A Feminist Interpretation of Jo March's Rebellion

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Abstract. Little Women is the story of four girls in an ordinary family who grow up under their mother's tutelage during the closing days of the American Civil War. Through analyzing the experiences of the four daughters of the March family, this article shows that the second daughter, Jo, who initially wanted to become an independent woman writer, eventually failed to realize her dream and had to grow into a "new woman" who compromised between the traditional and independent roles.

Keywords: Jo March; Little Women; Feminism.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women has been a popular book since its publication, and although it is a narrative of everyday life, it is rich in substance. The book is autobiographical and reflects the times and Alcott's ideas. Historical research can benefit from her account, which reflects the changes and activities of the time.

Feminism is prevalent in our society today, but many of its activities depart from what is termed feminism, or even its original intent, and are somewhat extreme. Some of them also lack theoretical guidance. Especially in times of feminist movements, this book presents feminist ideas that transcend time, and the images of women are inspiring and iconic, reflecting contemporary women's quest for equality and freedom.

In the author's time, American society was undergoing a transition, and China is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation, not just in economics and politics, but in all aspects of its cultural life, especially in thought. As a result, studying the book can also provide insight into the transformation and reform of Chinese society today.

The ending of the film's female protagonist Jo March and male protagonist Laurie was widely talked about when the new Little Women film was released online in 2019. Many people consider Jo and Laurie's ending as tragic and a pity for the book, but others believe it is plausible. This thesis will analyses the character of Jo March from a feminist perspective in relation to contemporary views of marriage and love, as well as explore the period of her behavior and the methodology behind it, as well as the contextual factors and ideas conveyed in the book about the reasonableness of the ending.

2. Rebellion Against Social Traditions

2.1 Seeking Female Freedom

What is freedom? Although it is a broad topic, Jo is after the freedom that belongs to women. As Beauvoir (2021: 9) explains, women's freedom is the ability to establish a mutual relationship between themselves and men, where they acknowledge each other's subjectivity, but also acknowledge that they are mutually other. Women's freedom is not simply the rejection of their gender or their gender, but the open pursuit of the value of women's existence based on the acceptance of gender.

What are the values of women's existence? The formation of women does not happen overnight, but is closely related to the social environment, and it is the society that shapes their character, according to Beauvoir (2021: 9). Women have been able to participate in society's vast and busy

industrial production since the industrial revolution, creating a special value for society and, to a degree, improving women's social status. Women were also able to awaken their minds and think about their values because of this.

Jo has an undeniable boyish way of behaving. "Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle." (Alcott 2018: 5). Blowing the whistle was uncommon in the United States, which emphasized feminine etiquette at the time, as it looked immodest and too casual, and Jo's behavior here reflects her rebellion. Jo is portrayed positively here. "That is why I do it," she says bluntly when her sister accuses her of being too 'boyish'(Alcott 2018: 5). The first rebellion in the story takes place here, and it is taken positively, which is not radical, but also hooks the reader from the very first line.

Social stereotypes of women are resisted, such as the expectation that women should stay at home and do housework. "I never enjoyed washing, and I am going to take a vacation today and read, write, go visiting, and amuse myself" (Alcott 2018: 5) Here Jo clearly expresses her distaste for domesticity. As a result, she believes that she was not born to be confined to a small home, as she has greater causes to pursue; she dreams of living in the outside world and achieving her goals. According to her, the purpose of her existence is not to please others but to do what she wants to do to make herself happy.

2.2 Expressing Feelings Clearly

Throughout this book, Alcott expresses the conflict between her thoughts and the society in which she lives. She also subverts traditional ideas throughout the book. (Fetterley 1979: 382). During the book's plot, Jo's sister burns her manuscript, but her family must convince him to forgive his anger and cover-up and self-digest his negative emotions "Forgive one another, help each other, and begin again tomorrow." (Alcott 2018: 107)

Although he initially doesn't follow this notion, she thinks this is pedantic and impractical. "Jo still looked like a thunder cloud, and nothing went well all day." (Alcott 2018: 107). However, as she also pays for her actions in the novel, an author believes that this plot setting contains a particular bias. As if male writers were dissatisfied with the higher status of women than they were, so they explicitly set up some women's miserable endings to imply that women are incapable of doing great things in the past. She can take this story direction in two ways: on the one hand, it may be an interpretation of her real life, which she used to illustrate that women must hold onto their negative emotions or else there will be harmful consequences; on the other hand, she can use it ironically to demonstrate that in those days or in her family, one should hold onto one's anger and seek harmony.

Literature was her way of expressing her emotions. In those days, writing books belonged to men, and in those days, the mission given to women was to raise children, and at that time, women could not earn money by themselves because there were very few careers open to them. In those days, writing novels was considered a bad thing, and only those with nothing to do wrote novels. Despite being full of enthusiasm, her ideas would be considered deviant in the world, so she had to record them in writing.

3. Rebellion Against Marriage

Only when words, behaviors, and thoughts differ from social norms are they considered rebellious. Throughout the article, the mother serves as the spokesperson of the old society, appearing in a preaching role, and her words and actions reflect the ideals of the patriarchal society for women. Mrs. March once says, "to be loved and chosen by a righteous man is the most valuable and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman." (Alcott 2018:116). According to Mrs. March, men master marriage. Aman's happiness in life depends on finding a Google compatible band, which is crass because it objectifies women and places them on an unequal footing with men.

3.1 Ambiguity Regarding Gender Identity

Butler (1990: 173) argued that biological gender equals social gender and that all people, regardless of gender, have been socialized to be gender conformable from birth. Gender socialization connotes that female subjectivity is constructed and that it is constructed through continual repetition of performances. Institutions, discourses, and practices all play a role in shaping a subject's gender identity. Constant dialogue precedes the achievement of the goal.

In her early years, Jo wraps herself in a kind of masculinity combining feminism and masculinity. In a home where her father was often absent, she was the pillar of the family and could cut her long hair for the family's sake. Long, luxurious hair was even considered a symbol of femininity at the time, so losing it was no small matter. Despite this, she was willing to make sacrifices to maintain the family, and she remained committed to fulfilling her role at this time. Women see men as brave self-sacrifices who are rational rather than emotional.

The following text reflects Jo's perception of her gender temperament. "I'm the man of the family now Papa is away" (Alcott 2018: 8). Jo is not the oldest of the four sisters, but she sees herself as possessing the responsibility of shouldering her family, which is also concretely reflected in the following text. For example, she cut off her long hair to raise money for her father's treatment. For the sake of her family, she is willing to give up her pride. In this family, the fathers were absent for a long time, but the daughters did not complain because their fathers supported them. According to the gender performance theory, Jo feels obligated to play this role. However, she does not feel comfortable with her gender. The male gender represents strength in her mind, so she is yearning for it in her heart.

According to Jo, marriage is an equal partnership. It is only when words, actions, and thoughts defy social conventions that they are labelled rebellious. Liu (2016) suggests that women must give up the absolute she-other status, create mutuality with men, and establish this mutuality as their own. As a result, it is imperative that women re-examine and re-examine their own motives to break through the limits set by men. This essay portrays the mother as the spokesperson of the old society. She is always present in a didactic role, and whose words and actions reflect the patriarchal society's norms for women. Mrs. March once says, "to be loved and chosen by an interosseous man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman" (Alcott 2018: 116). Mrs. March believes that the mastery of marriage lies with the woman and therefore a woman's happiness depends on whether she is all chosen by a good man, but Jo sees this behavior as a reflection of the objectification of women and therefore she rejects it in her heart. Jo is paranoid and shows her rebellion with some seemingly unrelated actions.

3.2 Fear

3.2.1 Fear of Marriage

In the society of the time, marriage was considered the ultimate and only place for a woman to be. This was because her happiness was tied to whether she found a reliable husband or not. It was not just because women lacked financial options, but also because they lacked emotional options, and if they didn't marry, they would grow old, and they would have to marry for fear of becoming the old and withered single woman.

Additionally, Jo's father is absent early on, and the absence of fatherly love makes her fearful of love from the opposite sex. Furthermore, since she is the elder of the family, she is burdened with the responsibility of playing the role of her father. She sees herself as a tomboy to meet his expectations. However, following the principle of consistency between words and deeds, she believes that she should not indulge in love, eventually acquiring a fear of it.

3.2.2 Fear of Breaking the Female Community

Lee (2017: 3) argues that Jo's rejection of Laurie reflects more than just her search for freedom and male power; it also reflects her almost paranoid desire to preserve this painstakingly constructed female community.

Little Women constructs a community of women in which the father plays an absent role, much like Alcott's own experience. In this community, women are interdependent, and there is a need for leadership, a role that Jo takes on with bravery, competition, and assertiveness. Although the male role is missing in this community, it is not completely closed, and a male-dominated society still dominates. Within the community, there is a constant emphasis on women's norms of behaviour. They are limited because of living in a patriarchal society where the balance of power still favours men. It is a relic of the past that can never be forgotten. Although Alcott is feminist in spirit, it cannot be divorced from the context of its time. Nonetheless, this community stood out for moving towards innovation and development within shackles. Women were given a specific space for self-development.

Jo's fears are about the disruption of the female community and stem directly from a fear of the opposite sex and heterosexual love. Nevertheless, Jo always asks herself to play the role of the firm and self-sacrificing male, who cannot express his fears directly. It would be perceived as weakness, so Jo takes the extreme step of hiding this fear by avoiding it or rejecting it.

"No gentleman was admitted" (Alcott 2018: 24), the novel creates a warm and beautiful family for us, but the male role is missing in this family. Therefore, they create a closed-loop community of women in which men are excluded. In this respect, she resembles Shakespeare's Cordelia in King Lear. Cordelia believes that marriage will prevent her from loving her father because it will take away half of her responsibilities, love, and respect for him. Jo fears that marriage will lead to their original ecology and tranquility being destroyed, which she has no way of weighing. Therefore, Because of this, she is consumed with a deep sense of guilt that prevents her from facing it.

In rejecting Laurie, she does not explicitly state that she does not love him. As a result, she evades him in a way that is essentially fearful. Jo's rejection of Laurie reflects her rebellious spirit at its height. In this community, she is given respect, but her capricious nature is repressed to some extent (Lee 2017). While she rebels against this patriarchal society, if she stays with Laurie, she must give up her hobby, since this would not be acceptable in a patriarchal society, especially in Laurie's class, which demands that she be an elegant and proper noblewoman. The result is that she is confined to a small space at home, which is often anathema.

3.3 Incompatibleness

In accordance with Leowndes (2011: 30), for a relationship to last, it must conform to the principle of equivalence; looks, wealth, status, knowledge, character, and personality must be in balance.

When judging someone's suitability, many people look only at the surface. In other words, they only see the joy of their youth, but liking, love, and marriage are different things. Mrs March's advice to Jo, the differences in their behavior and way of thinking, including their family circumstances and personalities, are discussed in the article. A discussion of compatibility is included in Intimacy, and similarity and equivalence are discussed in How to Make the One You Love Fall in Love with You. The corresponding elements are almost rational and realistic. For a couple to move towards marriage, or a long-term relationship, they need a certain amount of familiarity in the early stages, what we call common ground. However, such similarities can also blur the line between love and friendship. As a result of balancing many factors, love is a combination of reason and sensibility. There are six dimensions to be considered: looks, possessions, status and prestige, knowledge, character, and personality. If there is an imbalance in an intimate relationship, there is an inequity in status between the parties. If this is the case, love is like a wavering scale, full of suspicions. The imbalance in relationships will eventually result in feelings of inferiority or superiority.

The personalities are incompatible. Laurie may want to stand on the side-lines, but Jo is determined to pursue her dreams. Despite Laurie's opposition, Jo is determined to pursue her dreams. Despite not being able to make ends meet, she left her home after suffering a huge blow and began writing to prove herself. In addition, she believes that the way women cross the distance that separates them from men is through work, and that that is the only way they can achieve concrete freedom. (Beauvoir 2021: 543) Furthermore, Laurie loves freedom, but he only wants to be immersed in his world. "To

live in Italy and to enjoy myself in my way." (Alcott 2018: 42). Jo is stubborn, and if they go their own way and cannot tolerate each other, the end is doomed to be tragic. Since they both live their lives according to their own rules, they will hurt each other in the end. as Marmee claims, they are too alike in temperament, but because they are too alike in status, they are too equal.

Status is incompatible. Social standing and position in a relationship are included in status. Lauren belongs to the upper class, and the social conditions at the time prevent her from deviating from the norm. Further, Jo is unable to meet Laurie's expectations of marriage; although they can play together, marriage is different for each man, and Laurie once said that he preferred the way Amy addressed him. Since this would give him a sense of control, people cannot say that this is wrong. However, it doesn't work for Jo, who strives to be different, who is against subjugation, who prefers to be in control rather than submissive. Although feminism was developing at the time, it did not change the fact that it was a patriarchal society.

4. Conclusion

In the end, Jo's choice represents a conflict between her sense of independence and the norms of society, as well as an expression of her identity and triumph. Her rebellion against social norms or her rebellious view of marriage make her a subject of a new generation of women's moral growth stories, as Jo continues to grow in her own way, pursuing the value of life and becoming a moral role model for many female readers. (Yu 2011:144).

Jo's rebellion focuses on her rebellion against social norms and her rebellion against marriage. She rebels against social norms because she wants to express her rebellion against female norms in this way and because she dares to express her negative emotions in this way. Thus, her rebellion is not only personal, but also a microcosm of society, and as such, she is an example of a new kind of woman. Because she does not wish to compromise with society, she views marriage as the culmination of her rebellion; she is afraid of marriage because she has lived in a society where male roles are absent for a long time, yet she has to play them, which causes her to doubt her gender identity; As well as fearing that the female community will be shattered, she only pretends to be strong because she does not wish to be in a marriage. Marriage requires more consideration, Jo and Laurie's personalities and status are not equal, and once this imbalance is not rectified, a relationship will end.

As a result, Jo's rebellion against social norms reflects the empowerment of women in that era, an appeal for freedom; and her rejection of the concept of marriage reveals her self-worth and satisfaction with self-fulfillment.

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