About This Volume

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A nine-year-old girl, battling pneumonia, receives a present: an edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* that has been handed down from her grandmother to her mother and now to her. Opening it, she is immediately drawn in as Jo March grumbles, "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents" (11). Why won't there be presents? Who are these sisters, and why are they calling each other "niminy piminy chits" (12)? She is instantly and forever caught up in the lives and trials and tribulations of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy.

A second reader comes to Alcott's masterpiece later in life. A graduate student in American literature, developing an expertise in Civil War-era history and culture, he starts reading *Little Women*, intrigued to find fifteen-year-old Jo March announcing, "It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games, and work, and manners. I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy, and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit like a poky old woman" (12–13). He then discovers that Alcott has written in different genres—not only "children's" novels, but also fairy tales, short stories, humorous sketches, poems, novels for adults, and sensational thrillers about intrigue, illicit love, drug addiction, revenge, and other dark subjects that were published anonymously or pseudonymously. This new perspective on her range and her career makes him very interested in what he sees simmering beneath the surface of *Little Women*.

However readers come to *Little Women,* the novel has the power to capture their attention, as it has since its initial publication in 1868. Never out of print, and the inspiration for two sequels, countless imitations, plays, movies, radio and TV adaptations, operas, sonatas, illustrations, toys, stamps, and more, *Little Women* remains beloved. Jo March and her sisters have inspired readers and fans to write, run, act, play, laugh, squabble and make up, and to think more deeply about what it means to be a woman. While many

other nineteenth-century American novels have been relegated to musty libraries and memory, *Little Women* remains relevant.

Students, too, have read, discussed, and learned from *Little Women* ever since its publication. For example, a 1927 *New York Times* poll of high school students identified *Little Women* as the book that most influenced them. Lavinia Russ reported at the book's centennial in 1968 that *Little Women* was one of the two most circulated books in the New York Public Library (99). Although for decades the novel was omitted from public school curricula, national curriculum reforms are now requiring that schools assign more substantive and complex readings, and *Little Women* may be acknowledged as a classic that is rich and meaningful, while remaining engaging and accessible. Over the past four decades, recognizing *Little Women*'s appeal to high school and university readers as well as scholars in a number of disciplines, publishers such as Modern Library, Penguin, Broadview Press, and Norton, among others, have produced several student-friendly editions of the work.

In bringing together a team of scholars to create original essays for this Critical Insights volume, the editors have focused on what students would be most interested in and what they would need to know about *Little Women* and the context in which it was produced. The initial group of essays included here on "Critical Contexts" has been prepared by some of the world's most distinguished experts on Alcott and her writings. Coeditor of the standard editions of Alcott's *Journals* and *Selected Letters* and nearly a dozen other books on Alcott, Daniel Shealy provides for this volume an essay about the novel's historical and cultural context, titled "*Little Women* in Its Time." Drawing from his extensive knowledge of the Alcott family as well as the larger issues of the 1860s (including the Civil War, reform movements, immigration trends, and more), Shealy positions *Little Women* as a text that is both rooted in and transcendent of its era. The author of *The Afterlife of "Little Women"* (2014) and editor of *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews* (2004), Beverly Lyon Clark is the foremost authority on the reception of *Little Women*. Her essay for this volume provides an overview of the

critical reception of Alcott's novel from its publication to the present. Significantly, according to Clark, "scholarly respect for Alcott's work is accelerating: half of the pieces on *Little Women* currently indexed in the MLA online bibliography were published after 2000, twice the rate for the previous quarter century." Nineteenth-century Americanist Bruce Ronda, author of *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, A Reformer On Her Own Terms* (1999) and *Reading the Old Man: John Brown in American Culture* (2008) among other works, has created for this volume an essay on the secularization of nineteenth-century America and the ways that Alcott "seeks to retain historical religious references and present a kind of religious 'glow' to her account of the Marches, while also rooting their lives in the material circumstances of middle-class life in Victorian America." Ronda models for students the way that ideas about secularization can provide an apt and original critical lens for examining Alcott's novel amid the era's shifting attitudes toward spirituality and religious belief. Finally, in "Mignon's Song in America: *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and *Little Women,*" Christine Doyle, author of *Louisa May Alcott and Charlotte Brontë: Transatlantic Translations* (2000) and an expert on German influences on Alcott, provides insight into the ways that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel (published in 1795–96), resonates throughout *Little Women*, in Alcott's characterizations of Laurie as well as the March sisters, in the text's representation of actors and acting, and particularly in its conclusion, which Doyle sees in a more positive light than other critics.

The essays in the "Critical Readings" section address a range of issues relevant to a twenty-first century reader's consideration of *Little Women*. For most of the twentieth century, popular editions of Alcott's novel commonly reproduced the text of the revised, "Regular" edition originally published in 1880, not the original edition that Alcott published in 1868–69. The revised edition significantly altered the portrayal of major characters and the lively, sometimes slangy, colloquial language of the original text. In "Quinny-Dingles, Quirks, and Queer-Looking Men: 'Regularizing' *Little Women*," Anne K. Phillips summarizes and assesses the textual

changes, while also scrutinizing what might have provoked Alcott's publishers to make such alterations.

Throughout *Little Women*, a range of characters are found in the act of writing, whether it's contributing to a family newspaper and collaborating on plays, sending letters to Marmee and Father March in Washington, or sharing "round robin" journals about their travels to locations such as New York City and a series of European cities. In "'The precious home letters': Letter-Writing in *Little Women*," distinguished scholar Theresa Strouth Gaul draws from the field of Epistolary Studies to understand "to what effect Alcott employed letters in *Little Women*." Highlighting Alcott's "abrupt shift in genre from novelistic prose to the epistolary" in certain chapters of the novel, Gaul argues, "the letter form helped Alcott achieve ends that standard prose narration could not": Alcott "used the genre at key transitional moments in the plot to mediate anxieties about gender, women's mobility, and courtship." A complementary essay by Marlowe Daly-Galeano focuses on Jo March as a woman author who struggles to balance a writing career alongside personal and familial responsibilities and obligations. Daly-Galeano asks two important questions: "*Why, if Jo loves writing so much, does she seem to give it up?* and *Why does Jo marry Professor Bhaer*?" Pursuing these questions, she arrives at "an understanding of the complex and conflicted, but also generative, nature of the female author's position."

Ronda suggests in his essay that *Little Women* "shows us . . . a more heterodox vision of American middle-class life, where religious references, language, and beliefs were mixed up with secular, worldly pursuits and goals." R. Eric Tippin is similarly interested in the way that Alcott has mixed and mingled religious references and beliefs in her novel. In "'Up the Steep Hill by Trying': The Unorthodox Christianity of *Little Women*," he traces the way the novel represents elements of Puritanism, Unitarianism, and Transcendentalism. He argues that *Little Women* is "evasive in its religion" and that, while it does manifest aspects of all three of these belief systems, it "ultimately rejects any one traditional system of worship or belief" in favor of "its own ecumenical religion."

Considering the context in which *Little Women* was produced—in response to a specific request from the publisher Roberts Brothers of Boston for a girls' book that might appeal to middle-class girls the way that the works of Horatio Alger and Oliver Optic engaged middle-class boys—Sandra Burr offers "Beneath the Umbrellas of Benevolent Men: Validating the Middle-Class Woman in *Little Women* and *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*." Margaret Sidney's *Five Little Peppers* appeared in 1881 and was popular in its own era, inspiring eleven sequels and selling over two million copies by Sidney's death in 1924. Burr focuses on the trajectories of Jo March and Polly Pepper in terms of their domestic skills, noting that Jo becomes increasingly capable in the domestic sphere, while Polly, though initially quite adept, becomes increasingly inept. Focusing also on the domestic, but drawing direction from New Economic Criticism in her essay titled "'dishes and dusters': Valuing Beth's Labor in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*; or, Staying in for Service," Lorinda B. Cohoon argues that although many critics have been dismissive of Beth March's domestic talents and her contributions to the household, she deserves attention and respect. As Cohoon shows, Alcott's depiction of this quiet, but essential, sister is in fact a "complex meditation on nineteenth-century culture's devaluation of women's work."

In what may be a highly scrutinized and vigorously debated section of this volume, three contributors address issues of courtship and marriage in *Little Women*. In "Unsettling Engagements in *Moods* and *Little Women*; or, Learning to Love Louisa May Alcott," Sarah Wadsworth compares Alcott's treatment of courtship and marriage in her adult novel *Moods* (1864, 1882) with comparable elements in *Little Women* to show that the latter novel "reconfigures the marriage plot contemporary readers demanded, advocating reciprocity and the equal authority of women on matters of love and commitment" and should be seen as Alcott's "most daring work" on matters of love and commitment. Wadsworth traces the way that American periodicals of the mid-nineteenth century "were riddled with dialogue about 'learning to love'" and considers the way that *Little Women* is a progressive response to larger cultural

conversations about courtship and marriage. In "Alcott's 'Funny Match' for Jo," Elise Barker suggests that "the debate concerning Jo's marriage may be a source of *Little Women*'s persistent popularity," bolstering her argument with analysis of conversation threads about the novel found at the popular online venue Goodreads, particularly with regard to participants' attitudes toward Jo's refusal of Laurie's marriage proposal and her decision to marry Friedrich Bhaer. Barker deftly weaves together many of the voices from those threads to create a tapestry of intense, passionate opinions about the marriages of the March sisters. In the volume's concluding critical essay, "'Jo March is Pregnant and Laurie's the Father': Re-Visioning *Little Women* in Fan Fiction," Lauren Rizzuto examines how authors of fan fiction have reworked and responded to Alcott's novel. In the process, Rizzuto provides significant insight into "the participatory nature of fan fiction, the constant give-and-take between writers and readers, text and audience, that distinguishes it from other forms of literature."

Each of these essays models careful, insightful, and attentive reading to *Little Women*. Collectively, they represent a range of critical approaches that can be productively brought to the novel. We expect each essay to help reveal the varied layers of meaning as well as the emotional power of Alcott's masterpiece. They were authored so as to arouse a new generation of students and scholars to examine and re-think the novel and its importance to its readers. We hope that these essays inspire and excite readers to develop their own ideas and interpretations of *Little Women* or, *Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*.

Works Cited

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Quinny-Dingles, Quirks, and Queer-Looking Men: "Regularizing" *Little Women*

Anne K. Phillips

> "I like good, strong words, that mean something," replied Jo, catching her hat as it took a leap off her head, preparatory to flying away altogether.
>
> (Alcott, *Little Women* [2004] 36)

In response to a request from editor Thomas Niles of the Boston publishing firm Roberts Brothers for a girls' story that might be as popular as the books for boys by authors such as Horatio Alger and "Oliver Optic" (William T. Adams), Louisa May Alcott was initially dubious about such a project. Nonetheless, she agreed that "lively, simple books are very much needed for girls, and perhaps I can supply the need" (*Journals* 166). After the first volume of *Little Women* appeared in print on 1 October 1868, Alcott noted in her journal "much interest in my little women, who seem to find friends by their truth to life, as I hoped" (167). On 18 October, she wrote to Mary E. Channing Higginson, "Your husband gave me the praise which I value most highly when he said the little story was 'good, & American'" (*Selected Letters* 118). Reviewers lauded *Little Women*'s authentic characterizations—"real, penetrating, and abiding," according to *The Commonwealth* (qtd. in Clark 61–2). They especially praised its distinctive voice. As Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher asserted in *The Mother at Home and Household Magazine*, "Miss Alcott has the enviable faculty of making her characters say and do just what they really would have said and done, were they real personages" (qtd. in Clark 77). Thus, the qualities of the text that Alcott especially valued during its writing—its "lively," "truth to life," and "American" flavors—were elements of the work immediately recognized and celebrated by reviewers and fans.

Ironically, those qualities were not always obvious to most twentieth-century readers of Alcott's best-selling classic. The first volume appeared in 1868 and its sequel was published in 1869: the parts were then sold in two-volume sets for the next decade. Beginning in 1880, the novel appeared in a single, uniform volume with consecutively numbered chapters and numerous changes at the sentence level that made the work markedly less lively and true to life. It wasn't until Modern Library (1983) and Penguin (1989) reprinted the first edition that most modern readers discovered its distinctive character. In her introduction to the Penguin edition, Elaine Showalter briefly summarized the changes that were made in the 1880 "Regular" edition of the work, and a few other critics have compared aspects of the original and revised versions or addressed the way the text has been adapted.[1] Nonetheless, a more comprehensive analysis of what was changed, by whom, and why is still needed.

Certainly, the language of the first edition is far more distinctive than that of the revised, "regular" edition. In the first edition, clothes are "spandy" (72) rather than "new" (97)[2]; people are "rigged" (82) instead of "dressed" (110) and their garb is adorned with "quinny-dingles" (225), not "notions" (309); Aunt March refers to the girls' "pa and ma" (182) instead of their "parents" (253) and hollers for "Josy-phine" (92), not "Josyphine" (122); Hannah predicts an "uncommonly plummy" (172) rather than an "unusually fine" Christmas Day (240). Sentences in the original edition are often grammatically incorrect: the girls routinely say "ain't," Beth complains that she "can't practice good a bit" (12), and Jo suggests that Laurie's "grandpa don't know what's good for him" (44). In the revised edition, periods replace semi-colons and numerous exclamation marks have been added. While the tone and cadences of the work are altered through these sentence-level changes, the most significant revisions affect characterization.

Revisions to the 1880 edition endeavor to make Jo less of a tomboy, if not attractive then at least not plain, and less likely to reference what she has been reading. Almost universally, the alterations tone down her voice and convey greater passivity. In the

first chapter of the original edition, Jo complains about having to wait on her great-aunt March: "How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out of the window or box her ears?" (12). Jo's aggressive expression "box her ears"—that is, to strike her—becomes, in the revised edition, a thoroughly contrary and much more submissive "cry" (8). Rather than "pounding" on Laurie's door (166), Jo politely knocks (232). Instead of having "trampled" Laurie's hat in the second volume (197), Jo only walks on it (270). Jo's expressions are made more generic: "truckling to you" (160) becomes "helping" (223) and "raspy" (198) becomes "cross" (271). Her tomboy traits also are minimized so that she no longer "examin[es] the heels of her boots in a gentlemanly fashion" in the first chapter (11); instead, in the regular edition, she contemplates her shoes (8). Jo's face is described as "brown" in the first edition (46), but in the revised version that adjective is removed, perhaps because it would have suggested either an unrefined exposure to the elements or uncomfortable racial connotations.[3] "Brown" also alludes to the dark hair and olive complexion Alcott shared with her mother. In a birthday letter to her father, Alcott notably described herself as a "brown woman [who] will fight . . . & come out I hope queen of herself tho not of the world" (*Selected Letters* 14). Removing "brown" from the revised edition makes the novel less autobiographical. As she and her sisters celebrate Marmee's sixtieth birthday at the end of the novel, Jo no longer describes herself as "over thirty" (380); instead, she is merely thirty (531). Jo's occasional tendency to infuse her conversation with references to Dickens, particularly the sayings of the Cockney servant Sam Weller from *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), who characteristically substitutes a "w" for a "v" in his speech, is a distinctive aspect of her character. In the original version of *Little Women,* talking with Meg, Jo admits, "[m]arriage is an excellent thing after all. I wonder if I should blossom out, half as well as you have, if I tried it, always '*perwisin*'' I could" (338). In the revised version, she merely muses, "I wonder if I should blossom out half as well as you have, if I tried it" (472). While Jo still whistles, treads

the boards in her russet boots, bickers with Amy, runs for the sheer love of running, and longs to do something splendid, in the revised edition she is nonetheless a more conventional and less lively figure.

Throughout the regular edition, the revisions involving Jo minimize her emotions and voice. However, in the "Camp Laurence" chapter, following Jo's croquet altercation with Fred Vaughn, there is one uncharacteristic addition to the text that not only acknowledges but celebrates Jo's vociferousness. During the story-telling game "Rigmarole," Fred infuses his narrative with nautical allusions, pausing only to remark, "Of course the British beat—they always do" (108). In the first edition, Jo remains silent, but in the revised version, she cries, "No, they don't!" Perhaps the reviser, altering the novel only a short time after the 1876 centennial of America's independence from Great Britain, wished merely to celebrate American spirit and independence, but this is the only change to the 1880 edition that makes Jo more unruly.

Laurie becomes a more typical romantic hero in the 1880 edition. Alcott acknowledged in an 1869 letter to her childhood friend Alfred Whitman that Laurie "is you & my Polish boy 'jintly'. You are the sober half & my Ladislas (whom I met abroad) is the gay whirligig half" (*Selected Letters* 120). Changes to Laurie downplay these traits that Alcott attributed to Ladislas. As Showalter notes, "when Jo sizes up Laurie at the Gardiner's party" in the first edition, "he is both foreign and androgynous" (xxi), and Jo notices his "long nose, nice teeth, [and] little" hands (31). In the revised version, she instead catalogs his "handsome nose; fine teeth; [and] small" hands (37). The revisions erase details that allude to Laurie's Italian heritage or make him seem feminine. Jo originally notes that Laurie is "tall as I am" (31); in the revised edition, Laurie becomes "taller than I am" (37) and thus more manly: he becomes someone to look up to literally as well as figuratively. Laurie's "queer little French bow" (31) as he makes Jo's acquaintance in the original (characteristic of his European demeanor) becomes a "gallant little bow" (38). Laurie is later observed to be "working" (177) rather than "pegging away" (129) at his studies. Even his flair for the comic is restrained in the revised edition. For instance, after having written love notes to Meg

in the guise of John Brooke, he asks her forgiveness in the original and then follows up his sincere apology by "roll[ing] up his eyes in such a meekly repentant way" (166) that Meg is forced by his drollness as well as his repentance to forgive him. In the revised edition, the gesture is erased entirely, and Laurie, although still endearing, is less distinctive, without a flair for the ridiculous. Such changes make him less of a "gay whirligig" and more thoroughly the "model good boy" that critic Jan Susina identifies as something "closer to Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist than to Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer" (164).

The revisions with regard to Professor Bhaer's character parallel some of those made in connection with Laurie and Jo. The revisionist clearly felt it necessary to establish him as a more conventionally attractive leading man by the time of the 1880 edition (an impulse evident in later adaptations of *Little Women*, particularly in the casting of swoon-worthy Gabriel Byrne as Professor Bhaer for the 1994 feature film adaptation). In the first edition, Friedrich is a "queer-looking man" with a "droll nose" (262), although "he hadn't a handsome feature in his face" (263). In the regular edition, he is instead a "gentleman" (364) with a "good nose," although he hasn't "a really handsome feature in his face" (365). Though "odd" in the first edition (266), he is more attractively "foreign" (368) in the revised version—perhaps investing him with higher status, given American appreciation for European cachet in the later nineteenth century.[4] Paralleling Jo's age reduction at the end of the novel, in the first edition, she tells Friedrich, "you aren't old—I never think of it" (372), while in the 1880 edition, she tells him "you are not old—forty is the prime of life" (520). The reviser's agenda here is clear: to make more palatable what Alcott herself described in a letter to Elizabeth Powell as "a funny match" for Jo, meant to thwart the legions who were clamoring for Jo to marry Laurie (*Selected Letters* 125). Nonetheless, these revisions ultimately fail to disguise the eccentricities of Jo and Friedrich's pairing.

Changes relevant to the characterization of Amy are generally more successful, imposing upon her additional talent, refinement, and beauty. In the original edition, Amy describes her intended

contribution to Marmee's Christmas: "I'll get a little bottle of Cologne; she likes it, and it won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy something for me" (14). "Something" becomes "my pencils" in the revised edition (12)—efficiently delineating Amy's artistic bent and distinguishing her talent from those of her sisters. The changes also minimize Amy's facial imperfections. Alcott originally took pains to demonstrate that Amy, though attractive and imbued with grace, is never completely beautiful—hence her grudge against Jo for having dropped her on her nose when she was a baby and her aesthetic pleasure in Laurie's handsome nose. The reviser, however, downplays Amy's weaker features. Instead of attempting to "flatten" her nose (245), Amy merely "pats" it (339). And, instead of "having a decided underlip" (199), she has "a decided chin" (273)—changing the suggestion of an unfortunate physiognomy to good bone structure and the connotation of a determined character as well.

One decision made by the revisionist in connection with Amy demonstrates how attentive and yet inattentive the changes are to the tone of the novel. In Chapter 7, Amy purchases twenty-five pickled limes with the quarter Meg gives her in order to pay back her social debts at school. She eats one on the way to school and conceals the remaining twenty-four in her desk. When her teacher, Mr. Phillips, having heard of Amy's contraband from another student, instructs her to carry all the pickled limes to the window and throw them out, "[s]carlet with shame," Amy went "to and fro twelve mortal times," dropping "each doomed couple, looking, oh, so plump and juicy" (59). The revised edition notes that Amy makes "six dreadful" trips to the window (79). On one hand, this might reflect careful attention to the text. Mr. Phillips has instructed Amy to carry the limes "two by two" to the window (59). If she carries one lime in each hand, she'll need to make twelve trips. If she carries two in each hand, as the reviser assumes, she might indeed make six, rather than twelve, trips. On the other hand, something is lost in the revision. "[T]welve mortal times" represents Amy's deep mortification and outrage and the extent of her traumatic ordeal much more effectively than the relatively prosaic inconvenience of "six dreadful" passes.

Other characters' glamour is enhanced, as well. Marmee is originally described as a "stout motherly lady" in Alcott's original edition (15), but she appears as "a tall, motherly lady" in the revised version. "Stout" denotes breadth and heft; "tall" conveys height. The revision makes Marmee thinner and taller. Readers learn in the first edition that "[s]he wasn't a particularly handsome person, but mothers are always lovely to their children" (15)—thus, Marmee is defined not by her beauty, but through her relationships. In the revised version, she "was not elegantly dressed, but a noble-looking woman" (14), which defines her not by how others feel about her, but by how she appears (and upgrading her appearance along the way). Other alterations that affect Marmee connote refinement, as in Chapter 2, where "sniffing" at a flower evidently displays a lack of gentility (27), but "smelling" the flowers (30) is deemed an improvement, and in Chapter 11, where her "audibl[e]" laugh at Miss Crocker's report of the disastrous dinner party (99) becomes, in the revised edition, more discreetly "inaudibl[e]" amusement (133).

Similarly, the revisionist certainly endeavors to cast upon Meg some additional sophistication. In the first edition, receiving her share of the Laurences' flowers on Christmas night, Meg notes, "I never had a bouquet before; how pretty it is" (26). In the revised edition, she conveys greater experience, noting that she never had "such a fine bouquet before" (30). One of the more interesting revisions related to Meg, however, involves a pun by Alcott. In the first edition, after Marmee has gone to Washington to nurse her husband, Meg remains faithful to her duties as a governess and "went daily to her kingdom" (141). The revised version notes only that she "went daily to her pupils" (194). Since her employers are named King, there's a subtle charm to Alcott's reference to her "kingdom"—a pleasure entirely absent from the revision.

Changes involving Beth in the 1880 edition relate either to her cats, her bird, or her piano and seem to involve issues of continuity. Originally playing with her cats while Amy burns Jo's manuscript, Beth instead is reported in the revised edition to be fussing with her piano (62)—a definite possibility, since she received her fine piano from Mr. Laurence in the chapter immediately preceding this

Chronology of Louisa May Alcott's Life

1830	Abigail May and Amos Bronson Alcott marry in Boston.
1831	Anna Bronson Alcott, Abigail and Bronson's first daughter, is born.
1832	Louisa May Alcott, second daughter of Abigail and Bronson Alcott, is born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on November 29.
1835	Third daughter, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott, is born. Bronson meets Ralph Waldo Emerson.
1840	Alcotts move to Concord. Fourth daughter Abigail May Alcott is born.
1843	Alcotts move to a utopian community known as Fruitlands. Louisa starts a journal and begins writing poems.
1844	Alcotts leave Fruitlands in January. By year's end, they return to Concord.
1845	With financial help from Emerson, Abigail purchases a house in Concord. Bronson names it "Hillside."
1846	Louisa gets her own room at Hillside, and she reads and writes often. Alcott girls produce their own dramatic performances in the barn.
1847	Encouraged by Emerson, Louisa begins reading Goethe, Carlyle, and Shakespeare.

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About the Editors

Gregory Eiselein is professor of English and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar at Kansas State University. With Anne K. Phillips, he edited the Norton Critical Edition of *Little Women* (2004) and *The Louisa May Alcott Encyclopedia* (2001). He also edited *Adah Isaacs Menken:* Infelicia *and Other Writings* (2002) and *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings* (2002). He is the author of *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (1996) as well as several articles on Louisa May Alcott and on various aspects of American literature and culture.

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