

Defining Nineteenth-Century Womanhood: The Cult of Marmee and *Little Women*

Sarah Rivas

Abstract

This paper explores the character of Marmee in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women in order to illustrate Marmee's influence on her daughters and the message concerning womanhood and femininity evoked by the novel as a whole. The Cult of Marmee—an eclectic mixture of Barbara Welter's the "Cult of True Womanhood," feminism, spirituality, transcendentalism, and social reform—drives the plot of Little Women by becoming the standard from which the four March sisters construct their individual identities. This paper establishes Marmee as the primary influence on the March sisters, and therefore as the primary influence on the novel's plot, while exploring the five elements of the Cult of Marmee as they relate to the novel's characters and to real nineteenth-century women. Ultimately, any rigid conclusion regarding the novel as feminist or antifeminist must be grounded in an understanding of the novel's historical context. Alcott offers an imperfect picture of liberated womanhood; in spite of this, however, Little Women's message of hope for female independence and strength should not be ignored.

“Oh, my girls, however long you may live, I never can wish you a greater happiness than this!” These are the final words in one of the most beloved children’s stories of all time—Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (380). Mrs. March, or Marmee, speaks these words to her daughters in a family-centered happy ending that has long delighted girls and women alike. Meg, Jo, and Amy are happily married with families of their own, and they seem content to carry on the legacy begun by their mother Marmee. The trials and joys of the four March sisters culminate in domesticity and matrimony, even for rambunctious Jo. But what does it all mean? Is *Little Women* simply a confirmation of rather repressive nineteenth-century gender roles, or is it a subversive text meant to inspire young girls to independence and self-sufficiency?ⁱ This remains perhaps the most controversial debate connected with *Little Women*. Remarkably, throughout this critical debate, Marmee has been largely ignored; however, her philosophies influence each of the four girls’ actions, and this influence causes them to make the decisions that ultimately drive the novel’s plot. The existing feminist debate concerning *Little Women* stems in part from inconsistencies in Marmee’s philosophy, leaving readers to wonder exactly what Marmee believes. Nevertheless, what Marmee believes may be one of the most important elements of the novel. The Cult of Marmee—an eclectic mixture of Barbara Welter’s the “Cult of True Womanhood,” feminism, spirituality, transcendentalism, and social reform—drives the plot of *Little Women* by becoming the standard from which the four March sisters construct their individual identities.

Critics, including Gregory K. Eiselein and Anne Phillips, cite Marmee as a fictional construction of Abba Alcott, Louisa’s own mother (196). As a result, much of the scholarly attention paid to Marmee remains almost exclusively autobiographical in nature. Madeleine Stern’s biography *Louisa May Alcott* (1985) provides the most scholarly information on which to base autobiographical interpretations of the novel. However, these interpretations, while helpful, do not explore Marmee’s philosophies through a close reading of the text of *Little Women* itself, an exploration necessary for understanding the themes and messages conveyed throughout the novel. In spite of this seeming critical neglect, multiple critics do agree that the mother figure is central to the nineteenth-century home, and, therefore, central to the nineteenth-century domestic novel. Eiselein and Phillips call Marmee an “omnipotent presence” (197), while Nina Auerbach asserts the absolute authority of the Victorian mother within her domestic sphere, particularly as far as her daughters are concerned (7). Because of her position of authority, Marmee’s beliefs must be carefully examined in order to better understand her influence over her daughters.

Little Women is the coming-of-age story of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March. When the novel begins, the sisters’ beloved father Mr. March is serving away from home as a chaplain in the Union army. In his absence, Marmee educates and cares for her daughters despite limited financial resources. The sisters become close friends with Laurie, the grandson of their next-door neighbor, and together they experience the trials and joys of growing up in the mid-nineteenth century. As the novel progresses, Mr. March is wounded in the war, and Marmee leaves to care for him. While Marmee is away, Beth contracts scarlet fever, and though she begins to recover, she never fully regains her strength. Later,

Mr. Brooke, Laurie's tutor, falls in love with Meg, much to the consternation of her sister Jo. The two marry, and Jo eventually moves to New York to pursue a career in writing. While there, she meets a German professor, Frederick Bhaer, whom she marries at the end of the novel. Tragically, Beth's illness takes a turn for the worse, and she dies soon after Jo returns from New York. Meanwhile, Amy, who has matured significantly since the novel's opening, spends time in France where she falls in love with Laurie. At the novel's end, each of the three surviving sisters marries and has children, and Jo opens a school for boys in lieu of pursuing a literary career.

Throughout the novel, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy do not seem to question Marmee's goodness, wisdom, or absolute authority. They voluntarily appeal to her for guidance of all kinds and look to her as their disciplinarian. When Meg attends a party with the Moffatts, she dresses up and flirts gaily, causing Laurie to disapprove of her actions. Meg feels remorse, and soon after her return home says to her mother, "Marmee, I want to 'fess'" (82). Meg voluntarily confesses her perceived fault without prior threat of punishment to her mother, her moral authority. Mrs. March shows no surprise at this voluntary admission, but calmly responds, "I thought so; what is it, dear?" (82). This scene reveals that Marmee's authority follows Meg wherever she goes, and this principle holds true for each of the four sisters.

Despite their perception of Marmee as primary moral authority, the March sisters seem to adore her more than anyone else in the novel. In chapter one, the girls decide to devote their Christmas money exclusively to Marmee. They surprise her with a slew of presents, choosing to honor her instead of buying gifts for themselves (14). This adoration continues after the girls marry. As soon as Meg and John Brooke say their vows, Meg offers her mother, instead of John, her first kiss as a married woman: "It wasn't at all the thing, I'm afraid, but the minute she was fairly married, Meg cried, 'The first kiss for Marmee!' and, turning, gave it with her heart on her lips" (200). This illustrates only one of several incidents in the text in which Marmee is equated with a male lover. While talking to Jo near the end of the second half of the novel, Marmee encourages her to wait patiently until "the best lover of all comes to give you your reward," meaning a male romantic lover (341). Jo declares in reply, "Mothers are the *best* lovers in the world," though she then admits she would "like to try all kinds" (341). Though Jo is interested in a romantic relationship, her interest does not supersede her adoration and reverence for her mother. Marmee occupies the central place in her daughters' experiences, and her ideas and philosophies serve as the model from which the girls construct their own. Therefore, Marmee's ideology becomes a sort of religion, or cult, which her daughters follow faithfully. The Cult of Marmee extends its influence through each chapter in the novel.

The first aspect of the Cult of Marmee derives from Welter's "Cult of True Womanhood," defined as a combination of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152).ⁱⁱ Upper and middle-class nineteenth century women were expected to cultivate these four virtues in order to become a "true" woman. Men and women alike actively promoted the tenets of this cult, and Marmee is no exception. As Welter asserts, "If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately

as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic” (152). Marmee adheres rather closely to three of these tenets—purity, submissiveness (to Mr. March), and domesticity. However, though Marmee is quite spiritual, she does not actively practice conventional Christianity. For many nineteenth-century Christians, particularly Calvinists, attending weekly Sunday services was central to the implementation of their faith. In *Little Women*, there is no mention of the March family attending Sunday services even though Welter cites piety, or religion, as “the core of woman’s virtue” (152). Therefore, by not adhering to this tenet of the Cult of True Womanhood in the traditional sense, Marmee subverts established gender roles. However, Marmee does practice an unconventional form of moral piety loosely associated with Christianity, the third aspect of the Cult of Marmee termed “spirituality” for the purposes of this discussion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Though Marmee does not adhere to the virtue of piety in the Cult of True Womanhood, she confirms the remaining three virtues at various moments in the text, including purity. According to Welter, purity is “essential” to the nineteenth-century woman; without it, a woman becomes “unnatural and unfeminine” (154). This virtue remains somewhat concealed throughout the pages of *Little Women*, but its implications are present in the text. As Welter asserts, “The marriage night was the single great event of a woman’s life, when she bestowed her greatest treasure upon her husband, and from that time on was completely dependent upon him, an empty vessel” (154-5). Although Marmee does not explicitly address the issue of virginity, she does stress the monumental importance of marriage in a woman’s life during a conversation with Meg and Jo: “To be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman; and I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience” (Alcott 84). In this statement Marmee implies that her daughters’ life experiences will be incomplete unless they are “chosen” by a good man, an interesting word choice that highlights the girls’ lack of agency.^{iv} The underlying message, of course, is that one is not “chosen” by a “good” man unless one is a “good” girl; for nineteenth-century proponents of the Cult of True Womanhood, being “good” means being pure, saving oneself for the “beautiful experience” of marriage Marmee describes.

Though Marmee does not hesitate to exercise authority over her daughters, she seems to defer to Mr. March on any issue that extends outside the bounds of the home, implementing the virtue of submissiveness outlined by Welter as “the most feminine virtue” (158). Marmee’s submissiveness most strongly demonstrates itself in questions of morality. After Amy falls through the frozen pond while chasing Jo and Laurie, Jo discusses her faults, most notably her anger, with her mother. Marmee confesses that she too struggles with anger, to which Jo replies, “Why, you are never angry!” (Alcott 68). Marmee asserts that she has tried to “cure” her anger for forty years, causing Jo to exclaim, “Poor mother! what helped you then?” Marmee replies, “Your father, Jo. He never loses patience,—never doubts or complains,—but always hopes, and works, and waits so cheerfully, that one is ashamed to do otherwise before him” (69). Marmee does not view Mr. March as her moral equal; instead, he is her superior, and she looks to him for acceptable patterns of behavior. Her deferral is itself a submissive act, though the fact that she defers to him on questions of morality, generally understood as

a feminine concern in the nineteenth century, shows her submission even in a matter where she could legitimately assume authority. Her submission reinforces the idea of Mr. March as the moral superior; notably, Mr. March's faults and shortcomings are not discussed in the novel, while Marmee and the sisters' faults are discussed at length.

Just as Marmee confirms the virtue of submissiveness, she also stresses to her daughters the importance of domesticity in multiple, rather humorous incidents throughout *Little Women*. In chapter eleven, "Experiments," the girls decide to take a weeklong break from their work, with Marmee's permission. Unfortunately, their experiment does not produce the hoped-for result of continual rest and enjoyment; on the contrary, Beth's little bird Pip dies from neglect, Jo makes a dreadful supper, Amy damages a white frock by sitting in the grass, and Meg ruins some of her clothes by careless mending (92-8). Mrs. March allows the girls to follow this experiment to its conclusion, using their failure as a teaching moment. Marmee suggests to Jo, "Suppose you learn plain cooking; that's a useful accomplishment, which no woman should be without" (99). Jo's culinary failures, though humorous even to Marmee, will not serve her well as a nineteenth-century young lady, and Marmee is acutely aware of this. Jo must cultivate characteristics of domesticity in order to meet societal expectations and save herself from embarrassment and isolation. However, domestic competency is not enough; the girls must learn to work together for the good of all. Practicing collaborative labor teaches them how to manage their own homes: "Don't you feel that it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear or forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all?" (99). The women of the house are responsible for making home "comfortable and lovely," and the March sisters must practice keeping house before they are given homes of their own.

Ironically, these elements of the Cult of True Womanhood are paired throughout the text with elements of radical feminist ideology, sometimes in the same scene. In fact, immediately after Mrs. March tells Meg and Jo that being "chosen by a good man" will be "the best and sweetest thing" that can happen to them, she tells the girls, "better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands" (84). Marmee insinuates that her girls' happiness remains more important to her than their marriage prospects, a reversal from the dominant nineteenth-century philosophy that women contributed little to society unless they were married and could have children. Her assertion is decidedly feminist, even though an arguably sexist statement precedes it. However, the fact that Marmee's three surviving daughters do marry and pursue almost entirely domestic interests at the end of the novel seems to contradict this feminist declaration. In spite of this, Marmee's assertion, "better be happy old maids than unhappy wives," seems to undercut her previous statement that female fulfillment is ultimately derived from being chosen by a worthy man (84).

Later, Marmee more convincingly espouses feminist ideas when she encourages her daughter Meg to be proactive and take responsibility for her marriage and her personal education. After Meg's marriage to John Brooke, she absorbs herself in the care of their two small children and neglects her relationship with her husband. As a result, John chooses to

visit friends in the evening instead of coming home, and Meg laments that she “might as well be a widow” (306). Mrs. March tells her to involve John in the children’s upbringing, and she exhorts Meg to “take an interest in whatever John likes, talk with him, let him read to you, exchange ideas, and help each other in that way. Don’t shut yourself up in a bandbox because you are a woman, but understand what is going on, and educate yourself” (308). Marmee promotes mental equality and the exchange of ideas in marriage, bringing together the traditionally female sphere of the home and the traditionally male sphere of the outside world. Sarah Elbert, author of *A Hunger for Home*, asserts that as far as Marmee is concerned, being a good wife requires proactivity and independence: “Docility is a fine quality in a daughter, even a sister, Alcott admits, but dangerous in a wife. Meg becomes dowdy and dependent... Mrs. March shares her domestic secret with her daughter: a good marriage is based on mutuality of interests and responsibilities” (203-4). After Meg begins including John in the children’s upbringing and seeks to engage his mind, he once again prefers to stay at home with her. They begin to share responsibilities, even domestic pursuits. According to Alcott, through teamwork Meg and John find “the key to...mutual helpfulness” (313). This idea of “mutual helpfulness” noticeably conflicts with the tenets of the Cult of True Womanhood.

Marmee also praises hard work as a means through which women can attain independence. After she suggests that Jo learn to cook, Marmee praises work as a source of independence: “Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for every one; it keeps us from *ennui* and mischief...and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion” (99). Though Marmee generally encourages her girls to accomplish domestic work, rather than pursuing any sort of work outside the home, she does recognize the importance of female contributions to society, even if these contributions are domestic in nature. In order to achieve independence, women must prove their value and worth. As Elbert eloquently states, “Accepting, even glorifying the importance of women’s domestic work, Alcott emphasizes that men are homeless without women...it follows that women have already proved themselves in the world; thus their ability to extend their sphere is unquestioned in *Little Women*” (202). Therefore, according to Elbert, domesticity can provide the doorway through which women become valued as contributing members of society, and Marmee most certainly encourages her daughters to contribute by proving that “domestic work is real work” (202). In so doing, Marmee encourages a feminist spirit in her daughters and inspires in them a desire to contribute to society.

Coupled with this more liberal idea of female contributions to society is the more traditional concept of spirituality. For Marmee, spirituality is a mixture of Christianity and the idea that one should always strive to be as good as possible (particularly if one is a little girl). Though the March family, like Louisa May Alcott’s family, does not appear to attend weekly church services, Marmee still believes in God and invokes His help in times of need. After Marmee tells Jo about her struggle to control her anger, she tells her daughter to trust God and pray to Him: “The more you love and trust Him, the nearer you will feel to Him, and the less you will depend on human power and wisdom...Believe this heartily, and go to

God with all your little cares, and hopes, and sins, and sorrows” (Alcott 70). In this passage, Marmee reveals her direct relationship with God, the “Heavenly Father,” though references to Christ, church, and other components of the Christian faith are absent from the text (70).^v Marmee undoubtedly believes in God, but the text does not clarify the exact nature of this belief. The God she references appears to be the Christian God, though she does not seem to practice Christianity in a traditional, Calvinist sense.^{vi}

Though Marmee makes a couple of direct references to God, she more often communicates the importance of moral virtue to her daughters, a communication laden with spiritual overtones; however, these overtones are not explicitly Christian. The first chapter of *Little Women*, “Playing Pilgrims,” outlines Marmee’s idea that the four sisters pretend they are on a journey to the Celestial City, in the hopes that this game will enable the girls to handle life’s everyday trials and challenges with grace and goodness: “Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before father comes home” (18). Though *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a decidedly Christian text, in *Little Women* it becomes more of a guidebook for living a moral life.^{vii} The rest of the novel takes on some allegoric characteristics as the March sisters embark on their journey through life. According to Holly Blackford in her article “Vital Signs at Play: Objects as Vessels of Mother-Daughter Discourse in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*,” Marmee repurposes *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a masculine text by a masculine author, using it to illustrate her daughters’ journey towards mature femininity (5). Blackford then argues, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress* stands in for the absent father in the March house. It is a cultural metaphor for both Christian progress and individual child development” (6). In many ways, *Pilgrim’s Progress* provides the crux on which the novel itself hinges. The girls’ sense of the spiritual and moral journey that they are taking drives the plot, and Alcott includes explicit allusions to *Pilgrim’s Progress* throughout the text.

Marmee’s sense of morality and spirituality is strongly tied to the idea of “mending a fault,” or purging one’s character of vices, no matter how insignificant they may seem (Alcott 61). After Amy’s contraband limes are discovered at school, Mr. Davis strikes her, and Marmee decides to withdraw Amy from school (after consulting Mr. March, of course). However, though she does not condone Mr. Davis’s method of punishment, Marmee does encourage Amy to mend her faults: “You are getting to be altogether too conceited and important, my dear, and it is quite time you set about correcting it” (61). Though Marmee’s words are somewhat “severe,” she firmly believes in the necessity of cultivating morality (61). She does not fail to stress the importance of good character in everyday moments, including story time; her daughters have come to expect this from their mother: “Tell another story, mother; one with a moral to it, like this. I like to think about them afterwards, if they are real, and not too preachy” (42). Because the March sisters adore Marmee, they are eager to hear whatever she has to say, and this makes them particularly receptive to her moral instruction.

Marmee’s instruction encompasses more than the morals contained in these didactic stories, however; Marmee also espouses ideas about education gleaned from the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists. This philosophy strongly influences other components of the

Cult, particularly feminism and spirituality. Transcendentalism embraced radical ideas that often overturned traditional notions of gender and religion. Bronson Alcott, Louisa's father, was one of the great Transcendentalists, cited by Jane Duran as a "forerunner...of the pragmatists" (232). His influence can be seen throughout the pages of *Little Women*, particularly concerning issues of education. Unlike his contemporary Henry David Thoreau, who advocated nature as the ideal source of education, Bronson believed that by cultivating an observant attitude, one could learn best from interacting with others. He also believed that classrooms could be just as effective as natural surroundings, though unfortunately true learning did not often occur in the public education system. Like Margaret Fuller, Bronson believed that "Education...is a continuous process" (Duran 238). This is a process that Marmee fully embraces, using the daily happenings in her daughters' lives to teach them valuable lessons.

In *Little Women*, Marmee seeks to educate her daughters through their interactions with others. She adopts unconventional methods that take the girls outside of the classroom and into the real world for their education. According to Susan Laird, Marmee's "curriculum... includes the complex art of learning from experience to love and survive, come what may" (297). Marmee allows her daughters to learn from experience multiple times in the novel. When Amy wants to throw a fashionable (and expensive) party, Mrs. March expresses her concern. Amy assures her that all will be well, offering to pay for it. Marmee agrees, in spite of her reservations: "Mrs. March knew that experience was an excellent teacher, and, when it was possible, she left her children to learn alone the lessons which she would gladly have made easier, if they had not objected to taking advice" (Alcott 206). Without relinquishing her authority, Marmee employs a hands-off parenting method that strongly resembles Transcendentalist ideas about education.

Transcendentalism is not the only nineteenth-century philosophy that Marmee embraces. In keeping with the social reform movement that continued to gain momentum throughout the nineteenth century, Marmee also encourages her girls to engage in social activism. Interestingly, she does not encourage them to campaign for the female vote or prison reform; instead, she emphasizes local poverty and needs that are immediately accessible to her daughters, implying that they should waste no time in offering help to those who need it. In chapter two, "A Merry Christmas," Marmee asks her girls to donate their breakfast to the Hummel family, a single mother with six children and not enough food to eat: "My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?" (Alcott 21). Though the girls look forward all year to Christmas breakfast as a special feast, they agree to part with the delicacies and content themselves with bread and milk for breakfast. The narrator notes, "when they went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their breakfasts" (22). In this scene, charity offers the girls a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction that further motivates them to give of themselves and their resources.

In chapter seventeen, the girls are asked to give of themselves in an episode that stresses the importance of social reform. The girls discuss which sister should visit the Hummel family,

implying that the four girls have continued to care for the Hummels since the donation of their Christmas breakfasts. Meg claims she is too tired for a visit, and Jo complains that the weather will worsen her cold. Beth, who has visited the Hummels' house every day to help care for their sick baby, ventures out yet again (141-2). Tragically, the Hummel baby passes away in her arms, and when Beth comes home, Jo finds her "sitting on the medicine chest, looking very grave, with red eyes, and a camphor bottle in her hand" (142). Beth has contracted scarlet fever from her contact with the sick baby; Meg and Jo, who have had the fever before, are immune (143). Had Meg and Jo visited the Hummels themselves, taking responsibility for their charitable duties, Beth would not have contracted the fever, which ultimately causes her death. Though this consequence may seem extreme, Meg and Jo's refusal to perform the duties suggested to them by their mother causes their sister's death, a morbid but integral part of the plot of *Little Women*.

The Cult of Marmee combines several, often conflicting, ideologies, including the Cult of True Womanhood, feminism, spirituality, transcendentalism, and social reform. These five components are a complex mixture of common nineteenth-century philosophies and subversive ideas reminiscent of modern thought. However, these components overlap and complement one another in ways that go beyond the scope of this study. Further research is necessary fully to explore the elements of the Cult of Marmee and their interactions with one another, as well as their place in nineteenth-century thought and culture. Perhaps most importantly, scholars and critics should remember that *Little Women* is indeed a product of another time, as Barbara Sicherman notes in her article "Reading *Little Women*: the Many Lives of a Text." Applying twenty-first century definitions of feminism or social activism is unfair to Alcott's progressive, but still by modern standards conservative, text.

Perhaps the most significant legacy of *Little Women* is its message of equality for the many women and girls who have read it since its publication. As Richard H. Brodhead, author of "Starting Out in the 1860s: Alcott, Authorship, and the Postbellum Literary Field," notes, "*Little Women* tolerates deviations from normative gender identities unknown to earlier works in the domestic genre" (624). Clearly, *Little Women* contains revolutionary, subversive ideas. However, Brodhead identifies *Little Women* as a domestic novel, a quintessentially nineteenth-century literary form. Perhaps Brodhead has pinpointed the reason that Marmee seems to contradict herself, and scholars and critics cannot seem to agree on the underlying message of this novel: Alcott espoused radical ideas, but she was also a product of the Victorian Age. Joining some of the earliest feminist causes, Alcott advocated equality in marriage and independence for women. Though she did not push these concepts to their ultimate conclusion, as modern feminists might wish, she thought more openly about social and gender-related issues than many of her peers. Marmee, too, remains progressive while concurrently choosing to espouse certain Victorian ideals. Perhaps this paradox is most evident in the character of Jo, who at the novel's end is happily married with many boys to care for. She appears to have abandoned her writing and declares, "the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely and cold to me now. I haven't given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I'm sure it will be all the better for such

experiences and illustrations as these” (Alcott 379). Though Jo longs for complete fulfillment and professional achievement, she, like Marmee, is content to work hard and wait. Like her mother, Jo has accepted both the joys and difficulties of nineteenth-century womanhood, and through her and her sisters the Cult of Marmee will live on.

Notes

ⁱ See Keyser, Elizabeth Lennox. “‘The Most Beautiful Things in All the World’?: Families in Little Women.” *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark, Eds. New York: Garland, 1999. 83-96. Print.

ⁱⁱ The Cult of True Womanhood certainly did not apply to all nineteenth-century women all of the time. See Roberts, Mary Louise. “True Womanhood Revisited.” *Journal of Women’s History* 14.1 (2002): 150-5. *Project Muse*. Web. 12 December 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ See pages 9-11.

^{iv} For a discussion on 19th-century marriage see Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking, 2005. Print.

^v See Taves, Ann. “Mothers and Children and the Legacy of Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Christianity.” *The Journal of Religion* 67.2 (1987): 203-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 November 2012.

^{vi} Notably, Bronson and Abba Alcott rejected Calvinism in favor of Unitarian philosophies. See “Religion.” Eiselein, Gregory K. and Anne Phillips. *The Louisa May Alcott Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001. Print.

^{vii} For an in-depth exploration of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Little Women*, see Halttunen, Karen. “The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott.” *Feminist Studies* 10.2 (1984): 233-54. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 November 2012.

Works Cited

- Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. New York: Norton, 2004. Print.
- Auerbach, Nina. "Waiting Together: Alcott on Matriarchy." *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Ed. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Garland, 1999. 7-26. Print.
- Blackford, Holly. "Vital Signs at Play: Objects as Vessels of Mother-Daughter Discourse in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*." *Children's Literature* Vol. 34 (2006): 1-36. *Literature Online*. Web. 16 October 2012.
- Brodhead, Richard H. "Starting Out in the 1860s: Alcott, Authorship, and the Postbellum Literary Field." *Little Women*. Ed. Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein. New York: Norton, 2004. 624-32. Print.
- Duran, Jane. "Bronson Alcott: Transcendentalism in the Personal." *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 45.2 (2009): 231-9. *Academic Search Premier*. 15 November 2012.
- Elbert, Sarah. *A Hunger for Home*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987. Print.
- Laird, Susan. "Learning from Marmee's Teaching: Alcott's Response to Girls' Miseducation." *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Ed. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark. New York: Garland, 1999. 285-321. Print.
- "Marmee." Eiselein, Gregory K. and Anne Phillips. *The Louisa May Alcott Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001. Print.
- Sicherman, Barbara. "Reading *Little Women*: the Many Lives of a Text." *Little Women*. Ed. Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein. New York: Norton, 2004. 632-57. Print.
- Stern, Madeleine B. *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1985. Print.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-174. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 November 2012.

