporary discussions. In this sense, the novel does not remain confined to its historical moment but extends its significance into modern contexts.

From an academic standpoint, analyzing *Little Women* through a feminist lens contributes to a broader understanding of how literary texts participate in cultural conversations. It allows researchers to identify patterns of resistance, adaptation, and transformation within narratives that may initially appear simple or conventional. This approach also emphasizes the importance of giving voice to women's experiences, recognizing them as central to both literary and social analysis.

Additionally, this study seeks to highlight the importance of individuality within collective experiences. While the March sisters share the same environment and family values, their paths diverge in meaningful ways. This diversity reinforces the idea that identity cannot be reduced to a single definition, even within similar circumstances. Instead, it is shaped by a combination of personal desires, external influences, and evolving perspectives.

Another key aspect of this research is the concept of resilience. Throughout the novel, the characters face emotional, social, and economic challenges that test their values and aspirations. Their responses to these challenges reveal different forms of strength,

ranging from quiet perseverance to active resistance. By examining these responses, the study aims to demonstrate that resilience is not a uniform concept but rather a multifaceted process that varies according to individual experiences.

Finally, this research is guided by the following question: To what extent does *Little Women* incorporate feminist elements through its portrayal of gender roles, identity formation, and resistance in the nineteenth century? This question serves as the foundation for the analysis, directing attention toward the ways in which the novel both reflects and challenges the social norms of its time.

In order to answer this question, the study is structured around specific objectives that focus on analyzing gender inequalities, examining the strategies employed by the characters, and evaluating the presence of feminist elements within the text. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of *Little Women*, highlighting its significance as both a literary work and a cultural artifact.

## **Problem Statement**

*Little Women* was published over 150 years ago (1868–1869) by Louisa May Alcott, yet it remains central to both literary studies and popular culture. However, its interpretation within feminist criticism remains problematic. Some scholars argue that the novel challenges 19th-century gender roles by depicting women striving for education, work, and independence, particularly Jo March, who embodies a resistance to traditional expectations (Showalter, 1988; Elbert, 1987). Others argue that the narrative ultimately reinforces patriarchal norms, particularly through its emphasis on marriage, domestic responsibility, and female sacrifice (Auerbach, 1989; Keyser, 2000).

The problem is further complicated by the novel's contemporary relevance. Modern adaptations, such as Greta Gerwig's 2019 film, reframe the March sisters as icons of resilience and autonomy, underscoring that their struggles remain meaningful to 21st-century audiences. However, the contradictions within the novel between ambition and duty, and independence and conformity remain under explored in feminist scholarship

today. There also remains a gap in understanding how the March sister's different life choices can be analyzed as strategies for addressing inequality in society.

In contrast, society has changed throughout the history of writing, but not enough to allow women to trust, support, and believe in writing and succeed. Women have long contended with the exhaustion of persistent labor and advocacy without receiving due recognition. Society and its inequality have been the main reasons why women must strive for what they want and fight for their rights and well-being. Over the years, women have been outraged and insulted simply for being women, labeled as weak or incapable of many things, such as earning equal pay, performing specific tasks, getting ahead on their own, and much more.

On the other hand, governments and women have worked hard to eradicate discrimination and radical actions that affect women and their rights in various ways. Society still maintains patterns of behavior that affect and disregard women in various ways. However, many people around the world wonder what would happen or what would have happened if women were taken into consideration from the beginning. It is a question that perhaps in the future we have an answer to, or perhaps we do not, since everything depends on how much society and its thoughts change.

Overall, the research problem addressed is the lack of a clear and unified feminist interpretation of "Little Women" that addresses both its historical limitations and its modern relevance. By examining how each sister negotiates the limitations imposed by gender and society, this study seeks to clarify the novel's complex position within feminist literary criticism and demonstrate how Alcott's work continues to influence current debates about autonomy, identity, and sisterhood. To what extent does Little Women reconcile its nineteenth-century gender norms with contemporary feminist perspectives on autonomy and identity? To a significant extent, Little Women reconciles these dimensions by offering a nuanced portrayal of women who both conform to and challenge the expectations of their time.

## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

1. To analyze how Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* reflects nineteenth-century gender inequalities and portrays the strategies employed by the March sisters to navigate and resist societal constraints, from a feminist literary perspective.

### **Specific Objective**

2. To examine the resilience strategies employed by the March sisters in response to the challenges posed by nineteenth-century patriarchal society.
3. To analyze the representation of gender inequality in *Little Women* through the lived experiences of its female protagonist.
4. To evaluate the extent to which *Little Women* incorporates feminist elements and contributes to discourse on women's rights.

### **Justification**

The literary novel *Little Women* written by the writer Louisa May Alcott published on September 30, 1868. It is based on the story that the protagonist went through in real life during her childhood where she lived in Concord, Massachusetts. The novel is based on the story of four sisters and what they went through during the American Civil War, challenging the values, inequality, and solidarity that women experienced.

Furthermore, the analysis of this work contributes to an understanding of the historical development of feminist thought and how literary narratives can influence the construction of women's identity and rights. This research also establishes a dialogue between classical literature and contemporary debates on gender equality, providing tools for reflecting on current struggles for women's rights and the relevance of literary models that inspire empowerment and perseverance against patriarchal structures.

On the other hand, feminism has been a fundamental theme in history for many decades. Limited access to feminist works has increased during this time. There have been many changes since the beginning of literary work until today. This doesn't mean that the change has been 100 percent, but it is a radical shift worldwide. The struggle continues, the work continues, and the voices continue to be raised so that women are heard, understood, supported, and helped with issues of inequality, equity, freedom, and violence.

Another purpose of giving visibility to women in literature is for writers to know that they are being read, listened to, and supported, and to feel that the effort was worth it. In the literary *Little Women*, Alcott also portrays the dilemmas and aspirations of women in a society shaped by patriarchal structures, while at the same time reflecting on female autonomy. A clear example is found in Jo March's words: "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship." This quote reflects the protagonist's strength to face adversity and build her own destiny, challenging the limits imposed on women of her time. Such an expression embodies the resilient and transformative spirit that makes the novel a landmark for feminist studies.

## **Antecedents**

### **Historical and literary context of *Little Women*.**

As a first antecedent, throughout literature, historical events have influenced the way authors approach their works. *Little Women* exemplifies how literature can reflect a particular social and cultural moment. Louisa May Alcott wrote during the American Civil War, a period in which women lacked rights such as the vote and had few opportunities to express their ideas. The character of Jo March reflects this reality by not receiving recognition for her writings solely because she was a woman. This illustrates the experience of many women of the time, who shared their stories primarily with other women, seeking to be heard within the limits imposed by society. Thus, the novel serves as a reflection of the social restrictions faced by women in the nineteenth century. Judith Fetterley highlights that the difficulties Louisa May Alcott encountered were not unique to her but were shared by many women who sought to express themselves through writing. According to Fetterley (1979), in several of her works, Alcott shows that women who narrate life experiences must carefully plan how to do so in order to avoid conflicts or censorship derived from the social norms of the time.

This antecedent demonstrates that *Little Women* functions as both a literary and historical testimony of the gender limitations that defined nineteenth-century women's lives and intellectual agency.

Beyond documenting these social constraints, *Little Women* explores the complex ways in which women negotiated their roles, aspirations, and identities within a patriarchal society. The March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy represent different approaches to self-expression, ambition, and personal growth, demonstrating that resistance can take multiple forms, from subtle daily decisions to more visible challenges of societal expectations. Jo's pursuit of education, writing, and independence exemplifies direct resistance, while the other sisters demonstrate resilience through moral reflection, familial support, and the careful cultivation of personal virtues. Through these varied strategies, Alcott illustrates that female agency was neither uniform nor simple; rather, it was a dynamic process shaped by context, opportunity, and personal determination.

The novel also situates these individual experiences within the broader social, cultural, and economic realities of the Civil War era. Women were expected to maintain the domestic sphere, support their families emotionally and financially, and adhere to social norms that limited public participation. These constraints are visible in the March household, where each sister's ambitions and personal development are balanced with familial duty and societal expectations. By highlighting these intersections, Alcott demonstrates that identity formation and self-expression were deeply intertwined with both relational dynamics and structural limitations. Family, friendship, and community emerge as crucial spaces in which women could exercise creativity, moral judgment, and emotional resilience, even within the boundaries imposed by society.

Moreover, the novel emphasizes that resistance does not always require overt defiance. Alcott portrays moments of negotiation, compromise, and incremental assertion as equally significant forms of agency. The sisters' choices—Jo challenging literary conventions, Meg managing domestic responsibilities while pursuing her personal life, Beth nurturing others despite her frailty, and Amy striving for artistic and social recognition—reveals that autonomy can be cultivated through careful planning, reflection, and strategic engagement with societal norms. These narratives show that the struggle for self-definition and personal fulfillment was an ongoing, multifaceted endeavor, often expressed in everyday acts as well as more visible achievements.

Finally, the historical and literary context of *Little Women* underscores the novel's lasting significance. By capturing the social, cultural, and gendered realities of nineteenth-century America, Alcott not only reflects the challenges women faced but also celebrates their resilience, creativity, and moral agency. The novel serves as a foundation for understanding early feminist thought, demonstrating how literature can illuminate the complex processes through which women negotiate identity, assert autonomy, and resist restrictive social structures. Through its rich character development, realistic social settings, and attention to both personal and collective struggles, *Little Women* continues to offer valuable insights into the ways women navigate the tension between societal expectations and individual self-realization, making it an enduring work for both literary and historical study.

### **Jo March as a symbol of Women's Struggles.**

The second antecedent is the character of Jo March symbolizes these restrictions by not receiving recognition for her writings simply because she was a woman, a situation shared by many female writers of the time (Fetterley, 1979). Alcott, by expressing experiences in her novels, reflects women's struggle to be heard and valued in a context that was beginning to offer new social and political opportunities. Similarly, in *Pauline's* the protagonist carries out a carefully devised plan to take revenge on a man, with the collaboration of another male character, which demonstrates how female authors explored women's agency and strategies of power within the social limitations of their time (p. 370). These works demonstrate that, although women faced significant restrictions, they could find creative ways to assert themselves, challenge norms, and reclaim their voice in literature.

Moreover, Alcott's writing reflects a historical period in which new social and political opportunities for women were beginning to emerge. Through her characters and plots, Alcott shows how resilience, female solidarity, and the pursuit of intellectual recognition become tools to challenge and transform society's perception of women.

In this antecedent highlight how fictional characters such as Jo March served as symbolic vehicles for questioning gender hierarchies and for exploring possibilities of female agency in restrictive contexts.

### **Jane Eyre and Women's Autonomy as a comparative antecedent.**

The third antecedent is similarly, in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, the protagonist faces gendered and social barriers while seeking independence and personal fulfillment, challenging the norms imposed by a male-dominated society. Both works illustrate how nineteenth-century female authors used narrative to reflect women's struggles for autonomy, education, and the expression of their ideas. The literature of this period thus becomes a vehicle through which female writers document, critique, and transform societal perceptions of women, contributing to the recognition of their rights and capabilities. By depicting strong, determined female protagonists navigating restrictive social structures, *Jane Eyre* and works like *Little Women* reveal the strategies women employed to assert agency within oppressive environments.

This antecedent establishes the transnational dimension of nineteenth-century feminist literature, evidencing parallel strategies used by women authors to represent autonomy, resilience, and social critique.

### **Feminist Struggles in Costa Rican history.**

The fourth antecedent emphasizes in Professor Eugenia Rodríguez S., from the University of Costa Rica (U.C.R.), has conducted in-depth research on the less visible stages of the feminist movement and the struggle for women's civil rights in Costa Rica between 1890 and 1953. Her research focuses on making visible and contextualizing historical events involving women that, although significant for Costa Rican society, had previously been marginalized or minimized in traditional historical accounts. Rodríguez (2005) emphasizes that during this period, Costa Rica experienced significant sociopolitical changes that affected women's participation in public and political life, including the fight

for suffrage, access to education, and the demand for equal opportunities in various social spheres.

The author notes that traditional political history has tended to exclude women's demands and achievements, privileging male political figures, political events, and the role of governmental institutions, while relegating women's contributions, resistance, and strategies to the background. This historical invisibility implies that many acts of female empowerment and resistance were neither fully recognized nor properly documented, limiting a comprehensive understanding of women's impact on the development of Costa Rican society.

Furthermore, Rodríguez emphasizes that analyzing these historical processes allows us to understand how women developed mechanisms of organization, cooperation, and resilience to confront power structures that restricted their autonomy. These findings are crucial, as they demonstrate that the struggle for women's rights was not an isolated process but part of a broader social movement connecting private and public spheres, contributing to the recognition of female citizenship and the transformation of social norms.

In this sense, Rodríguez's research provides an essential historical framework for understanding the evolution of feminism in Costa Rica and serves as a reference for comparative studies with XIX feminist literature, where female authors similarly documented, questioned, and sought to transform the conditions of women within their own sociopolitical contexts. This combined historical and literary approach enables the identification of common patterns in female resistance and the pursuit of autonomy, visibility, and social recognition, enriching the analysis of literature from a gender perspective.

This other antecedent underscores the value of integrating historical and literary perspective to identify continuities in women's resistance, organization, and pursuit of recognition across different contexts.

### **Costa Rican Women in Literature.**

The final antecedent is about Costa Rica also reflects the situation of gender inequality in literature. Despite the absence of comprehensive documentation of women's

literary production, it is possible to identify Costa Rican female authors whose works have made significant contributions to the country's cultural heritage. Historically, the belief that women lacked the intellectual capacity to write has limited their recognition, as literary expression has traditionally been dominated and valued primarily in the hands of men. This marginalization has resulted in the under representation of women in literary histories and critical studies, despite their active engagement in cultural and intellectual life.

Nevertheless, women have undertaken daily actions to create a more equitable environment, promoting opportunities that allow them to express themselves and develop in the literary sphere. As Piedra Carvajal (2004) analyzes, these efforts reflect not only the individual agency of female authors but also a broader societal dynamic, illustrating how cultural norms shape perceptions of women and their participation in Costa Rican literature. Through resilience, creativity, and collaboration, women writers have challenged the limitations imposed on them and expanded the scope of literary production in the country.

Furthermore, acknowledging the contributions of Costa Rican women to literature is essential for understanding the development of national cultural identity and the ways in which literature can serve as a tool for social critique and transformation. By situating female authors within historical and sociocultural contexts, scholars can better recognize patterns of resistance, empowerment, and innovation that characterize women's literary production. In this sense, Costa Rican women writers have not only enriched the national literary heritage but also contributed to broader discussions about gender equality, intellectual agency, and the value of diverse voices in cultural production.

The last antecedent highlights the importance of recovering and recognizing women's literary production in Costa Rica, situating it within both national cultural identity and the broader feminist project of challenging exclusionary traditions.

## Chapter II

### Theoretical Framework

The analysis of *Little Women* (1868) by Louisa May Alcott requires the integration of feminist literary criticism, gender theory, and cultural studies in order to situate the novel within broader debates on women's identity, social expectations, and cultural legacy. This theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundations necessary to examine the text as both a product of its historical context and a site of ongoing feminist reinterpretation, his thesis situates *Little Women* as both a reflection of nineteenth-century limitations on women and a narrative that anticipates contemporary feminist concerns.

From this perspective, the novel can be understood as a space where cultural norms are not only represented but also subtly negotiated. The domestic sphere, often idealized within nineteenth-century literature, is portrayed in *Little Women* as both a place of comfort and a site of restriction. Through the everyday experiences of the March sisters, Alcott illustrates how women were expected to internalize values such as self-sacrifice, modesty, and moral responsibility, while simultaneously revealing the tensions that arise when these expectations conflict with personal desires and ambitions.

Furthermore, the application of gender theory allows for a deeper exploration of how femininity is constructed and performed within the novel. Rather than presenting gender as a fixed or natural category, *Little Women* suggests that it is shaped through social interaction, cultural expectations, and individual choices. Each of the sisters embodies a distinct interpretation of womanhood, demonstrating that identity is neither uniform nor predetermined. This diversity of perspectives reinforces the idea that gender roles are flexible and subject to reinterpretation.

In addition, cultural studies provide a broader lens through which the novel can be analyzed, emphasizing its role as a cultural artifact that both reflects and influences societal values. The enduring popularity of *Little Women* highlights its ability to transcend its original context, inviting new generations of readers to engage with its themes in light of contemporary concerns. As a result, the novel continues to participate in ongoing

discussions about autonomy, equality, and the evolving definition of women's roles in society.

Ultimately, this theoretical framework underscores the importance of reading *Little Women* not merely as a historical text, but as a dynamic narrative that bridges past and present. By examining the intersections between gender, identity, and cultural expectations, this study seeks to demonstrate how the novel contributes to a deeper understanding of both nineteenth-century realities and modern feminist discourse.

## **2.1 Literature**

- Overview of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) as a foundational work in American literature.
- Position of the novel within nineteenth-century domestic fiction.
- Critical reception of *Little Women* through time: from moral didacticism to feminist reinterpretation.

## **2.2 Theory**

### **2.2.1 Social and cultural Norms**

During the nineteenth century, social and cultural norms played a central role in shaping the expectations, behaviors, and identities assigned to women within American society. As Welter (1966) explains, these norms were deeply influenced by a dominant ideology that defined what it meant to be a "proper" woman during that period. Gender roles were clearly divided, placing men in the public sphere as active participants in economic and political life, while women were largely confined to the private sphere, where their responsibilities revolved around the home and family. These expectations were not only socially reinforced but also internalized, creating a framework in which women's value was measured according to their ability to fulfill these prescribed roles.

One of the most influential concepts that emerged from this context was the "Cult of True Womanhood," also known as the "angel in the house." This ideology established a model of femininity based on four fundamental virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and

domesticity. Women were expected to embody moral superiority, maintain sexual purity, remain obedient to male authority, and dedicate themselves entirely to domestic responsibilities. These ideals functioned as both a guide and a limitation, as they defined acceptable behavior while simultaneously restricting women's autonomy and opportunities for self-expression. By promoting these values, society reinforced a narrow and idealized image of womanhood that excluded alternative identities and aspirations.

Also, these social and cultural norms had a profound impact not only on women's everyday lives but also on their representation in literature. Female characters were often constructed according to these expectations, reflecting and perpetuating the same ideals that governed real-life experiences. However, literature also became a space where these norms could be questioned and reinterpreted. Through narratives that portrayed women navigating, negotiating, or subtly resisting these expectations, authors were able to reveal the tensions between societal demands and personal desires. In this sense, understanding the influence of these norms is essential for analyzing how femininity was both imposed and redefined during the nineteenth century, particularly in literary works such as *Little Women*, where characters embody different responses to these constraints.

### **2.2.2 Influence of female Education and Labor**

In the nineteenth century, women's access to education and participation in the labor force were significantly shaped and limited by prevailing social expectations. Educational opportunities for women were often restricted to basic instruction or subjects considered appropriate for domestic life, such as moral education, etiquette, and household management. As a result, women were frequently discouraged from pursuing intellectual development or professional careers, reinforcing the belief that their primary role was to remain within the domestic sphere. This limitation not only affected their personal growth but also reduced their opportunities for economic independence and social mobility.

In this context, domesticity and marriage were widely regarded as the ultimate goals for women's success. Society promoted the idea that a woman's fulfillment was achieved through her ability to become a devoted wife and mother, rather than through personal or professional accomplishments. These expectations shaped both individual aspirations and

societal perceptions, creating a narrow definition of success that excluded alternative paths. Women who sought education or careers outside the home often faced social criticism or were perceived as deviating from accepted norms.

Despite these constraints, literary works of the period, such as *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, offer a more complex and nuanced perspective on women's roles. Alcott's narrative reflects the limitations imposed on women while also presenting characters who aspire to intellectual, creative, and professional fulfillment. Through figures like Jo March, the novel challenges traditional expectations by portraying a woman who values independence and self-expression. In this way, Alcott's work not only mirrors the realities of the nineteenth century but also opens space for imagining alternative models of female ambition and autonomy, highlighting the tension between societal restrictions and individual potential.

### **2.2.3 Reflection in Literature**

- Nineteenth-century literature both reinforced and challenged social expectations (Showalter, 1985).
- *Little Women* exemplifies this tension by depicting the March sisters negotiating societal pressures in diverse ways.
- Jo March's resistance to traditional roles illustrates a literary critique of restrictive norms, linking social context to narrative development.

### **2.3 Approach**

This analysis adopts a feminist literary approach to analyze *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, focusing on the representation of gender, identity, and resistance within the socio-cultural context of the nineteenth century. Through this approach, the analysis examines how the March sisters negotiate traditional gender roles and challenge patriarchal expectations imposed upon women of their time. By exploring key themes such as autonomy, self-expression, and moral development, the analysis highlights the ways in which the novel both reflects and critiques the limitations placed on female identity.

Ultimately, this feminist perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how the text constructs and redefines womanhood in a restrictive historical framework

### **2.3.1 Methodological Orientation**

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach in order to examine the selected literary work in depth. Instead of focusing on numerical data or measurable variables, this methodology prioritizes the exploration of meanings, themes, and character development within the narrative. In this sense, the research seeks to understand how the characters are constructed, how they evolve throughout the story, and how their experiences reflect broader social and cultural dynamics. Through a close engagement with the text, this approach enables a more nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of the literary elements present in the work.

In addition, the analysis places particular emphasis on both textual evidence and thematic significance. On the one hand, specific passages, dialogues, and narrative moments are carefully examined to support the interpretation, ensuring that the analysis remains firmly grounded in the text. On the other hand, attention is given to recurring themes and underlying messages, especially those related to gender, identity, and resistance. As a result, the combination of close textual analysis and thematic exploration allows for a deeper understanding of the narrative, highlighting how literary elements contribute to the overall meaning of the work.

### **2.3.2 Case Studies of the March Sisters**

The March sisters are approached as distinct case studies in order to explore the diversity of female subjectivity represented in the novel. Rather than treating them as a uniform group, each sister is analyzed as an individual character whose experiences, decisions, and personal development reflect different ways of navigating the social

expectations of the nineteenth century. In this way, the analysis recognizes that womanhood is not a fixed or singular concept, but rather a complex and multifaceted experience shaped by personal values, aspirations, and social constraints.

More specifically, each sister embodies a particular response to the norms imposed on women during the period. Meg represents domestic conformity, as she ultimately embraces marriage and family life as central to her identity. In contrast, Jo stands out as a figure of independence and rebellion, challenging traditional gender roles through her pursuit of writing and personal autonomy. Meanwhile, Beth exemplifies altruistic self-sacrifice, embodying the moral ideals associated with femininity, particularly through her devotion to others. Similarly, Amy illustrates artistic ambition and social negotiation, as she seeks both personal fulfillment and social recognition within the boundaries of her society.

Taken together, these different representations highlight the multiplicity of female experiences portrayed in the novel. As a result, this perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how women respond to social expectations in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. Ultimately, by examining the March sisters as individual case studies, the discussion emphasizes that female identity is not homogeneous, but instead shaped by a dynamic interaction between personal agency and societal influence

### **2.3.3 Focus on Jo March**

Particular attention is given to the character of Jo March, who emerges as a central figure of rebellion and autonomy within the novel. Rather than conforming to the traditional expectations imposed on women during the nineteenth century, Jo consistently demonstrates a desire for independence and self-expression. Her character challenges the conventional ideals of femininity, especially through her rejection of passive domestic roles and her determination to pursue a career as a writer. In this sense, Jo represents a departure from the normative model of womanhood promoted during the period.

Moreover, Jo's choices and personal development can be understood as a reflection of resistance to patriarchal norms. Throughout the narrative, her actions reveal an ongoing struggle between societal expectations and personal aspirations. While she is not entirely removed from the influence of her social environment, her decisions illustrate a conscious effort to define her own path. Consequently, her journey highlights the complexities of negotiating identity within a restrictive social context, where autonomy must often be asserted gradually rather than through overt defiance.

At the same time, Jo's character functions as a lens through which broader themes such as identity formation and self-determination can be examined. Her experiences illustrate that personal growth is shaped by both internal desires and external pressures, emphasizing the dynamic nature of identity. Ultimately, her story allows for a deeper understanding of how women navigate the tension between conformity and independence, making her a key figure for interpreting the novel's exploration of gender, agency, and resistance.

## **2.4 Social Approach**

The social approach provides a framework for understanding *Little Women* in direct relation to the social structures and gender expectations that shaped nineteenth-century American society. Within this context, the novel reflects a world in which women's roles were clearly defined and largely confined to the domestic sphere, limiting their opportunities for autonomy and self-expression. Through the experiences of the March sisters, the narrative illustrates how these social norms influence behavior, relationships, and personal aspirations, revealing the extent to which society regulates and conditions women's lives.

Moreover, this perspective allows for a deeper analysis of how the characters respond to these constraints. Rather than portraying them as passive figures, *Little Women* presents the March sisters as individuals who actively negotiate their positions within a restrictive social environment. For instance, while Meg tends to conform to traditional expectations of marriage and domesticity, Jo challenges these norms through her pursuit of

independence and authorship. In contrast, Beth and Amy represent different ways of adapting to social expectations, demonstrating that responses to societal pressure are neither uniform nor predictable.

#### **2.4.1 Autonomy**

The concept of autonomy is explored through the ways in which the March sisters navigate personal choice and self-determination within the social constraints of nineteenth-century America. In a context where women's roles were largely predefined by societal expectations, the ability to make independent decisions was often limited and closely monitored. Nevertheless, each sister demonstrates, in her own way, an attempt to assert control over her life, revealing that autonomy is not a fixed condition, but rather a gradual and complex process shaped by both internal desires and external pressures. In this sense, their experiences illustrate how personal agency can emerge even within restrictive environments.

Among the sisters, Jo March stands out as the clearest example of autonomy. Her pursuit of authorship reflects a strong commitment to intellectual and creative independence, challenging the notion that women should confine themselves to domestic roles. Furthermore, her initial rejection of marriage as a social obligation highlights her desire to define her identity beyond traditional expectations. Rather than viewing marriage as the ultimate goal, Jo prioritizes personal fulfillment and self-expression, demonstrating a willingness to question and resist the norms imposed upon her. Consequently, her character embodies a form of autonomy that is both aspirational and transformative, offering a more complex understanding of female independence within the novel.

#### **2.4.2 Identity**

Identity is examined through the formation of the March sisters' sense of self, which emerges from the interaction between individual aspirations and societal expectations. In the context of nineteenth-century America, identity was not constructed freely, but rather

shaped by cultural norms that defined appropriate roles and behaviors for women. As a result, each sister's development reflects an ongoing negotiation between personal desires and the limitations imposed by society. In this sense, identity is not presented as a fixed or predetermined condition, but as a dynamic process influenced by both internal motivations and external pressures.

Within this framework, each of the March sisters represent a distinct model of feminine identity. Meg embodies domestic conformity, as she ultimately embraces marriage and family life as central to her sense of fulfillment. In contrast, Jo represents independence and nonconformity, consistently challenging traditional gender roles through her pursuit of personal and intellectual freedom. Meanwhile, Beth illustrates a form of identity grounded in self-sacrifice and empathy, reflecting the moral ideals associated with femininity during the period. Similarly, Amy represents ambition and social negotiation, as she seeks to balance personal aspirations with the desire for social recognition and stability.

Taken together, these diverse representations highlight the complexity of identity formation in the novel. Rather than offering a single definition of womanhood, the narrative presents multiple possibilities, each shaped by different values, choices, and circumstances. Consequently, the experiences of the March sisters demonstrate that feminine identity is multifaceted and continuously evolving, shaped by the tension between conformity and individuality.

### **2.4.3 Resistance**

Resistance is examined through the various ways in which the characters challenge and negotiate normative gender roles within the social context of the nineteenth century. In a society where expectations for women were clearly defined and strictly enforced, acts of resistance did not always take the form of open defiance. Instead, they often emerged through subtle decisions, personal aspirations, and everyday actions that questioned traditional limitations. In this sense, resistance is portrayed as a multifaceted process, shaped by individual circumstances and expressed in both visible and understated ways.

More specifically, the characters of Jo and Amy illustrate different forms of resistance within the narrative. On the one hand, Jo's rejection of conventional domestic expectations represents a more explicit form of defiance, as she actively pursues independence through her writing and personal choices. On the other hand, Amy's insistence on developing her artistic career reflects a more nuanced form of resistance, as she navigates societal expectations while still striving for personal and creative fulfillment. Although their approaches differ, both characters demonstrate that resistance can manifest in diverse ways, depending on individual goals and social positioning.

## **2.5 Cultural Approach**

The cultural approach provides a broader perspective for understanding *Little Women* within its historical and social context. Through this lens, the novel can be examined not only as a literary work, but also as a cultural product that reflects the values, beliefs, and expectations of nineteenth-century American society. In this sense, the narrative serves as a representation of the norms that shaped women's roles, while also offering insight into the ways these norms were experienced and interpreted by individuals.

Additionally, this approach allows for an analysis of how cultural influences contribute to the construction of identity and the definition of gender roles. The March sisters' experiences are deeply connected to the cultural environment in which they live, revealing how social expectations are internalized and, at times, questioned. Their actions and decisions illustrate the tension between conformity and individuality, highlighting the role of culture as both a guiding force and a source of limitation.

### **2.5.1 Historical Reception**

The initial reception of *Little Women* can be understood within the social and cultural framework of the nineteenth century, where the novel was widely interpreted

as a moral and domestic text intended primarily for young female readers. As Keyser (1993) suggests, the work was initially valued for its didactic qualities, as it promoted behaviors and attitudes aligned with the expectations placed upon women during that period. In this sense, the novel was not only appreciated as a literary work, but also as a guide that reinforced socially accepted ideals of femininity, particularly those related to virtue, family responsibility, and moral development.

At the same time, Alcott's work was recognized for its educational and socially instructive character. The narrative was seen as a means of teaching young women how to navigate their roles within society, emphasizing the importance of discipline, empathy, and adherence to moral values. Consequently, the novel reflected the dominant beliefs of the nineteenth century, presenting a model of womanhood that aligned with the cultural expectations of the time. Nevertheless, while its initial reception emphasized conformity to these ideals, the text also contains elements that invite deeper interpretation, allowing it to be reconsidered beyond its original didactic purpose.

### **2.5.2 Evolution of feminist Reading**

Over time, *Little Women* has been reinterpreted through the lens of feminist literary criticism, leading to a shift in how the text is understood and valued. Later scholarship, particularly the work of critics such as Showalter (1985) and Fetterley (1979), has moved beyond the novel's initial classification as a purely moral and domestic narrative. Instead, these perspectives emphasize themes of autonomy, identity, and resistance, recognizing the text as a more complex exploration of women's experiences within a patriarchal society. In this way, the novel has come to be viewed not only as reflective of its historical context, but also as a work that engages with early feminist ideas.

Within this critical framework, the character of Jo March has received particular attention as a symbol of female independence and agency. Her rejection of conventional gender roles and her commitment to personal and intellectual freedom have made her a central figure in discussions of feminist interpretation. As a result, Jo has been analyzed across generations as a representation of women's struggle for self-definition and

autonomy, inspiring ongoing debates about gender, identity, and the limitations imposed by society.

Consequently, these evolving interpretations demonstrate how *Little Women* has been repositioned within feminist literary discourse. Rather than being confined to its original didactic purpose, the novel now occupies a significant place in discussions about the construction of gender roles and the possibilities for resistance within restrictive social structures. This shift in perspective highlights the enduring relevance of the text and its capacity to generate new meanings in response to changing critical approaches.

### **2.5.3 Adaptations and Cultural Legacy**

The cultural legacy of *Little Women* can be observed through its numerous adaptations across film, television, and theater, which have contributed to maintaining the relevance of the novel across different historical periods. These adaptations not only bring the story to new audiences but also reinterpret their themes in ways that reflect changing social values. As Moseley (2020) notes, contemporary versions, including Greta Gerwig's 2019 film adaptation, offer renewed perspectives on the characters and their experiences, emphasizing aspects that resonate with modern discussions on gender, identity, and autonomy.

At the same time, these adaptations reveal how shifting cultural norms influence the interpretation of literary works. While earlier versions tended to highlight the novel's moral and domestic elements, more recent adaptations place greater emphasis on female independence, self-expression, and the complexities of women's choices. In this sense, the reinterpretation of gender roles becomes a central element, as characters such as Jo March are portrayed with a stronger focus on agency and resistance to traditional expectations.

As a result, the continued adaptation of *Little Women* demonstrates its enduring cultural significance and its ability to evolve alongside societal changes. By revisiting the narrative through different artistic mediums, each adaptation contributes to an ongoing dialogue about gender roles and the representation of women, reinforcing the novel's place within both literary and cultural discourse.

## 2.6 Literary Analysis

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott offers a rich landscape for literary analysis, particularly through its nuanced portrayal of the March sisters. Each character embodies distinct responses to the constraints of 19th-century society, providing insight into themes of autonomy, identity, and resistance. In this context, the novel presents a detailed exploration of how women experience and interpret the social expectations imposed upon them, highlighting the complexity of their personal journeys.

Furthermore, the narrative allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which these characters navigate the tension between individual desires and societal responsibilities. Through their interactions, decisions, and emotional development, the March sisters reveal that personal growth is not a linear process, but rather one shaped by challenges, reflection, and adaptation. Their experiences demonstrate that identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed, influenced by both internal aspirations and external pressures.

In addition, the novel emphasizes the importance of everyday experiences as a space for personal transformation. Rather than relying solely on dramatic events, Alcott portrays moments of daily life as meaningful opportunities for the characters to define themselves and assert their values. This approach contributes to the realism of the narrative, allowing readers to connect with the characters on a more personal level while also recognizing the broader social implications of their actions.

## 2.7 Plot

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott offers a rich landscape for literary analysis, particularly through its nuanced portrayal of the March sisters. Each character embodies distinct responses to the constraints of 19th-century society, providing insight into themes of autonomy, identity, and resistance. The novel opens with the March family coping with financial difficulties and the absence of their father, who is serving as a chaplain in the war.

The sisters' distinct personalities are introduced, setting the stage for individual journeys of growth, ambition, and self-discovery. The plot develops through everyday events, social interactions, and personal trials. Jo struggles with societal expectations while pursuing her passion for writing. Meg navigates the tension between domestic duties and personal desires. Beth's quiet heroism emerges through acts of care, and Amy seeks social refinement and artistic accomplishment. These intertwined narratives highlight the sisters' negotiations with societal norms and familial obligations. The novel also explores the ways in which personal experiences, relationships, and moral choices shape the sisters' individual development. The March sisters encounter challenges that extend beyond the household, including illness, loss, and the expectations of extended family and society at large. Their growth is depicted as a gradual process, marked by moments of self-reflection, sacrifice, and emotional resilience. Alcott emphasizes that each sister's journey is deeply influenced by her interactions with others, showing how friendship, mentorship, and family support play crucial roles in shaping identity and fostering independence.

Furthermore, the narrative demonstrates that resistance to social constraints is not uniform. While Jo openly challenges gender norms through her writing and desire for independence, Meg, Beth, and Amy express agency in subtler ways, whether through managing household responsibilities, nurturing others, or pursuing social and artistic aspirations. These varied forms of resistance illustrate that autonomy and self-realization can manifest in multiple dimensions emotional, intellectual, and relational rather than through overt rebellion alone.

The plot also underscores the interplay between individual ambition and communal responsibilities. The sisters must constantly balance their personal goals with loyalty to family, adherence to societal expectations, and the moral principles instilled by their parents. Alcott presents this tension with nuance, showing that personal fulfillment often requires negotiation, compromise, and ethical consideration, thereby reflecting the complex realities faced by women in the nineteenth century.

Finally, *Little Women* portrays a rich tapestry of growth, resilience, and self-discovery. The plot's detailed attention to everyday life, personal challenges, and social dynamics provides insight into the ways women navigated the constraints of their time,

highlighting the significance of choice, reflection, and moral strength in shaping identity and negotiating autonomy.

## **2.8 Background**

Little Women was written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868, a period marked by profound social and cultural changes in the United States. The country was emerging from the Civil War, and traditional gender roles were being questioned in response to both economic necessity and the early stirrings of the women's rights movement. The March family's experiences reflect the challenges faced by middle-class women in 19th-century America. Limited access to education, societal expectations surrounding marriage and domesticity, and constrained professional opportunities framed women's lives. Alcott draws upon her own upbringing in a progressive household, influenced by transcendentalist thinkers such as Bronson Alcott and Ralph Waldo Emerson, to depict a family negotiating these societal pressures.

The March sisters embody distinct responses to the limitations imposed on women, illustrating how personal ambition, creativity, and ethical decision making intersect with societal norms. Jo March, in particular represents a challenge to conventional expectations, pursuing intellectual and artistic endeavors despite cultural pressures to prioritize domesticity. Meanwhile, Meg, Beth, and Amy navigate their own paths, negotiating familial obligations, social proprieties, and personal desires in ways that illuminate the diversity of female experiences within the same historical context.

Moreover, Alcott's narrative reflects the tension between public and private spheres, highlighting how women's identities were shaped not only by external expectations but also by internalized values, family influence, and community networks. Through episodic storytelling, personal reflection, and moral commentary, the novel captures the complexity of growing up as a young woman in a period of social transformation. It offers a lens through which readers can understand the gradual evolution of female agency and the

strategies women employed to negotiate autonomy, self-expression, and resilience within a constrained society.

The *Little Women* functions not merely as a work of domestic fiction but as a cultural and historical document that illuminates the interplay between gender, class, and morality in nineteenth-century America. By portraying the March sisters' individual journeys alongside broader societal currents, Alcott provides a nuanced exploration of how women's lives were both limited and enriched by the structures, values, and opportunities of their time.

## **2.9 Historical Context**

The March family's experiences reflect the challenges faced by middle-class women in 19th-century America. Limited access to education, societal expectations surrounding marriage and domesticity, and constrained professional opportunities framed women's lives. Alcott draws upon her own upbringing in a progressive household, influenced by transcendentalist thinkers such as Bronson Alcott and Ralph Waldo Emerson, to depict a family negotiating these societal pressures.

*Little Women* illustrates how historical events, such as the American Civil War, directly impacted domestic life, family structures, and social responsibilities. With the absence of the father due to military service, the March women were compelled to assume roles that demanded both practical and emotional labor, highlighting the dual burdens faced by women in maintaining family stability while managing societal expectations. The novel also reflects the growing discourse on women's education and intellectual development during this period, as seen in the sisters' pursuit of reading, writing, and artistic skills, which served as avenues for personal growth and subtle forms of resistance against prescribed gender roles.

Alcott further situates her characters within a society in which women's moral guidance and domestic labor were highly valued, yet often undervalued in terms of social recognition and economic independence. The emphasis on ethical development, self-discipline, and altruism among the March sisters demonstrates how women navigated

limited opportunities by cultivating moral and emotional authority within the home, which in turn shaped their identity and influence. Additionally, the novel subtly critiques the rigid boundaries of class and gender, showing how women of modest means had to negotiate ambition, creativity, and personal fulfillment without overstepping the limits imposed by social convention.

By embedding these historical realities into her narrative, Alcott provides readers with a nuanced portrayal of the period, one that captures both the challenges and the resourcefulness of women in the nineteenth century. The historical context in *Little Women* not only situates the sisters' personal journeys but also illuminates broader cultural dynamics, offering insight into how women navigated, resisted, and reshaped the societal expectations of their time.

## **2.10 Social and Cultural Context**

The novel portrays the intersections of gender, class, and morality. The March sisters navigate social expectations through education, artistic pursuits, and domestic responsibilities. Alcott's work challenges the conventional "angel in the house" ideal, advocating for female agency, intellectual development, and emotional resilience. This portrayal resonates with contemporary discussions of gender equity, self-determination, and the negotiation of personal and societal roles. While the March family occupies a comfortable middle-class position, their financial constraints and social standing influence their choices, ambitions, and interactions with others. Alcott emphasizes that navigating society required both moral discernment and practical adaptability, highlighting the ways in which social and cultural expectations constrained women while also providing spaces for growth and self-expression.

Education and artistic development emerge as central avenues for empowerment. The sisters' engagement with literature, music, painting, and writing allows them to cultivate intellectual and emotional capacities that challenge restrictive gender norms. Jo's pursuit of a literary career exemplifies the tension between societal expectations and personal ambition, while Amy's artistic aspirations demonstrate how creative development

could serve both social advancement and self-realization. Similarly, the sisters' domestic responsibilities are portrayed not merely as obligations but as opportunities to exercise moral judgment, care, and leadership within the family unit.

Alcott also engages with cultural ideals surrounding morality and virtue, illustrating how women were expected to balance personal ambition with ethical conduct. Through the sisters' successes, failures, and ethical decisions, the novel underscores the significance of resilience, empathy, and self-reflection as strategies for navigating societal pressures. By highlighting both the constraints and possibilities afforded by social and cultural norms, Alcott presents a nuanced vision of female experience, one in which agency is exercised not only through overt acts of defiance but also through careful negotiation, moral discernment, and the pursuit of personal excellence within socially acceptable frameworks.

## **2.11 Literary Context**

*Little Women* is often considered a semi-autobiographical work, blending domestic realism with moral instruction. The novel contributed to the emerging genre of women's literature and has been widely studied in feminist literary criticism for its nuanced portrayal of female subjectivity and its subtle critique of patriarchal structures. Alcott's narrative style combining episodic storytelling, character introspection, and epistolary elements enhances the reader's understanding of the sisters' inner lives and social struggles.

These narrative techniques, the novel engages with broader literary traditions of the nineteenth century, including sentimental fiction, domestic novels, and moral literature. Alcott adapts these genres to foreground the experiences and perspectives of women, highlighting both their vulnerabilities and their agency. Through this blending of literary forms, she creates a layered narrative that balances entertainment with ethical and social reflection, allowing readers to observe the growth, challenges, and self-realization of her characters in a realistic and emotionally compelling manner.

The semi-autobiographical nature of *Little Women* also strengthens its authenticity, as Alcott draws upon her own experiences growing up in a progressive, intellectual household. This personal dimension allows the novel to explore themes such as ambition, moral responsibility, and the tension between societal expectation and individual aspiration

with remarkable subtlety. The sisters' struggles and triumphs mirror Alcott's own negotiation of gendered limitations and creative ambition, providing a vivid literary lens into the realities faced by women writers in the nineteenth century.

## **2.12 Setting**

The setting of *Little Women* plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and the characters' development. Louisa May Alcott situates the March family in Concord, Massachusetts, during the mid-19th century—a period marked by social change, the aftermath of the Civil War, and evolving roles for women.

## **2.13 Physical Setting**

The novel's physical setting alternates between the March family home, social spaces in the community, and, later, locations outside Concord, such as Europe. The March household is depicted as modest yet nurturing, emphasizing domestic life as a site of both limitation and opportunity for women. Spaces such as the drawing-room, the attic where Jo writes, and the family's garden symbolize the intersection of personal ambition, creativity, and societal expectations.

The community settings: churches, schools, markets, and social gatherings. The broader social environment in which the sisters must navigate expectations of propriety, class, and gender. These spaces reveal how women's behavior was constantly observed and evaluated, and they serve as arenas where the March sisters negotiate friendship, reputation, and moral guidance. The contrast between private and public spaces underscores the tension between individual desire and social conformity, a theme central to the novel.

Later in the narrative, the European setting, particularly in Amy's artistic travels, represents a form of liberation and exposure to new cultural norms. These locations broaden the sisters' horizons, symbolizing possibilities for education, personal growth, and professional development that were often inaccessible within the confines of nineteenth-

century American domesticity. The shift from Concord to Europe also reflects the gradual expansion of the characters' agency and autonomy, illustrating how physical movement parallels personal and intellectual development.

Likewise, Alcott's attention to detailed description of the natural environment the garden, the New England seasons, and landscapes surrounding the home serves both aesthetic and symbolic purposes. Nature becomes a site of reflection, emotional renewal, and inspiration for creative pursuits. For instance, Jo's writing in the attic overlooking the family garden conveys a sense of intellectual freedom, even within the constraints of her domestic role. In this way, the physical setting is intricately tied to the novel's exploration of identity, ambition, and resistance, showing that spaces are not merely backdrops but active elements shaping character experience and growth

### **Temporal Setting**

The story unfolds during the 1860s, a time when women's roles were primarily confined to domestic spheres. The historical period informs the sisters' experiences, from economic constraints to educational opportunities, and frames the narrative within the broader context of social and moral expectations. Alcott uses this temporal setting to highlight the tension between tradition and emerging feminist ideals.

Furthermore, the 1860s in America were marked by significant social, political, and economic transformations, including the aftermath of the Civil War and the early stages of industrialization, which influenced family structures, labor dynamics, and societal values. Within this milieu, the March sisters navigate a world in which women's aspirations were often limited by cultural norms that prioritized marriage, domesticity, and moral propriety. By situating her narrative in this specific historical moment, Alcott not only captures the realities of everyday life for middle-class women but also critiques the limitations imposed upon them. The temporal setting thus serves as a lens through which readers can examine how historical context shapes character development, moral decision-making, and individual agency. In doing so, Alcott underscores the broader cultural dialogue between entrenched social expectations and the evolving discourse on female independence,

education, and personal fulfillment, making the novel both a product of its time and a forward-looking exploration of gender and identity.

## **Social Setting**

Concord functions as a microcosm of 19th-century American society. Social interactions, community events, and class distinctions influence the sisters' choices and aspirations. The novel examines the intersection of gender, class, and morality, illustrating how societal norms shape the opportunities available to women while also providing spaces for resistance and personal growth.

Moreover, Concord serves not only as a physical setting but also as a cultural and moral landscape in which the characters' identities are continuously negotiated. The town reflects the prevailing values of propriety, reputation, and social expectation, yet it simultaneously allows moments of individual expression and defiance. Through everyday interactions—ranging from neighborly visits to charitable activities—Alcott demonstrates how social structures enforce conformity while also opening subtle avenues for autonomy, education, and creative expression. Class distinctions are particularly evident in the contrast between the March family and wealthier neighbors, highlighting the impact of economic resources on women's opportunities and social mobility. By situating the narrative within this socially layered environment, Alcott underscores the complex ways in which communal expectations, moral responsibility, and personal ambition intersect, revealing the tensions and possibilities inherent in women's navigation of 19th-century American society. Ultimately, the social setting in *Little Women* operates as both a constraining force and a space for negotiation, reflecting the broader societal dynamics that shaped women's lives and demonstrating Alcott's nuanced critique of social hierarchies and gendered limitations.

## **3.0 Characters**

**Jo March:** the protagonist, embodies rebellion and independence. Her ambition to become a writer challenges the 19th-century norm that women should prioritize marriage and domesticity. Jo's defiance of traditional roles, combined with her assertive personality, positions her as a feminist icon within the narrative (Fetterley, 1979). Her character illustrates the tension between personal aspiration and societal expectation, and her journey reflects the broader struggle for female self-determination.

**Meg March:** she represents the negotiation between personal desire and social conformity. She embraces family life and domestic responsibilities but does so on her own terms, demonstrating that agency can exist within conventional structures. Her character highlights the complexity of women's roles, showing that fulfillment can be achieved through both adherence to and subtle resistance against societal norms.

**Beth March:** Beth embodies moral strength and emotional resilience. While she is less rebellious than her sisters, her influence is profound, demonstrating that resistance can manifest through care, compassion, and ethical integrity. Beth's character challenges the notion that feminism is solely about overt defiance, emphasizing the power of quiet, sustained agency.

**Amy March:** she represents ambition and social navigation. Her pursuit of artistic refinement and social status reflects the opportunities and limitations for women in her time. Through Amy, Alcott explores how women can assert themselves within societal structures while balancing personal and social aspirations.

### 3.1 Morale

The morale in *Little Women* is central to understanding the March sisters' development and their navigation of societal expectations. Louisa May Alcott embeds ethical lessons within the characters' actions, decisions, and interpersonal relationships, highlighting the connection between morality, personal growth, and feminist ideals. Additionally, the moral dimension in *Little Women* is inseparable from the social and feminist contexts of the novel. Alcott uses the sisters' ethical decisions to explore themes of

integrity, responsibility, and social conscience, showing how women can assert themselves morally and socially within restrictive environments.

The moral framework of the novel is closely tied to the concept of character formation. Each sister's growth is guided not only by personal ambition but also by the ethical implications of her choices. Jo's struggle between pursuing her literary career and fulfilling familial obligations, Meg's negotiation between domestic life and personal desire, Beth's quiet devotion to others, and Amy's artistic and social aspirations all illustrate different moral pathways shaped by circumstance, desire, and social expectation. Alcott presents these moral journeys not as rigid prescriptions but as nuanced explorations of conscience, empathy, and self-awareness.

Moreover, the novel emphasizes the role of education, reflection, and mentorship in cultivating moral sensibility. Parental guidance, community norms, and personal experience all interact to shape the sisters' understanding of right and wrong. The text demonstrates that morality is dynamic and contextual: the characters must weigh personal ambitions against social duties, navigate dilemmas with discernment, and reconcile individual desires with collective well-being.

Alcott also subtly critiques rigid moral codes imposed by patriarchal society. By showing how women exercise ethical judgment and cultivate virtue independently, the novel suggests that morality is not solely a tool for social control but can serve as a form of empowerment. The ethical agency exercised by the March sisters, particularly Jo illustrates how adherence to personal integrity and moral reasoning can coexist with resistance to limiting social norms.

Lastly, the moral dimension of *Little Women* reinforces the novel's enduring relevance. It underscores that the cultivation of character, ethical reflection, and social responsibility are deeply intertwined with the pursuit of autonomy, self-definition, and equality. By embedding these lessons within relatable and emotionally grounded narratives, Alcott ensures that the moral development of her characters resonates with readers across generations, inspiring reflection on both individual and societal values.

## 3.2 Symbols

**Writing and the Attic:** Jo's writing symbolizes creativity, independence, and self-expression. The attic where she writes represents a private space of intellectual freedom and autonomy, away from societal expectations. Her manuscripts are a tangible manifestation of her resistance against restrictive gender norms.

**Domestic Objects and Clothing:** Meg's interest in fashion and household management symbolizes her negotiation between personal desire and societal roles. Clothing and domestic spaces reflect her engagement with conventional femininity, while also highlighting her agency in making choices that align with her values.

**Piano and Household Care:** Beth's piano playing and acts of care symbolize harmony, emotional resilience, and altruism. These symbols reinforce the idea that moral strength and quiet resistance can manifest through nurturing, empathy, and dedication to family welfare.

**Art Supplies and Europe:** Amy's sketches, paintings, and travels symbolize ambition, social aspiration, and self-improvement. These elements highlight her journey of balancing personal ambition with social expectations, reflecting the negotiation of identity within structured societal limits.

## 3.3 Motifs

**Domestic Life and Household Chores** The motif of domestic activities, cooking, sewing, cleaning reflects the societal expectations placed upon women. While seemingly ordinary, these tasks provide a framework for the sisters to assert control, demonstrate responsibility, and cultivate moral and emotional strength. For instance, Jo's management of household duties when Marmee is absent showcases her emerging leadership and independence.

**Letters and Written Communication:** Letters, diaries, and written stories recur throughout the novel as motifs of self-expression, reflection, and agency. They allow the sisters, particularly Jo, to articulate their desires, emotions, and ambitions. Writing becomes both a literal and symbolic form of autonomy, highlighting the importance of intellectual freedom for women in a restrictive society.

**Illness and Recovery:** Beth's frailty and illness serve as a recurring motif representing vulnerability, moral strength, and the emotional bonds that sustain the family. Illness functions symbolically, emphasizing resilience, empathy, and the power of quiet resistance to societal and personal challenges.

### **3.4 Themes**

**Autonomy and Self-Determination:** one of the most prominent themes is the pursuit of personal independence. Jo's ambition to become a writer, Amy's artistic aspirations, and Meg's careful negotiation of domestic responsibilities highlight diverse strategies women employ to assert control over their lives. The novel emphasizes that autonomy can take many forms, from overt rebellion to subtle negotiation within societal constraints.

**Identity and Self-Expression:** the development of personal identity is central to the narrative. Each sister negotiates her individuality within family and societal expectations, exploring creative expression, moral values, and social roles. Writing, art, and domestic responsibilities act as mediums through which the sisters define themselves, reflecting Alcott's interest in the formation of female subjectivity.

**Resistance and Social Critique:** The March sisters engage in various forms of resistance against restrictive gender norms. Jo's defiance of marriage expectations, Beth's moral influence, and Amy's negotiation of ambition within societal limits illustrate that resistance can be both overt and subtle. Through these characters, Alcott critiques patriarchal structures while promoting women's agency and resilience.

### 3.5 Cinematography

The cinematic adaptations of *Little Women* provide an additional lens through which to analyze the characters, themes, and feminist dimensions of Louisa May Alcott's novel. Film versions, including the 1994 adaptation directed by Gillian Armstrong and the 2019 adaptation by Greta Gerwig, interpret the March sisters' experiences while highlighting issues of autonomy, identity, and resistance in visual and narrative form.

The cinematic and television adaptations of *Little Women* serve as vital visual interpretations that extend Louisa May Alcott's literary vision into new cultural and artistic dimensions. Each adaptation re-imagines the novel's feminist and social concerns through distinct historical, aesthetic, and narrative perspectives, providing a dynamic framework for understanding the March sisters' emotional, moral, and intellectual evolution.

The 1994 film directed by Gillian Armstrong stands as a faithful yet deeply evocative adaptation that captures the warmth of domestic life and the sisters' journey toward maturity and self-definition. Through delicate lighting, intimate close-ups, and an overall nostalgic tone, Armstrong transforms the domestic sphere traditionally associated with feminine confinement into a site of strength, creativity, and moral depth. Jo March is portrayed as an emblem of subtle defiance and self-determination, embodying a quiet feminist resistance within the constraints of her time.

In contrast, Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation approaches *Little Women* with a self-reflexive and temporally fluid narrative structure that reinterprets Alcott's text for a modern audience. By interweaving past and present, Gerwig creates a dialogue between memory and identity, illuminating the process through which women construct their sense of self amid social expectations. Her cinematographic palette warm golden tones juxtaposed with cooler shades visually conveys the tension between youthful idealism and adult reality. Moreover, Gerwig's focus on Jo's authorship and negotiation with patriarchal publishing systems re-frames the story as a powerful reflection on female creativity, ambition, and agency. This approach transforms Alcott's nineteenth century feminist vision into a contemporary meditation on authorship and women's autonomy in art and society.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodological Framework**

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology, focusing on a literary analysis of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. The purpose of this approach is to explore the ways in which the novel represents female autonomy, identity, and resistance within the social and cultural context of the nineteenth century, as well as its continued relevance in contemporary feminist thought. Rather than seeking numerical data or statistical patterns, this study prioritizes a deep, reflective understanding of the characters, their development, and the symbolic meanings that emerge throughout the narrative.

The textual analysis involves a close reading of the novel, paying attention to language, dialogue, character behavior, and narrative structure. This helps to identify the literary devices and themes Alcott employs to challenge patriarchal expectations and highlight women's emotional and intellectual independence. Jo March, as the main character, serves as a primary case study to examine notions of individuality and self-determination in contrast to the social limitations placed upon women of her time.

A feminist literary approach is used to interpret the text, drawing on theories of gender and identity proposed by scholars such as Elaine Showalter (1985) and Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar (1979). This framework allows for an analysis that not only situates *Little Women* in its historical and cultural moment but also connects it to broader conversations about women's roles, personal freedom, and the construction of female subjectivity across generations.

The study also engages with secondary sources, including critical essays, academic journals, and feminist interpretations of Alcott's work, to provide context and support the analysis. This triangulation of perspectives ensure a balanced and well-supported interpretation of the novel's social and moral dimensions.

In addition to the close reading of the primary text, this research emphasizes the importance of contextual analysis. Understanding the historical, social, and cultural conditions of the nineteenth century is essential to fully interpret the behaviors, decisions,

and limitations experienced by the characters. By situating *Little Women* within its original context, the study is able to distinguish between what reflects the norms of the time and what subtly challenges them. This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the novel, recognizing both its adherence to and its divergence from dominant ideologies.

Moreover, the interpretative nature of this methodology acknowledges the role of the researcher in the analytical process. Rather than assuming objectivity as complete neutrality, this study embraces a reflective perspective in which meaning is constructed through careful engagement with the text. This does not weaken the validity of the research; instead, it strengthens it by making the analytical process transparent and grounded in well-supported arguments.

Another key component of this methodological framework is the thematic categorization of the analysis. The study is organized around central themes such as identity formation, female autonomy, resistance to social norms, and the significance of sisterhood. By grouping textual evidence according to these themes, the research is able to identify patterns and connections that contribute to a deeper understanding of the narrative. This thematic approach also facilitates a clearer and more structured presentation of the findings.

In relation to character analysis, particular attention is given not only to Jo March but also to the development of the other sisters, as their experiences provide important contrasts and complementary perspectives. While Jo often represents independence and resistance, Meg, Beth, and Amy offer alternative ways of negotiating societal expectations. This comparative analysis enriches the study by demonstrating that autonomy and identity can manifest in diverse and sometimes unexpected ways.

### **3-6 Research Approach**

In the research approach, the main objective is to analyze how *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott, portrays women's search for autonomy, identity, and resistance through the character of Jo March, and how her trajectory continues to resonate with contemporary understandings of female empowerment. Literature is a humanistic art form; Thus, it requires an interpretive lens capable of capturing the subtle interplay between language,

character, and ideology. Through close reading, this research examines how Alcott constructs Jo's voice as a challenge to the patriarchal norms of the nineteenth century.

A central example of this is found in Jo's declaration: "am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship." This quote encapsulates Jo's and by extension, Alcott's vision of female growth and resilience. Symbolically, the "storm" represents the societal expectations and limitations imposed on women, while "sailing her ship" reflects Jo's determination to navigate life on her own terms. The interpretative approach allows this study to move beyond the literal meaning of the text and uncover its broader implications for women's independence and self-definition.

Building on this approach, the research considers not only Jo's experiences but also how her interactions with family, peers, and societal institutions reveal the broader mechanisms through which women of the nineteenth century negotiated agency. The novel's episodic structure and the interplay of domestic and social spheres provide a framework to analyze the subtle forms of resistance that manifest in everyday life, emphasizing that empowerment is often cumulative, relational, and context dependent. This method highlights how identity is actively constructed through reflection, moral choices, and the negotiation of societal norms, rather than passively received.

Furthermore, the interpretive methodology incorporates a feminist lens to examine how Alcott critiques gender hierarchies and affirms female intellectual and emotional capacity. Close attention is paid to narrative strategies, including dialogue, inner monologue, and character development, to trace how Alcott simultaneously reflects contemporary limitations for women and models paths toward self-realization. In doing so, the research situates *Little Women* as both a product of its historical moment and a timeless exploration of women's pursuit of autonomy, illustrating how literature can illuminate enduring questions about gender, identity, and resistance.

Finally, this approach allows the study to connect literary analysis with cultural and historical inquiry, demonstrating that Jo March's journey is emblematic of broader societal transformations and the gradual expansion of opportunities for women. By emphasizing interpretive engagement with character, theme, and social context, the research underscores

the novel's continuing relevance for discussions of empowerment, resilience, and the ways women negotiate selfhood in restrictive environments.

### **3.6.1 Qualitative Approach**

In this sense, the study does not seek to generalize or quantify behavior, but rather to uncover the symbolic and emotional depth of Jo March's experiences. The analysis is guided by feminist literary theory, drawing on scholars such as Elaine Showalter (1985), who emphasizes the cultural construction of female roles in literature, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), who analyze how authors use fiction to resist patriarchal constraints. These perspectives provide the theoretical lens through which Jo's actions, language, and decisions are interpreted, not merely as personal traits, but as reflections of a broader movement toward women's self-definition.

Another qualitative approach is to recognize the subjective dimension of interpretation. It involves understanding Jo's emotions and struggles as expressions of women's universal desire for recognition and freedom. This interpretive empathy allows the analysis to transcend superficial description and reveal the moral and psychological truths embedded in Alcott's narrative.

In addition, the qualitative approach permits an exploration of the narrative's symbolic and thematic layers, such as the use of domestic spaces, writing, travel, and interpersonal relationships as metaphors for autonomy and resistance. By analyzing recurring motifs, dialogues, and narrative structure, the study can highlight how Alcott communicates complex ideas about gender, identity, and agency.

The approach also values contextual understanding, situating the text within its historical, social, and cultural milieu. This includes recognizing how 19th-century social norms, family dynamics, and educational opportunities influenced both the author and her characters. Understanding these contexts is crucial to interpreting the subtle ways in which Alcott critiques societal expectations while simultaneously presenting realistic depictions of women's lives.

Finally, a qualitative framework allows for the integration of multiple interpretive perspectives, combining feminist theory with historical and literary analysis. This multidimensional lens provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of *Little Women*, highlighting not only the struggles of the March sisters but also their strategies of resilience, moral reflection, and creative expression. In doing so, the study underscores the enduring relevance of Alcott's work in conversations about women's autonomy, empowerment, and the negotiation of personal and societal roles.

### **3.6.2 Mixed Research**

This study integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of *Little Women*. The qualitative component interprets the depth of Jo March's character and her narrative symbolism, while the quantitative component identifies thematic patterns and linguistic markers that reinforce qualitative perspectives. The mixed methods approach strives to ensure both emotional resonance and empirical observation. It unites subjective interpretation with objective measurement, showing how Alcott's narrative combines artistry with intentional thematic repetition.

Ultimately, this approach recognizes that *Little Women* is both a deeply human narrative and a structured literary work. The qualitative perspective captures the richness of emotions and characters, while the quantitative perspective highlights the intentionality and recurring themes, showing how Alcott weaves Jo March's story with mastery and purpose. When brought together, these methods illuminate the novel's enduring message: that women, like Jo, can face life's challenges with courage, creativity, and self-determination.

### **3.6.3 Research of this Investigation**

The research in this paper focuses on exploring female autonomy, identity, and resistance in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, with particular attention to the character of Jo March. The primary objective is to understand how Alcott's narrative constructs women's self-expression and independence in the social and cultural context of 19th-century America, and how these themes continue to resonate in contemporary feminist thought. This investigation relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the novel *Little Women* itself, including both Part One (*Little Women*, 1868) and Part Two (*Good Wives*, 1869). The text is examined for character development, dialogue, narrative structure, and thematic patterns that illustrate Jo March's journey toward self-determination.

In addition to textual analysis, this research considers historical documents, literary criticism, and feminist theoretical frameworks to contextualize Alcott's work within the broader discourse on women's rights and social expectations during the 19th century. By situating Jo March's experiences within these frameworks, the study not only highlights the societal constraints imposed on women but also emphasizes the strategies of negotiation, adaptation, and resistance that Alcott depicts through her characters. Furthermore, this investigation explores how the novel's portrayal of female ambition, creativity, and moral agency challenges the dominant narratives of femininity of its time. The combination of primary and secondary sources allows for a holistic understanding of the text, bridging literary analysis with historical and cultural insight, and demonstrating the enduring relevance of *Little Women* as a text that continues to inform discussions of gender, identity, and empowerment in modern feminist scholarship.

### 3.6.4 Historical-Critical Method

This study applies a historical-critical method to examine Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, focusing on the character of Jo March and her journey toward autonomy, identity, and resistance. The historical-critical approach allows for the interpretation of the text within its social, cultural, and historical context, while also analyzing its literary construction. By situating *Little Women* in 19th-century America, this method provides insight into the social expectations placed on women and the ways in which Alcott's narrative both reflects and challenges these norms.

A striking example of Jo March's determination and ambition is found early in the novel: "I want to do something splendid...something heroic or wonderful that won't be forgotten after I'm dead. I think I shall write books." Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (Chapter 3, "Ambitions") This quote illustrates Jo's desire to transcend conventional female roles, asserting her right to creative expression and personal achievement. Historically, women of the nineteenth century were often confined to domestic duties, and opportunities for independent careers were limited. By aspiring to become a writer, Jo embodies a form of resistance against societal restrictions, demonstrating both personal ambition and a challenge to traditional gender expectations.

Moreover, her aspirations highlight the broader tension between individuality and communal expectation, reflecting the struggles faced by women who sought to define themselves outside the domestic sphere. Jo's character, therefore, functions as a literary conduit through which Alcott interrogates the possibilities of female agency, revealing the complexities of negotiating personal identity within a patriarchal framework while inspiring readers to consider the historical roots of gendered limitations and the transformative potential of creative self-expression.

### 3.6.5 Feminist Approach

To explore *Little Women*, emphasizing gender dynamics, social critique, and women's agency within the narrative. Unlike general literary analysis, the feminist method focuses specifically on how the text represents women's experiences, challenges patriarchal norms, and constructs female subjectivity.

Through this lens, Jo March is not only a character but a symbol of early feminist consciousness. The method examines how Alcott portrays Jo's choices such as prioritizing her creative ambitions over societal expectations of marriage or domesticity as deliberate acts of resistance that reflect broader questions about women's autonomy

For instance, in Chapter 3, Jo declares: "I want to do something splendid...something heroic or wonderful that won't be forgotten after I'm dead. I think I shall write books." This statement illustrates Jo's aspiration for self-definition and public recognition, which contrasts sharply with the limited roles available to women in nineteenth-century America. By analyzing these moments, the feminist method highlights how Alcott critiques social norms and empowers her female characters to envision alternative futures.

Furthermore, the feminist approach allows the researcher to explore the diversity of female experience within the novel. While Jo embodies defiance and ambition, other characters such as Meg, Beth, and Amy provide complementary perspectives on womanhood, illustrating the range of strategies women employed to navigate societal expectations. Meg negotiates her domestic and social responsibilities while seeking personal contentment; Beth demonstrates moral courage and quiet resilience within familial and social structures; and Amy pursues artistic growth and social refinement, reflecting the interplay between personal desire and social opportunity.

Additionally, this approach examines the intersections of gender with other social dimensions, such as class, education, and morality, emphasizing how Alcott situates her critique within the lived realities of middle-class American women. It also highlights the relational aspects of feminist consciousness, showing how solidarity, mentorship, and family bonds enable the sisters to negotiate constraints collectively and individually.

Ultimately, applying a feminist lens to *Little Women* enables a comprehensive understanding of how Alcott not only reflects the gendered limitations of her era but also envisions possibilities for women's empowerment, autonomy, and identity formation. By combining textual analysis, historical context, and character study, this method reveals the enduring relevance of Alcott's work in discussions of gender, resistance, and social transformation.

### **3.7 Sources of Information**

The exploration of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott draws upon a diverse range of sources that provide literary, historical, and sociocultural perspectives. Primary sources include the original text of Alcott's novel (Alcott, 1868), which serves as the foundation for textual and thematic analysis. Close reading of the novel allows an in-depth understanding of character development, narrative strategies, and feminist undertones, particularly in the portrayal of the March sisters' journey toward autonomy, identity, and personal resistance.

Secondary sources include scholarly articles, critical essays, and books that examine Alcott's work within the context of 19th-century American literature, feminist theory, and social history. For instance, studies such as Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* (1979) highlight the ways in which female authors challenge patriarchal norms and offer readers alternative narratives of women's agency. Historical and biographical sources on Alcott herself, including letters, diaries, and contemporary biographies, provide insight into her motivations, social environment, and the ways in which her own life informed the narrative of *Little Women*.

In addition, contemporary scholarly research on feminist literary criticism and women's literature offers frameworks to analyze how Alcott negotiates issues of gender, morality, and social expectation within her narrative. Journals and dissertations examining the representation of female subjectivity, ethical dilemmas, and resistance strategies in *Little Women* provide critical perspectives that enrich the analysis of the text. Digital archives and academic databases further facilitate access to historical documents, critical commentary, and comparative studies, allowing the researcher to situate Alcott's work within broader socio-historical and literary conversations.

Moreover, pedagogical sources exploring the impact of *Little Women* in educational settings contribute to understanding how the novel continues to shape perceptions of gender roles and moral development. These sources demonstrate that Alcott's work is not only a historical artifact but also a living text that informs contemporary discussions on women's autonomy, identity formation, and resilience. The combination of primary, secondary, historical, and pedagogical sources ensures a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to studying *Little Women*, strengthening the scholarly rigor and depth of the research.

### **3.8 Research Design**

A research design is the structured plan that guides the study's investigation, ensuring its systematic, coherence, and academic rigor. In the context of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, the research design defines how the novel is analyzed, including methods for examining characters, themes, and social contexts, as well as the theoretical perspectives such as feminist theory through which the text is interpreted.

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach that emphasizes close reading and textual analysis. This design allows for a detailed examination of narrative strategies, character development, and thematic elements, revealing how Alcott constructs representations of gender, identity, and resistance. By focusing on the lived experiences of the March sisters, the research design ensures that both explicit and subtle forms of agency are identified and analyzed within the broader social, cultural, and historical context of nineteenth-century America.

Moreover, the research design incorporates a multi-layered analytical lens, combining literary, historical, and feminist perspectives. This integration allows the study to not only explore the narrative and stylistic elements of the novel but also situate it within its historical moment, highlighting how societal norms, moral expectations, and cultural values influenced the characters' choices and possibilities for self-expression. The design

emphasizes the importance of context, acknowledging that Alcott's work reflects both her personal experiences and the broader challenges faced by women of her time.

Additionally, the research design accounts for the interpretive nature of literary analysis, recognizing that meaning is constructed through careful engagement with the text. The study systematically identifies key passages, dialogue, and character interactions that exemplify themes of female empowerment, resilience, and negotiation of social constraints. By organizing the analysis thematically and thematically across the experiences of the sisters, the design ensures coherence and clarity in presenting findings that address the research objectives.

### **3.8.1 Exploratory**

In the context of *Little Women*, using an exploratory approach in the research design allows for:

- Open-ended analysis of characters: Understanding the complexity of the March sisters' personalities, decisions, and growth.
- Identification of emerging themes: Examining issues of autonomy, identity, resistance, and gender roles as they appear throughout the narrative.
- Flexibility in methodology: Allowing the researcher to adapt analytical focus as new insights arise from both the primary text and secondary literature.
- Integration with theoretical frameworks: Exploring feminist and historical perspectives without imposing pre-defined conclusions, which enables a more nuanced interpretation of the novel.

### **3.8.2 Correlational**

In correlational research within a research design could allow a researcher to:

- Investigate relationships between characters' traits and outcomes, such as how independence or resilience in the March sisters correlates with personal growth or moral development.
- Examine thematic correlations, for example, linking the presence of feminist ideals in the text with the sisters' decisions and behaviors. By analyzing recurring motifs, dialogue, and narrative structure, a correlational approach can reveal how themes such as autonomy, education, and self-expression are interwoven with character arcs and plot development. This not only strengthens the argument that *Little Women* is a consciously feminist text for its time but also demonstrates the systematic way Alcott embeds social critique within her literary construction.

Additionally, correlational research provides the opportunity to explore how external factor such as social expectations, economic circumstances, and family dynamics interact with internal character traits to shape outcomes. For example, Jo's ambition and moral determination can be examined in relation to the supportive yet restrictive social environment of Concord, revealing how Alcott portrays the interplay between individual agencies and societal constraint. Ultimately, using a correlational lens enriches both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, offering a comprehensive view of how character traits, thematic patterns, and social context converge to produce the novel's enduring insights into gender, identity, and resistance.

### **3.8.3 Experimental**

In the context of *Little Women*, a traditional experimental design might not be directly applicable, as literary studies do not typically manipulate variables in the strict sense. However, adapted approaches can be used in certain educational or interpretive contexts: Educational interventions: For example, research could examine the effect of reading *Little Women* on students' understanding of gender roles or empathy, comparing groups exposed to the novel with groups that have not.

Furthermore, experimental approaches can involve structured observations and measurements of behavioral or cognitive responses to the text. For instance, researchers might assess changes in students' attitudes toward gender equality, moral reasoning, or social awareness before and after engaging with the novel. Surveys, questionnaires, or reflective journals could provide quantitative and qualitative data that illustrate how interaction with Alcott's narrative influences perspectives on women's roles, ethical decision-making, and interpersonal relationships.

Also, experimental adaptations can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating feminist literary texts into educational curricula. By analyzing differences in comprehension, critical thinking, and empathy between students exposed to *Little Women* and those reading alternative texts, researchers can identify the novel's potential as a tool for fostering awareness of social norms, resistance strategies, and identity formation.

While the experimental approach in literary studies is necessarily indirect, it highlights the potential for empirical inquiry to complement interpretive analysis. Combining controlled observation with qualitative insight allows researchers to better understand the impact of Alcott's work on contemporary readers, revealing how literature can shape social consciousness and encourage reflective engagement with historical and cultural themes.

### **3.8.4 Exploratory – Descriptive**

This study adopts an exploratory-descriptive approach, combining the flexibility of exploratory research with the structured documentation of descriptive research. This allows the investigation to uncover patterns, themes, and insights in *Little Women*, while systematically describing the literary and thematic elements present in the text.

The exploratory-descriptive framework enables the researcher to engage deeply with the complex narrative structure and the nuanced character development within the novel. The exploratory dimension allows for the identification of emergent themes, such as gender roles, autonomy, identity formation, and forms of resistance, without restricting the

analysis to preconceived categories. This openness is particularly valuable for examining a text like *Little Women*, where subtle interactions, personal reflections, and ethical dilemmas reveal significant insights into the societal pressures and opportunities experienced by women in the nineteenth century.

Simultaneously, the descriptive dimension ensures that these observations are systematically documented and analyzed. By carefully recording instances of character growth, familial dynamics, moral decision-making, and social interactions, the study provides a coherent and detailed portrayal of how Alcott constructs her narrative. This method allows for a clear understanding of recurring motifs, dialogue, and plot progression, illustrating the interconnectedness of personal development, social expectations, and feminist ideals in the lives of the March sisters.

Furthermore, the combined approach facilitates a comprehensive interpretation that integrates both thematic exploration and textual description. It allows research to consider not only what occurs in the story, but also how the events, settings, and character choices reflect broader cultural and historical realities. In doing so, the study emphasizes that Alcott's work is both a reflection of its time and a progressive commentary on women's agency, ethical integrity, and personal growth.

Ultimately, the exploratory-descriptive approach provides a balanced and thorough framework for analyzing *Little Women*, capturing both the richness of its narrative and the depth of its social, cultural, and feminist significance. It enables the researcher to uncover meaningful patterns and insights, while presenting a structured and academically rigorous account of the novel's literary and thematic dimensions.

### **3.8.5 Descriptive**

In a research design, descriptive research is valuable because it offers clarity and organization, generating a detailed description of the text's elements. In the case of *Little Women*, it ensures that the study presents a structured overview of the themes, characters, and social implications while maintaining academic rigor.

In the context of *Little Women*, a descriptive research approach allows:

- Document character traits: Describe the personalities, motivations, and growth of the March sisters.
- To identify recurring themes: Systematically record motifs such as female empowerment, family dynamics, moral development, and social norms.
- To analyze narrative strategies: Examine Alcott's literary techniques, plot structure, and stylistic elements.
- To provide contextual understanding: Situate the novel within its historical, social, and feminist contexts, presenting an organized depiction of its significance.

### **3.9 Data Collection Instruments**

This project consists of a literary analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Every research project should include data collection to make the work more comprehensive and accurate.

Document analysis: is a central stage of this research, as it involves meticulous organization, interpretation, and critical analysis of information gathered from both primary and secondary sources. In this study, which focuses on Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, data analysis is conducted using a qualitative and interpretive approach, complemented by selective quantitative elements. This combination allows us to explore not only the novel's thematic depth but also the patterns, language, and narrative strategies that contribute to the construction of gender identities and roles, and to feminism.

Interview: The interview method is incorporated as a complementary strategy to enrich the understanding of literary analysis, including diverse perspectives on Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women*. This method allows for exploring how readers and analysts interpret the text, especially in relation to character development, moral lessons, and social messages present in the narrative.

Survey: The survey method is used as a structured data collection technique to gather quantitative and qualitative information from readers or students who have read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. It allows obtaining measurable data on the interpretations, emotional responses, and perceptions of readers regarding the themes and characters of the novel.

Observation: is used to capture real-time interactions and interpretive processes among participants. This approach allows the researcher to understand how readers construct meanings, respond emotionally, and negotiate interpretations collectively in group settings.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves the researcher collecting, presenting, and reviewing information in order to reach accurate and well-supported conclusions. It is a crucial stage of the study, as it brings together the analyzed data that either supports or challenges the objectives established for the research. In the case of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, the data analysis is particularly significant because it allows the researcher to examine how the novel portrays themes such as gender roles, family values, personal growth, social expectations, and female identity within a nineteenth-century American context. Furthermore, the analysis considers the historical and cultural background of the nineteenth century, recognizing that the behaviors, decisions, and limitations of the characters are deeply influenced by the social norms of the time. This contextual approach allows the researcher to understand not only what the characters do, but also why they act in certain ways, revealing the tensions between individual desires and societal pressures.

Another important aspect of the data analysis is the application of feminist literary theory. Concepts such as patriarchy, gender construction, and female agency are used as analytical tools to interpret the text. These theoretical perspectives enable the researcher to examine how the novel both reinforces and challenges traditional gender ideologies. In this way, *Little Women* is not only analyzed as a literary work but also as a cultural artifact that reflects and questions the social structures of its time.

In addition, the analysis employs a close reading strategy, which allows for a detailed examination of specific passages, dialogues, and narrative descriptions. Through this method, the researcher identifies key moments in the novel that reveal character development, emotional conflicts, and ideological tensions. Particular emphasis is placed on the character of Jo March, whose experiences illustrate the struggle for autonomy and self-expression in a society that often limits women's opportunities. By analyzing these textual elements, the study highlights how the narrative constructs and negotiates female identity.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is used to organize the data into meaningful categories. Themes such as independence, domesticity, ambition, sacrifice, and sisterhood are identified and examined throughout the text. This process enables the researcher to recognize patterns and connections that contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel's central messages. The identification of these themes also facilitates a more structured and coherent interpretation of the data.

Building upon the thematic organization previously established, the data analysis also examines how these themes evolve throughout the narrative and interact with one another. Rather than functioning as isolated elements, concepts such as independence, domesticity, ambition, and sacrifice are deeply interconnected, shaping the experiences and decisions of the characters. This interrelation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how female identity is constructed within the novel, as it reflects both personal aspirations and the influence of social expectations.

In this sense, the analysis pays particular attention to the progression of the characters over time. The development of the March sisters is not presented as immediate or linear; instead, it unfolds gradually through a series of experiences that challenge their beliefs and values. These moments of growth often emerge from conflict, whether internal such as the struggle between personal desire and moral duty or external, such as economic limitations and societal pressures. By examining these processes, the study highlights the complexity of personal development and the ways in which identity is continuously shaped and reshaped.

Jo March's character serves as a central point of reference within this analysis. Her pursuit of independence and self-expression illustrates the tension between individuality and conformity that many women experienced during the nineteenth century. However, her journey also reveals that autonomy is not absolute. Rather, it is negotiated within the constraints of her social environment, demonstrating that resistance can coexist with adaptation. This nuanced portrayal challenges simplified interpretations of empowerment and emphasizes the multifaceted nature of female agency.

At the same time, the experiences of Meg, Beth, and Amy provide essential complementary perspectives. Meg's decision to embrace domestic life reflects a conscious negotiation with traditional expectations, suggesting that fulfillment can also be found within conventional roles when they are chosen rather than imposed. Beth's character, though quieter, represents emotional strength and moral integrity, highlighting forms of resilience that are often overlooked. Amy, on the other hand, embodies ambition and transformation, illustrating the importance of self-improvement and adaptability in the pursuit of personal goals. Together, these characters demonstrate that there is no singular model of womanhood, but rather a diversity of identities shaped by different circumstances and choices.

Another significant dimension of the analysis is the role of sisterhood as a foundational element in the construction of identity. The relationships among the March sisters provide a space for emotional support, guidance, and shared learning. Through their interactions, the novel emphasizes the importance of solidarity and mutual understanding, presenting female relationships as a source of strength rather than competition. This perspective contributes to a more humanized and relational understanding of identity formation.

Moreover, the analysis considers the narrative strategies employed by Louisa May Alcott, including tone, dialogue, and descriptive language. These elements play a crucial role in shaping the reader's interpretation of the characters and their experiences. The use of reflective and often didactic passages invites readers to engage with the moral and emotional dimensions of the story, while moments of humor and warmth create a sense of familiarity and authenticity. By examining these narrative techniques, the study gains a deeper appreciation of how meaning is constructed within the text.

It is also important to acknowledge the presence of tension and contradiction within the novel. *Little Women* does not offer a fully resolved or unified perspective on gender roles; instead, it presents a balance between conformity and resistance. This ambiguity allows for multiple interpretations and reflects the complexity of the social realities in which the characters exist. As a result, the novel remains open to reinterpretation, particularly when viewed through contemporary feminist perspectives.

#### **4.1 Approaches to the Investigation**

The investigation of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott is based on a qualitative literary approach, which allows for a detailed and reflective analysis of the novel. This approach is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, themes, and character development rather than measuring numerical data. Through close reading, the researcher examines key passages, dialogues, and narrative events to better understand the messages conveyed in the text.

A feminist literary perspective is incorporated to explore the representation of women and the social expectations placed upon them during the nineteenth century. This perspective helps to analyze how Alcott presents different models of womanhood through the March sisters, emphasizing the tension between personal ambition and traditional gender roles. Particular attention is given to Jo March, whose character reflects a strong desire for independence and challenges conventional ideas of femininity.

In addition to the feminist perspective, a historical and social approach is applied to contextualize the novel within its cultural and temporal setting. This approach allows the researcher to examine how family structure, moral values, and social class influence the characters' choices and life experiences. Understanding the historical background of the novel provides deeper insight into Alcott's intentions and the societal norms she portrays and questions. For instance, the limited educational and professional opportunities available to women, the moral and domestic expectations placed upon them, and the impact of social class and economic constraints are all considered to fully appreciate how these factors shape the sisters' development and interactions.

Furthermore, the investigation incorporates a cultural lens that examines the broader ethical, emotional, and social norms embedded within the text. This lens emphasizes how Alcott not only reflects but also critiques the prevailing ideas of virtue, femininity, and social propriety, demonstrating that women's experiences were deeply mediated by both internalized values and external pressures. The approach also considers the narrative strategies Alcott employs, including episodic storytelling, introspective monologues, and

the use of letters, which provide readers with intimate access to the sisters' thoughts, feelings, and moral reasoning.

By integrating qualitative, feminist, historical, and cultural approaches, the investigation aims to offer a holistic understanding of *Little Women*. This multidimensional framework enables the study to explore the intersections of gender, identity, and resistance, while situating the novel within its nineteenth-century context. It allows for an analysis that is both textually grounded and socially informed, highlighting how Alcott's work continues to resonate with contemporary discussions about women's agency, personal growth, and the negotiation of societal norms.

#### **4.2 Theories vs Literary Work**

Feminist literary theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing *Little Women* as a text that reflects and interrogates the gender norms of nineteenth-century American society. This theoretical approach focuses on how literature represents women's identities, social roles, and forms of resistance within patriarchal structures (Showalter, 1979). When applied to Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, feminist theory allows for a deeper understanding of how the novel both conforms to and challenges the dominant ideology surrounding femininity, domesticity, and female agency.

During the nineteenth century, women were largely expected to embrace the ideals of the "cult of true womanhood," which promoted obedience, moral virtue, and devotion to the domestic sphere. From a theoretical perspective, these ideals functioned as mechanisms of social control that limited women's autonomy and opportunities. In *Little Women*, characters such as Meg March appear to align with these expectations, particularly through her desire for marriage and family life. However, feminist theory encourages a more nuanced reading, suggesting that Meg's choices represent a negotiation between personal fulfillment and social constraint rather than a simple acceptance of patriarchal norms.

Jo March, in contrast, embodies a more explicit challenge to traditional gender roles. Feminist concepts related to identity and resistance help explain Jo's rejection of

conventional femininity and her pursuit of intellectual and professional independence. Her ambition to become a writer, her resistance to marriage, and her discomfort with domestic expectations position her as a figure of gender nonconformity within the novel. Although Jo's eventual marriage has been interpreted as a limitation to her feminist potential, feminist literary theory highlights the historical context in which Alcott was writing, suggesting that the ending reflects societal pressures rather than a complete abandonment of feminist ideals. Furthermore, feminist theory emphasizes the significance of female relationships as spaces of empowerment and identity formation. *Little Women* foregrounds sisterhood and female solidarity as central elements of the narrative, challenging male-centered literary traditions of the period. The emotional and moral support shared among the March sisters reinforce the idea that women's experiences and voices deserve narrative centrality, thereby resisting their marginalization in nineteenth-century literature.

In this sense, *Little Women* can be understood as a literary work that operates within social limitations while subtly resisting them. Through feminist theoretical analysis, the novel emerges not as a radical rejection of patriarchy but as a text that exposes its constraints and offers alternative representations of womanhood. The dialogue between feminist theory and the literary work thus reveals *Little Women* as an important contribution to early feminist thought, particularly in its exploration of gender, identity, and resistance within a restrictive social context.

### **4.3 Theme, motif and symbol**

#### **Theme: Female Identity and Self-Definition**

A central theme in *Little Women* is the construction of female identity within a restrictive patriarchal society. Through the experiences of the March sisters, Louisa May Alcott illustrates how women must negotiate personal desires with social expectations. From a feminist perspective, identity is portrayed as a process rather than a fixed condition, shaped by individual choices and external limitations. This theme highlights the novel's

subtle resistance to nineteenth-century gender norms by presenting multiple, valid models of womanhood.

### **Motif: Artistic and Intellectual Work**

The recurring motif of artistic and intellectual work particularly writing, music, and visual art represents women's pursuit of self-expression and independence. Jo's dedication to writing functions as the clearest example of this motif, symbolizing a challenge to the belief that women's ambitions should be confined to the domestic sphere. Feminist literary analysis interprets this motif as a form of resistance, emphasizing women's desire for autonomy and recognition beyond traditional roles.

### **Symbol: Jo's Hair**

Jo's hair serves as a powerful symbol of sacrifice and resistance in the novel. When she cuts her hair to support her family, the act symbolizes the rejection of conventional standards of femininity, as long hair was associated with beauty and womanly virtue in the nineteenth century. From a feminist perspective, this moment reflects both the personal cost of women's sacrifices and Jo's resistance to rigid gender expectations.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter presents the research findings, both for the overall objective and for each of the specific objectives and, also provides some recommendations. All the information provided in this chapter is based on the researcher's perspective and the information previously gathered for this thesis. In this sense, the conclusions aim to synthesize the most significant insights while maintaining a critical and reflective perspective.

Regarding the general objective, which focused on analyzing how *Little Women* reflects gender inequalities and portrays the construction of female identity and resistance within a nineteenth-century context, the findings demonstrate that the novel offers a complex and nuanced representation of women's lives. Rather than presenting a single model of womanhood, the text illustrates multiple ways in which women navigate social expectations, highlighting both the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures and the possibilities for personal growth and self-definition.

In relation to the first specific objective, which examined the representation of gender roles, it can be concluded that *Little Women* reflects the dominant ideologies of its time while simultaneously questioning them. The novel portrays the expectations placed upon women, particularly within the domestic sphere, but it also reveals the tensions that arise when these expectations conflict with individual desires. This duality allows the reader to understand that gender roles are not entirely fixed, but subject to reinterpretation and negotiation.

With respect to the second objective, focused on the resilience strategies employed by the March sisters, the analysis shows that each character adopts different approaches to cope with societal pressures. These strategies range from adaptation to subtle forms of resistance, demonstrating that resilience is not a uniform concept. Instead, it is shaped by personal values, circumstances, and aspirations. The experiences of the sisters highlight that

even within restrictive environments, individuals can find ways to assert their identity and pursue their goals.

Concerning the third objective, which explored the construction of female identity, the findings indicate that identity in *Little Women* is presented as a dynamic and evolving process. The characters' journeys illustrate that identity is not predetermined, but developed through experiences, relationships, and self-reflection. This perspective reinforces the idea that personal growth involves both internal transformation and external negotiation with social expectations.

Finally, in relation to the fourth objective, which evaluated the presence of feminist elements within the novel, it can be concluded that *Little Women* incorporates these elements in a subtle yet meaningful way. Although it does not explicitly challenge all aspects of the social order, it introduces ideas related to autonomy, individuality, and female agency that anticipate later feminist discussions. This suggests that the novel can be read as an early contribution to feminist thought, particularly in its emphasis on the diversity of women's experiences.

Overall, the research confirms that *Little Women* remains a relevant and valuable text for the study of gender, identity, and resistance. Its ability to address complex social issues through relatable characters and narratives allows it to maintain its significance across different historical periods. The novel not only reflects the realities of the nineteenth century but also invites contemporary readers to reflect on ongoing challenges related to gender equality and personal freedom.

## **5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion**

The conclusion is fundamental because it summarizes all the ideas, especially the main ones, and offers a final reflection. This is because the body of the analysis focuses primarily on breaking down the elements of the literary work under discussion.

Additionally, for a conclusion to be complete, it can include a reflection on the work being studied. This allows the conclusion to reaffirm the central argument and the objective

of the study. The conclusion functions not only as a summary, but also as a space for integration, where the different ideas developed throughout the analysis of *Little Women* are brought together in a coherent and meaningful way. It enables the researcher to revisit the central arguments while illustrating how each section of the study contributes to understanding the novel's portrayal of gender roles, identity formation, and female resistance. As a result, the conclusion provides clarity and a sense of closure, reinforcing the overall purpose of examining the work from a feminist perspective.

Moreover, a well-developed conclusion goes beyond merely restating previous points; instead, it offers a deeper level of interpretation. In other words, it encourages reflection on the significance of the findings in relation to the experiences of the March sisters. Through this lens, *Little Women* can be understood not only as a representation of nineteenth-century social expectations, but also as a narrative that subtly questions and redefines them. Consequently, the conclusion highlights how the novel engages with enduring themes such as autonomy, personal growth, and the negotiation between individual desires and societal norms.

Similarly, the conclusion creates an opportunity to evaluate the scope and contributions of the study. By synthesizing the insights obtained throughout the analysis, it becomes evident that *Little Women* offers multiple perspectives on womanhood, each embodied by the different trajectories of the March sisters. At the same time, this diversity reinforces the idea that identity is not fixed, but continuously shaped by experience, relationships, and context. Therefore, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how literary texts can reflect and challenge cultural values.

Furthermore, the conclusion allows for a reflection on the relevance of *Little Women* in contemporary contexts. Although the novel is rooted in the nineteenth century, its exploration of gender, identity, and resistance continues to resonate with modern readers. In this sense, the text bridges past and present, inviting ongoing dialogue about the evolving roles of women in society.

Finally, the conclusion serves as the closing voice of the research, leaving the reader with a lasting impression of the novel's significance. To this end, it brings together the analytical, theoretical, and interpretative dimensions of the study, offering a sense of

completion while also encouraging further reflection. Ultimately, the conclusion not only reaffirms the central argument but also underscores the importance of engaging critically with *Little Women* as a literary work that continues to inspire discussions about gender, identity, and the pursuit of autonomy.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

The main purpose of this analysis was to examine *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott through a social and cultural, as well as a feminist lens. To achieve this, the researcher focused on three specific objectives. First, to analyze how the novel reflects the social expectations and limitations imposed on women during the 19th century. Second, to explore how the March sisters, particularly Jo March, challenge traditional gender roles and seek personal independence and self-realization. Third, the research examined how family values, personal growth, and moral development are portrayed through each character's journey. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that *Little Women* not only reflects the historical context in which it was written, but also offers a progressive perspective on women's roles, emphasizing individuality, resilience, and the importance of personal choice.

The study that *Little Women* provides a nuanced exploration of the multiple forms of resistance available to women within a patriarchal society. While some characters, like Jo, engage in overt acts of defiance through their pursuit of education, work, and creative expression, other forms of resistance are subtler, emerging in everyday choices, acts of emotional courage, and moral discernment. This emphasizes that empowerment is not solely defined by visible rebellion, but also through the cultivation of personal agency, self-awareness, and ethical integrity.

Furthermore, the novel underscores the vital role of familial and social support in shaping the characters' capacity for resilience and self-definition. The bonds shared among the March sisters and their parents provide both a safe space for experimentation and a foundation of moral guidance, demonstrating that individual growth is often nurtured through collective encouragement and relational empathy. This relational dimension of

personal development reveals how interconnected social, emotional, and ethical factors contribute to the realization of autonomy and identity.

This analysis suggests that *Little Women* continues to resonate with contemporary readers because it addresses universal concerns about identity, gender, and personal agency. By portraying the sisters' struggles and triumphs in a manner that combines historical authenticity with timeless human insight, Alcott's work invites ongoing reflection on the challenges women face in asserting their individuality and negotiating societal expectations. In this way, the novel serves both as a historical document of nineteenth-century female experience and as an enduring literary text that inspires reflection on resilience, ethical decision-making, and the pursuit of self-realization across generations.

### **5.2.1 To analyze how Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* reflects nineteenth-century gender inequalities and portrays the strategies employed by the March sisters to navigate and resist societal constraints, from a feminist literary perspective**

The first objective of this study was to analyze how *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott reflects nineteenth-century gender inequalities and portrays the strategies employed by the March sisters to navigate and resist societal constraints from a feminist literary perspective.

The analysis reveals that the novel offers a nuanced representation of the restrictive social structures that shaped women's lives, particularly in relation to domestic expectations, limited professional opportunities, and the cultural emphasis on marriage as a primary life goal.

At the same time, Alcott constructs her female characters as complex individuals who actively engage with these limitations rather than passively accepting them. Through Jo's pursuit of intellectual and creative autonomy, Meg's negotiation between personal fulfillment and societal ideals of womanhood, Beth's quiet embodiment of moral virtue, and Amy's strategic adaptation to social expectations, the narrative illustrates varied forms of resistance and accommodation. Thus, the novel not only exposes the gender inequalities of the nineteenth century but also foregrounds women's agency, resilience, and capacity for self-definition within a constrained social reality.

Thus, the novel not only exposes the gender inequalities of the nineteenth century but also foregrounds women's agency, resilience, and capacity for self-definition within a constrained social reality.

In this regard, it becomes evident that the strategies employed by the March sisters are not uniform, but rather deeply influenced by their individual personalities, aspirations, and emotional experiences. Each character navigates societal expectations in a distinct way, demonstrating that resistance does not necessarily imply direct opposition, but can also emerge through adaptation, negotiation, and personal growth. This diversity of responses enriches the narrative, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how women experienced and responded to the limitations of their time.

The analysis highlights that these processes of resistance are often subtle and embedded within everyday life. Rather than presenting overt rebellion, the novel emphasizes small yet meaningful acts of self-assertion, such as the pursuit of creative expression, the redefinition of personal goals, or the conscious acceptance of certain roles under specific conditions. These actions, although seemingly ordinary, represent significant steps toward autonomy and self-awareness within a restrictive social framework.

Also, the text underscores the importance of internal development as a key component of resistance. The characters are frequently confronted with moral dilemmas and emotional challenges that require introspection and self-evaluation. Through these experiences, they gradually construct a sense of identity that is both influenced by and independent from societal expectations. This internal dimension of growth reinforces the idea that resistance is not solely external, but also deeply personal.

The portrayal of multiple female perspectives contributes to a broader redefinition of womanhood. By presenting different life paths and outcomes, the novel challenges the notion of a single, idealized model of femininity. Instead, it affirms that women's experiences are diverse and that their identities are shaped by a combination of choice, circumstance, and personal values. This multiplicity is essential in understanding the novel's contribution to feminist literary discourse.

Finally, the findings related to this objective confirm that *Little Women* operates as both a reflection of nineteenth-century gender inequalities and a subtle critique of them. Through its rich characterization and exploration of individual agency, the novel not only reveals the constraints faced by women but also emphasizes their ability to navigate, reinterpret, and, in certain ways, transform those limitations. Consequently, the text stands as a significant literary work that continues to inform and inspire discussions on gender, identity, and resistance.

### **5.2.2 To examine the resilience strategies employed by the March sisters in response to the challenges posed by nineteenth-century patriarchal society**

To examine the resilience strategies employed by the March sisters in response to the challenges posed by nineteenth-century patriarchal society.

Rather than conforming passively to restrictive expectations, each sister negotiates her position within these constraints in a deeply personal and meaningful way. Their resilience is not portrayed as a singular or uniform trait, but rather as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by their individual aspirations, values, and emotional experiences.

For instance, their strategies of resilience manifest through perseverance in the pursuit of personal goals, the cultivation of moral integrity, and the conscious effort to maintain a sense of identity despite external pressures. At the same time, the strong emotional bonds within the March family serve as a fundamental source of support, reinforcing their capacity to endure hardship and resist societal limitations. This collective dimension of resilience highlights the importance of solidarity and empathy as essential tools for navigating adversity.

Moreover, the sisters' responses to patriarchal norms often take the form of subtle resistance rather than open defiance, reflecting the complexities of living within a society that restricts female autonomy. Through their actions and decisions, they challenge traditional gender roles while still operating within the boundaries of their historical context. In this sense, their resilience embodies both adaptation and quiet transformation. Ultimately, this analysis underscores that resilience in *Little Women* is not merely about survival, but about growth, self-definition, and the continuous negotiation of one's place in

a limiting social structure. The experiences of the March sisters illustrate that even within systems of inequality, women can exercise agency, redefining expectations, and creating meaningful pathways toward personal fulfillment. It is important to recognize that resilience is closely connected to the process of personal transformation. Throughout the novel, the sisters are confronted with situations that test their values, challenge their expectations, and require them to adapt to changing circumstances. These experiences do not weaken their sense of self; rather, they contribute to its development, allowing each character to evolve in response to both internal and external pressures. As a result, resilience becomes a continuous process of learning and adaptation rather than a fixed characteristic.

The analysis reveals that emotional strength plays a central role in the construction of resilience. The ability of the March sisters to cope with loss, disappointment, and uncertainty demonstrates that resilience is deeply rooted in emotional awareness and self-reflection. This dimension is particularly significant, as it highlights forms of strength that are often overlooked within traditional narratives, where resilience is typically associated with visible or external actions. In *Little Women*, however, resilience is equally expressed through patience, empathy, and the capacity to maintain hope in difficult circumstances.

In addition, the novel emphasizes the importance of support systems in fostering resilience. The March family, as well as their close relationships, create a space in which the characters can share their struggles and find encouragement. This collective aspect reinforces the idea that resilience is not solely an individual effort, but also a relational process shaped by connection and mutual understanding. Through these interactions, the sisters can reaffirm their values and strengthen their ability to confront societal challenges.

### **5.2.3 To analyze the representation of gender inequality in *Little Women* through the lived experiences of its female protagonist**

To analyze the representation of gender inequality in *Little Women* through the lived experiences of its female protagonist.

From this perspective, the novel reveals a deeply personal and realistic depiction of the challenges women faced within a nineteenth-century patriarchal society, allowing readers to connect with these inequalities not only as abstract concepts, but as everyday lived realities. By situating the narrative in the specific historical, social, and cultural context of mid-19th-century America, Alcott highlights how systemic restrictions were reinforced through both external institutions such as education, employment, and social norms and internalized beliefs about femininity, morality, and ambition.

Through the experiences of the March sisters, gender inequality is portrayed as a constant presence that shapes their identities, aspirations, and life choices. Each sister confronts different limitations, whether in the form of restricted professional opportunities, societal expectations surrounding marriage, or the pressure to embody idealized notions of femininity. These experiences highlight how inequality is embedded in both external structures and internal beliefs, influencing not only what women are allowed to do, but also what they come to believe they should desire. In this way, Alcott illustrates that oppression operates on multiple levels both socially enforced and psychologically internalized shaping the ways women perceive themselves and their potential.

Louisa May Alcott presents gender inequality as a complex and evolving reality, one that is experienced differently by each individual yet collectively understood. By grounding these themes in the lived experiences of the protagonists, the novel invites a more empathetic and critical understanding of women's struggles, emphasizing not only the weight of societal constraints, but also the strength, resilience, and humanity that emerge in response to them.

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functions not only as a reflection of historical realities, but also as a timeless exploration of the enduring challenges and triumphs associated with negotiating gender inequality, inspiring readers to consider both the societal and personal dimensions of women's experiences.

#### **5.2.4 To evaluate the extent to which *Little Women* incorporates feminist elements and contributes to discourse on women's rights.**

To evaluate the extent to which *Little Women* incorporates feminist elements and contributes to discourse on women's rights.

Through the lived experiences of the March sisters, the narrative explores how gender roles are socially constructed and deeply embedded within everyday life. These roles not only define what is expected of women but also influence how they perceive themselves and their place in the world. In this sense, the novel engages profoundly with the concept of identity, illustrating how each sister navigates the tension between societal expectations and personal aspirations. Their individual journeys reveal that identity is not fixed, but rather shaped through reflection, experience, and, in many cases, resistance.

Importantly, the feminist elements present in the novel are expressed through both explicit and subtle forms of resistance. While characters like Jo openly challenge traditional norms by pursuing intellectual and creative independence, other forms of resistance emerge through quieter, yet equally significant, acts of self-definition and emotional strength. The novel suggests that resistance does not always take the form of direct opposition; it can also be found in the determination to make personal choices, to value one's voice, and to seek fulfillment beyond imposed limitations.

At the same time, the text acknowledges the complexities of negotiating autonomy within a patriarchal society. Rather than presenting a simplistic or idealized vision of liberation, the narrative portrays the process of self-realization as gradual and, at times, constrained by social realities. This nuanced portrayal enhances the novel's contribution to

feminist discourse, as it reflects the lived experiences of women who must continuously balance conformity and individuality.

Louisa May Alcott contributes to the discourse on women's rights by offering a narrative that centers women's voices, validates their struggles, and highlights their capacity for growth and transformation. *Little Women* stands as a significant literary work that not only reflects early feminist ideas, but also deepens the conversation around gender, identity, and resistance. By portraying these themes through relatable and emotionally grounded experiences, the novel continues to invite readers to reflect on the enduring challenges of inequality and the ongoing pursuit of autonomy and self-definition.

### **5.2.5 Unexpected Results**

One of the most significant unexpected findings was the realization that the novel not only challenges patriarchal norms, but also, at times, subtly reinforces traditional gender roles. While the March sisters demonstrate varying degrees of independence and self-awareness, their personal journeys often remain connected to socially accepted ideals, particularly in relation to domesticity, morality, and family life. This duality reveals a tension within the text, where resistance and conformity coexist rather than function as opposing forces.

Additionally, it became evident that resistance in the novel is not always expressed through overt or direct opposition to societal expectations. Instead, many forms of resistance are internal, emotional, and deeply personal. The characters often navigate their constraints through reflection, compromise, and gradual self-definition, suggesting that resistance can take subtle and complex forms. This insight expanded the initial understanding of resistance, highlighting it as a multifaceted process rather than a singular act of defiance.

Another unexpected result was the prominent role of family values and emotional bonds in shaping the identities of the protagonists. While the research initially focused on gender inequality, the analysis revealed that identity formation in the novel is equally

influenced by affection, moral guidance, and interpersonal relationships. This suggests that the construction of identity is not solely determined by external societal pressures, but also by internalized values and supportive environments.

In sum, these unexpected findings illustrate that *Little Women* portrays a rich and multifaceted exploration of identity, resistance, and autonomy. By showing that acts of defiance can be subtle, internal, and emotionally grounded, and that conformity and personal growth can coexist, the novel offers a nuanced understanding of women's experiences within patriarchal society. These insights reinforce the complexity of Alcott's narrative, emphasizing that empowerment and self-definition are processes shaped by both social constraints and intimate, relational influences.

### **5.2.6 Restatement of the Research Question**

This research sought to explore how *Little Women* represents the interconnected themes of gender, identity, and resistance within the context of nineteenth-century society. More specifically, it aimed to examine the ways in which the novel portrays gender inequality and how the lived experiences of the March sisters reflect, challenge, and negotiate the social expectations imposed upon women during this period.

Furthermore, the study questioned to what extent the narrative incorporates feminist elements and contributes to the broader discourse on women's rights. By focusing on the personal development, choices, and struggles of the protagonists, the research also sought to understand how identity is constructed in relation to both societal constraints and individual agency.

In this sense, the central research question can be restated as an inquiry into how Louisa May Alcott uses the experiences of her characters to depict and critically engage with the realities of gender roles, the formation of identity, and the various forms of resistance available to women in the nineteenth century.

Additionally, this inquiry extends to exploring the nuanced ways in which the March sisters negotiate their autonomy and moral agency within a society that simultaneously imposes limits and offers opportunities. The research considers how each

sister's individual trajectory from Jo's pursuit of intellectual and creative independence to Meg's negotiation of domestic responsibilities, Beth's quiet altruism, and Amy's artistic ambitions reflects broader social dynamics while also revealing personal strategies for self-expression and empowerment.

The study further examines how Alcott's narrative structure, character development, and thematic emphasis serve as both a reflection and critique of contemporary social norms. It investigates how resistance is not solely expressed through overt defiance but also through subtle, everyday acts of choice, resilience, and self-definition. In doing so, the research highlights the complex interplay between societal expectations and personal agency, demonstrating that the negotiation of gender, identity, and resistance is a dynamic and ongoing process within the novel.

Lastly, restating the research question in this expanded form emphasizes the dual focus of the study: on the one hand, understanding the historical and social realities that shape the March sisters' lives, and on the other, interpreting the enduring significance of Alcott's work in conversations about feminist thought, autonomy, and the evolving understanding of women's roles in society. This restatement situates the research within both literary and socio-historical frameworks, underlining the novel's relevance for contemporary analyses of gender and identity

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research on *Little Women*, several recommendations can be proposed for future studies and for the continued exploration of literary works through a feminist perspective.

Firstly, it is recommended that future research expand the analysis of gender, identity, and resistance by incorporating comparative studies with other literary works from the nineteenth century. Examining texts written by different authors or within diverse cultural contexts could provide a broader understanding of how gender inequality was represented and challenged across societies. This would allow for a more comprehensive view of the evolution of feminist thought in literature.

Secondly, further studies could benefit from the inclusion of interdisciplinary approaches, combining literary analysis with perspectives from history, sociology, and gender studies. Such approaches would enrich the interpretation of texts by situating them more deeply within their social and cultural contexts, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of the experiences of women and the structures that shaped their lives.

Additionally, it is recommended to explore the relevance of Louisa May Alcott's work in contemporary settings. Future research could examine how the themes presented in *Little Women* continue to resonate with modern audiences, particularly in relation to ongoing discussions about gender equality, identity formation, and women's rights. This would highlight the enduring significance of the novel and its contribution to current feminist discourse.

Finally, it is recommended that educational institutions continue to incorporate literary works such as *Little Women* into academic curricula, as they provide valuable opportunities for critical reflection on gender roles and social expectations. Engaging with these texts can foster awareness, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the historical and ongoing struggles for equality.

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