DOI 10.51558/2490-3647.2024.9.1.325

UDK 305-055.2:821.111(73).09-31 Alcott L.M.

Primljeno: 28. 01. 2024.

Izvorni naučni rad
Original scientific paper

Nataša V. Ninčetović

WOMANHOOD AND DEMOCRATIC HOUSEHOLD IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*

This paper deals with the issues of womanhood and democratic household in *Little Women,* a novel by Louisa May Alcott. The theoretical framework for the research is Barbara Welter's classic essay on the concept of "true" womanhood in Victorian America. By analyzing the four cardinal traits of proper womanhood as reflected in the novel, the conclusion emerges that Meg, Beth, Jo, and Amy's growing into womanhood simultaneously confirms the limitation of women's potential in Victorian America and testifies to the struggle for actualization. The development of the four girls is under the indisputable influence of both the gender discourses that prevail in society and the progressive views of their mother. However, since each girl interprets these visions differently and adapts them to their various personalities, their paths to womanhood are unique. Finally, the paper aims to demonstrate that the March sisters attempt to strike a balance between actualization and adaption to the needs of the family, two equally important, but opposing aspirations. In conclusion, the actualization of the March girls, initially jeopardized by the limitations of patriarchal culture, is further complicated by their desire to remain true to their family's (mother's) teaching, which is especially emphasized during Amy and Jo's attempts to realize their artistic ambitions.

Keywords: Louisa May Alcott; *Little Women;* womanhood; democratic household; actualisation

1.1. Introduction

For almost 160 years, Louisa May Alcott's best-known novel, *Little Women* (1868/1869),[1] has not stopped arousing the interest of both readers and critics. When the representation of women in Alcott's most enduring novel is concerned, the opinions of critics are quite divided. Whereas some critics (Nina Auerbach, Sarah Elbert, Shai Rudin) praise Alcott's masterpiece as subversive and boundary-pushing, other critics (Judith Fetterley, Orly Lubin, Stephanie Foote) interpret the novel's vision as confirming conventional gender stereotyping. The main "stumbling block" seems to be that the novel ends with the marriage of the three of four sisters and their confinement to the private sphere. On the one hand, Fetterley (1979) and Foote (2005) emphasise that the development of the March girls can be described as curbing their anger and wishes (both materialistic and that of independence) and link such development with the domestication of the female gender characteristic of nineteenth-century Victorian America. On the other hand, Sarah Elbert contends that *Little Women* continues to be important and relevant precisely because it views "domesticity and feminism as not only compatible, but essential to one another" (1984: 144).

However, this paper takes the middle ground between these two opposed critical circles. The fact is that Meg, Jo, and Amy indeed remain within the house. However, the vision of family life as reflected in the novel is an extraordinary one. The March family, which serves as a role model, is a prototype of the so-called democratic household, in which there is no artificial division of roles and responsibilities. A household conceived in this way is aimed not at limiting, but at encouraging personal development.

The theoretical framework for the research is Barbara Welter's influential essay on the concept of true womanhood in Victorian America. According to Welter, a woman in the first half of the nineteenth century in America, to be labelled as a proper one, had to possess four virtues: purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness (1966: 152). Instead of being Eve the temptress, the woman was perceived as a better version of Eve, the Eve who worked "in cooperation with the Redeemer" (1966: 152). In the view of Victorian ideology, the loss of chastity was the worst thing that could happen to a woman. Purity was every girl's most precious dowry, and marriage was the central life event. As Welter contends, these four values were appreciated primarily be-

1 Although the paper refers to Alcott's novel as *Little Women*, it deals with both *Little Women* and *Happy Wive*s, its sequel published in 1869. Even though the two novels were originally published separately, they are considered a whole and referred to as *Little Women*.

cause they did not distance the woman from her home (1966: 153), of which she was the sovereign but meek ruler. Hence, a "true" woman was a domestic woman, a woman who should never have lost sight of her proper sphere. Moreover, absolute obedience to her husband was expected of her, and submission was praised as "the most feminine virtue" (1966: 159).

By analysing the March sisters through the prism of the cult of true womanhood, this paper aims to demonstrate that their attitudes are somewhat shaped by both the cult and its redefined version provided by their mother. However, each of them interprets both visions of womanhood differently and adapts them to their personality. Hence, while their maturation has some common characteristics, the character differences of the sisters necessarily result in some peculiarities, so that each blossoming into womanhood is unique.

However, in the view of Mrs March, who is the role model for the girls, it is equally important to express individuality and adapt to the needs of the family. Marmee's emphasis on both individuality and democratic household is Alcott's adaptation of John Bunyan's vision of moral quest as reflected in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678/1684). *Little Women* contains numerous allusions to Bunyan's religious allegory, which Alcott "creatively transforms and places in the context of her own time and place" (Waters 1994: 153). As *The Pilgrim's Progress* implies, to be a good Christian, it is equally important to strive towards individuality and to be aware of the importance of personal contribution to the well-being of the group. In the context of Victorian America, the awareness that the well-being of the family as a whole depends on the individual contributions of all its members is the way to transform the family into a stable backbone of society based on the principles of equality and equal distribution of duties and privileges. However, the ensuing discussion aims to demonstrate that actualisation and group (family) belonging sometimes turn out to be equally important, but opposing aspirations between which it is not easy to strike a balance. This paper aims to demonstrate that the March girls' striving for individuality, initially jeopardised by the constraints of patriarchal culture, is further complicated by their desire to live up to the expectations of their family, their mother in particular.

1.2. The cult of true womanhood redefined

1.2.1. Piety and purity

At first glance, all the women in the March household possess the qualities prescribed by the cult of true womanhood. However, a comprehensive analysis of the required attributes as reflected in the March family demonstrates that of all the mentioned attributes, the only one that cannot be questioned is purity. Although never explicitly discussed, there are hints in the novel that testify to the supremacy of purity for the Marches. Marmee, the role model for her daughters, may seem gentle and indulgent, but does not approve of pleasing the senses and is a strong opponent of flirting, drinking, and gambling. For example, alcohol is strictly forbidden in the March household and is never consumed, not even when they have a reason to celebrate. To Laurie's surprise, alcohol is not even served at Meg's wedding, for which decision he is given the following explanation: "´You know he [Mr March] thinks that wine should only be used in illness, and mother says that neither she nor her daughters will ever offer it to any young man under her roof˝" (Alcott 2007: 277). Furthermore, although Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy seem to enjoy unlimited freedom, their freedom is partial and refers to the choice of hobbies and interests, whereas their mother is always on the lookout, while keeping a watchful eye on their male acquaintances.

If the girls' endorsement of purity is evident, their piety is quite unconventional within the context of Calvinist America. The Marches are deeply religious, but, as Sarah Rivas astutely observes, they do not "actively practice conventional Christianity" (2014: 57). Although the family members do mention God and rely on him in moments of crisis and illness, their church attendance is never spoken of. Be that as it may, Mrs March and her daughters demonstrate their Christianity with their good deeds, generosity and charity. For example, the sisters, on the initiative of their mother, give up their Christmas breakfast and bestow it upon the poor Hummel family. Although the March family lives modestly, this does not prevent Marmee from helping those who are in dire need. Hence, their faith is not of a nominal, but of a practical nature.

1.2.2. Domesticity – democratic household

When it comes to the other two desirable qualities for Victorian women, Alcott's vision in *Little Women* is even more unconventional. *Little Women* is definitely a do-

mestic novel. It deals with everyday issues such as children's upbringing, education, courtship, and marriage. On the one hand, it follows some of the conventions of the sentimental novel. The sentimentalists highlighted the importance of family and the dedication of parents, primarily mothers, to raising children and instilling virtues by personal example. In this respect, Marmee resembles a sentimental mother with the boundless love and attention she gives to her daughters. However, the vision of family life deviates somewhat from the sentimental one. Unlike the sentimentalists, who insisted on the concept of separate spheres, and on the inexorable authority of the father figure, to whom the mother was subordinate, Alcott advocated the idea of the so-called democratic household.

The Victorian ideology declares the father to be the main and most often the only breadwinner of the family, who is active outside the home, whereas the woman is the sovereign, but meek and humble ruler of the private sphere. However, the situation is substantially different in the March household. Given that Mr March is absent from the house for a long period, Mrs March is forced to perform all parental duties, including the duty to sustain the family. Still, since opportunities for remunerative work for women in Victorian America are quite limited, the children, specifically Meg and Jo, contribute to the financial security of the family. Even when the father returns from the war, the division of labour and roles in the family is practically unchanged.

Therefore, *Little Women* represents a progressive domestic novel, one which does not reproduce the ideology of separate spheres. Even though *Little Women*, like other sentimental and domestic novels, suggests that the family is the most important thing in the world, the vision of family life it represents does not resemble either a sentimental or a so-called "fashionable" family.[2] If the sentimentalists, as Strickland correctly notices, erected the wall between the sexes (1985: 109), this novel is aimed at breaking down that wall. Moreover, *Little Women* suggests that the division of labour[3] is to blame for the conflict between the genders. The suggested solution which will result in the proper functioning of the family, which is the basic social unit, is the joint labour and cooperation of all family members. Therefore, there is an ingrained

2 An obvious allusion to such a type of family are the Moffats, the family with whom Meg spends some time. Alcott's view of such families is rather negative, and her main argument against this kind of family is that the mother and father neglect their parental duties and that children are encouraged to enter the world of adults before their time. As evidenced by the example of the Moffats, such a parenting style has harmful effects on the development of children, particularly girls, whose flirting and alcohol consumption are viewed favourably.

3 The division of labour and consequential ideology of separate spheres are the results of the Industrial Revolution. Before it, production was done at home, and both male and female members participated in the work. However, the Revolution moved production to factories, to which men had to commute. It was no longer feasible for women to take part in production since someone had to take care of the house and children.

attitude in the March family that everyone must contribute to the welfare and well-being of the family since, in Marmee's words, "the comfort of all depends on each doing their share faithfully" (2007: 132). There is no division of jobs into male and female, and the emphasis is on helping each other and sharing both responsibilities and privileges.

1.2.3. The vision of gender in *Little Women*

Both in her life and fiction, Alcott advocated the attitude that "human nature is very much the same in men and women" (Alcott 1870: 341–342). For example, *Little Women* may be viewed as an implicit critique of traditional gender roles. In reversing what is traditionally considered male and female duty, Alcott suggests that masculinity and femininity are social and cultural constructs and that traits regarded as masculine in feminine exist in each individual. In fact, there should be a balance of male and female principles in everyone. For instance, Laurie is fond of playing the piano, which is conventionally regarded as a feminine activity, whereas Jo exhibits "male" ambition. Likewise, Mr March often takes on the function of the "counsellor and guide for his troubled daughters" (Foote 2005: 83), whereas his wife and daughters take on the role of provider.

However, the desired blend of male and female principles is not easily attainable in a world where the emphasis is on the differences between the sexes. At the beginning of the novel male and female characters are separated and there is a minimum of contact between them. Mr March is at the front, the Laurences are isolated in their mansion, whereas the female members of the March household live in a sort of matriarchal utopia.[4] It is Jo who is credited for bridging the gender gap in the novel by taking the initiative to befriend Laurie. The reactions of the sisters (particularly Meg) to the introduction of the boy into their circle reveal that girls are also prejudiced against the opposite sex. In Meg's view, boys are by definition wild and indolent, and experience teaches her that boys may also have many positive traits. In fact, both the boy and the girls mature together and serve as corrective to each other, which is an example of Alcott's (for the Victorian era) progressive idea that boys and girls should grow up and be educated together, "correcting one another's faults and learning the lessons of comradeship" (Strickland 1985: 117).

4 See Nina Auerbach's classic study *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (1978: 73).

1.2.4. Submissiveness – companionate marriage

The most disputed attribute of Marmee and her daughters is definitely submissiveness. As stated by Welter, this is the most feminine of all the prescribed virtues (1966: 158). In the ideology of Victorian America, "men were the movers, the doers, the actors" (Ibid: 159). Women were expected to suppress all ambitions except those related to home and family and submit to duty and primarily to men. If we analyse Marmee and her daughters in relation to this trait, large individual differences are noticeable. To be sure, the role model for Meg, Beth, Amy, and Jo is definitely their mother.

We argue that Marmee is by no means a submissive woman. On the surface, Marmee is a meek housewife. Still, it turns out that this apparently humble woman is quite capable of standing up for her views and has consistent rules from which she never deviates. This is best evidenced when she expels Amy from school after the teacher physically punishes her. Moreover, she encourages her daughters to educate and to work on themselves. For example, she supports Jo's writing aspirations, but only on the grounds that her writing is aligned with her values. Furthermore, the March girls are not confined to the house, but are allowed to experience the world outside its boundaries. Hence, Meg is allowed to attend parties, Amy to travel to Europe, and Jo to search for work in New York.

In Marmee's view, marriage does not mean that a woman should only dedicate herself to the children. She is an ardent advocate of the so-called companionate marriage. Companionate marriage does not only refer to the husband's involvement in raising children, it also refers to a woman's interest in her husband's preoccupations even after she becomes a mother. For example, Marmee reproves Meg for making the common mistake of young wives by devoting herself completely to the children and neglecting her husband. From Marmee's point of view, young mothers should not, because of the birth of children, stop being interested in their husbands and stop working on personal development:

> "Go out more, keep cheerful as well as busy, – for you are the sunshine maker of the family, and if you get dismal there is be no fair weather. Then I'd try to make 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 to take part in the world's work, for it all affects you and yours" (Alcott 2007: 423–424).

However, not every man in the fictional world of *Little Women* is the right choice for companionate marriage. This kind of marital community entails a male character

that fits into the category of "domesticated male" (Strickland 1985: 103). In contrast with the stereotypical Victorian male, who is viewed as active, aggressive and selfish, Alcott's domesticated male is sensitive towards his surroundings, fond of children and values home and family above everything. Mr March, Professor Bhaer and Laurie fit into this conception of male character. On the other hand, John Brook and Meg's marriage is by no means egalitarian. John is represented as a typical Victorian man who does not value domestic skills. However, he is not the only one to blame for the undemocratic marital union. As Sarah Elbert persuasively argues, Alcott adopts the position that prerequisites for a democratic marriage are the enlightened beliefs of both parties (1984: 157). In the case of Meg and John, a democratic marriage is impossible because neither of them wants it.[5]

As this paper aims to demonstrate, the development of the four girls is under the indisputable influence of both the gender discourses that prevail in society and the progressive views of their mother. However, since each girl interprets these visions differently and adapts them to their various personalities, their paths into womanhood, although they share some characteristics, take different directions. Whereas Amy and Jo have internalised their mother's lesson on the importance of marriage equality, they have to reconcile their artistic ambitions with their duty to the family. On the other hand, Meg and Beth are docile daughters who have assimilated only Marmee's devotion to the household, but do not seem to have any ambitions in terms of personal fulfilment. Therefore, their respective developments imply a search for a balance between individuality and adaptation to the family's expectations. Even though all the sisters attempt to strike a balance between these two opposing, but equally important objectives, this task turns out to be a laborious and difficult one.

1.3. Each path to womanhood is unique

The four March sisters, who are very different characters, should embody the range of possibilities for women in Victorian America, with whom most female readers could easily identify. They are all influenced by Marmee's redefined version of the cult of true womanhood, but adapt it to their different personalities. As a result, as Foote aptly remarks, "by the end of the novel, Jo, Amy, and Meg are happily married and are labouring in the fields best suited to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of their personalities" (2005: 69).

5 Their relationship fits into the category of romantic marriage, which, as Elbert argues, is by definition "passionate, selfish, and unequal" (Elbert 1984: 161).

The most conventional character among the March sisters is definitely Meg. The oldest sister is acutely aware of the limits that patriarchal society imposes on women and she consciously chooses to remain tucked away in the private sphere. At first glance, Meg seems to have fully assimilated the values of the cult of true womanhood. Still, her behaviour does not arise out of her beliefs, but out of her decision to achieve her goal – material security – by performing true femininity. Meg is aware that in the Victorian age it is not so important to actually possess all the traits attributed to the "true" woman as it is to be seemingly proper. Meg is the archetypal Victorian woman because she is a "skilled actress" (Halttunen 1984: 245), ready to pretend to be a flawless woman in order to attract a fine match in the form of a well-to-do man who will fulfil all her (materialistic) desires. Therefore, Meg exhibits a partial self-denial that manifests itself in the lack of aspirations except those related to finding a wealthy husband and creating a home of her own.[6]

According to Smith, Beth is the only March girl who not only displays, but also fully internalises the values of the cult of true womanhood (2021: 3). In other words, Beth is honestly and even pitifully reconciled to gender stereotypes and does not want anything for herself. Only Beth does not have any plans for the future and does not dare to wish for anything. In the view of Maruo-Schröder, "Beth's death can be seen as a lesson of self-denial gone too far" (2018: 405). However, there are hints in the novel that attest to the statement that Beth is not the embodiment of self-denial which Alcott implicitly criticises by ending her life prematurely. Like Jo and Amy, she also has artistic aspirations and is dedicated to developing her musical talent. The main difference concerning pursuing their interests is that Beth, due to her introverted nature, rarely and shyly talks about it.

As for her timidity, Beth is acutely aware that this is her greatest flaw, her "bosom enemy" (Alcott 2007: 19). She may not fully overcome this shortcoming, but makes a big step in that direction by befriending Laurie and visiting his home to practise playing the piano. In support of the claim that Beth's life is not so strictly limited to the private sphere are the facts that she goes to the market to buy necessities and that it is Beth who visits the Hummels when they need help. This goes in line with Cohoon's argument that Beth "overcomes her quietness and shyness if there is some greater or more necessary service that must be performed" (2015: 165). As only Beth follows her mother's advice to the letter and visits the sick baby, it may be argued that she is the only one who fully internalises Mrs March's benevolence. After her

6 However, she matures to a certain extent, and despite the impending disinheritance from Aunt March decides to listen to her heart and accept the marriage proposal of the industrious but poor Mr Brooke.

death, a huge loss is felt in the March family, whose members only then begin to appreciate her efforts in running the household and her unreserved support for her sisters. Her obedience and dedication to the family greatly influence the establishment of a balance between attachment to the family and the expression of individuality in the other sisters, specifically Jo and Amy.

Of all the March sisters, Jo has always been the most intriguing and beloved among them. Like her sisters, she is deeply aware of the limitations of women's potential in patriarchal Victorian America, but is determined to find a way to overcome them. That is precisely the reason why she embraces activities that were considered men's activities in Victorian America, such as whistling, jumping, and the adoption of a "cross-dressing language" (Murphy 1990: 577). Moreover, Jo begins to hate her gender, because the fact that she was born as a girl is the worst possible initial position for someone who strives to achieve something. In Jo's view, at least at the beginning of her development, men are equated with action and power. By adopting a behaviour that was more customary to men, Jo attempts to "appropriate male power" (Keyser 1993: 66). However, what Jo does not realise at the beginning of her journey to womanhood is that "[B]biological gender does not confine a person; society's gender expectations and stereotypes confine a person" (Bender 2017: 144). Jo is afraid of maturing since she predicts that the pressures to conform to the cult of true womanhood will increase as time goes on.

Unlike her sisters, who dream of finding a suitable match who will provide for them, Jo dreads such prospects for the future. The current marital ideology stands in stark contrast with her values. The Victorian concept of marriage glorifies marriage as the crucial event in the life of every woman, after which a woman loses her identity and becomes a hostage of her own home and husband. However, unlike Meg, Jo succeeds in finding a husband who will allow her to be his equal partner. Jo and Friedrich's marital union resembles that of her parents, but still transcends it. Both unions are examples of companionate marriage, but Jo's also succeeds in combining vocation with domesticity, which was the coveted, but hard-to-achieve dream of many *Little Women* readers.

Although at the beginning of the novel Amy and Jo seem like antagonistic characters, since Amy is very conventional, while Jo is a tomboy who defies convention, by the end of the novel both transform. This transformation manifests itself in the adoption of values promoted by Marmee, companionate marriage and altruism in particular. For example, Amy proves "true to the mother's teaching" (2007: 491) since she overcomes her initial selfishness and renounces marriage of convenience. How-

ever, the omnipresence and dominant influence that Marmee exerts on her daughters is both their blessing and their curse. That "curse" is most pronounced when Jo and Amy step into the public sphere in an attempt to realise their artistic ambitions.

Unlike Beth and Meg, who are "safely removed from the trials of life" (Murphy 1990: 572), Jo and Amy are willing to step out of their comfort zone and challenge established gender stereotypes and prejudices. Once Jo and Amy venture out into the world in hopes of realising their dreams, it turns out that both lack perseverance and the ability to make independent judgments. Especially indicative is Amy's realisation that "talent is not the same as genius, and no amount of energy can make it so" (2007: 437) which she arrives at after just one visit to Rome, "as if possessing the genius of Michelangelo were a woman's only excuse for pursuing artistic activity, as if she had no responsibility to nurture mere talent" (Murphy 1990: 572). However, this paper argues that Amy's permanent and Jo's (hopefully) temporary abandonment of artistic careers is not only the consequence of the limited opportunities for women artists in nineteenth-century America. Their decisions may also be interpreted as a logical outcome of adopting Marmee's value system, according to which the only important thing is to have talent and "the consciousness of possessing one should satisfy one" (Alcott 2007: 82). Amy and Jo's easy abandonment of their dreams attest to a certain flaw in Marmee's idealistic concept of a self-sufficient democratic household. Amy and Jo's abrupt decisions speak in support of the conclusion that the adoption of Marmee's attitudes is insufficiently good preparation for leaving the framework of the private sphere into the cruel and materialistic outside world regulated by different rules.

1.4. Conclusion

To sum up, *Little Women* is an unconventional domestic novel. It delineates the blossoming into womanhood of the four March girls, which is simultaneously shaped by the gender discourses prevailing in society and their redefined version provided by their mother. A comprehensive analysis of the cult of true womanhood as reflected in the March household demonstrates that piety and purity are values that are highly valued and aspired to, but in a non-traditional way. On the other hand, whereas Marmee attaches great importance to housework and raising children, she encourages her daughters not to accept a subordinate role, but to strive for equality. In other words, Marmee, the girls' role model, believes that for a better position of women, the transformation of the family into a community based on equality and sharing of

duties and responsibilities is of key importance. Marmee is an ardent advocate of companionate marriage and democratic household, which aim to demolish the wall between the sexes that was "erected" by the sentimentalist revolution and the division of labour after the Industrial Revolution.

Starting from the observation that all the daughters assimilate Marmee's values, but adapt them to their personalities, the paper proves that each path to womanhood is unique. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy adopt their mother's teaching to varying degrees. Meg is the most conventional, but simultaneously the most docile daughter who assimilates her mother's dedication to the household, but adopts a submissive position to her husband. Beth is not only an obedient daughter and an exemplary housewife, but attempts with all her might to overcome her excessive timidity and develop her talents. However, her blossoming into womanhood is thwarted by a premature death.

A certain limitation of Marmee's view of womanhood becomes evident in the case of Jo and Amy. Both of them by the end of the novel adopt their mother's altruism and concept of companionate marriage. However, too strong hold that Mrs March exerts over them proves to be both a blessing and a curse. This becomes evident when Jo and Amy venture out into the world to pursue their artistic ambitions. It turns out that not only the restrictions of the patriarchal culture, but also the relationship that the family has towards affirmation in the public sphere, contribute to their easy abandonment of artistic careers. The conclusion emerges that the March girls' striving for individuality, initially jeopardised by the constraints of the prevailing gender discourses, is further complicated by their desire to live up to the expectations of their family, their mother in particular.

REFERENCES

1. Alcott, Louisa May (1870), *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, Roberts Brothers, Boston
2. Alcott, Louisa May (2007), *Little Women and Good Wives*, Vintage Books, London
3. Auerbach, Nina (1978), *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction*, Harvard UP, Cambridge
4. Bender, Clare (2017), ″Gender Stereotyping in 'Little Women': 'Let us be Elegant or Die'″, *MJUR*, 8, 140–153.
5. Cohoon, Lorinda (2015), ″'Dishes and Dusters': Valuing Beth's Labor in Louisa May Alcott's 'Little Women'; or, Staying in for Service″, in: Anne K.

Phillips and Gregory Eiselein (eds.), *Critical Insights: "Little Women"*, Salem Press, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 159–173.
6. Elbert, Sarah (1984), *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and "Little Women"*, Temple UP, Philadelphia
7. Fetterley, Judith (1979), ″'Little Women': Alcott's Civil War″, *Feminist Studies*, 5 (2), 369–383.
8. Foote, Stephanie (2005), ″Resentful 'Little Women': Gender and Class Feeling in Louisa May Alcott″, *College Literature*, 32(1), 63–85.
9. Halttunen, Karen (1984), ″The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott″, *Feminist Studies*, 10(2), 233–254.
10. Keyser, Elizabeth L (1993), *Whispers in the Dark: The Fiction of Louisa May Alcott*, Tennessee UP, Knoxville
11. Maruo-Schröder, Nicole (2018), ″Louisa May Alcott″, in: Christine Gerhardt (ed.), *The Handbook of the American Novel of the Nineteenth-Century*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 399–417.
12. Murphy, Ann (1990), ″The Borders of Ethical, Erotic and Artistic Possibilities in 'Little Women'″, *Signs*, 15(3), *The Ideology of Mothering: Disruption and Reproduction of Patriarchy*, 562–585.
13. Rivas, Sarah (2014), ″Defining Nineteenth-Century Womanhood: The Cult of Marmee and 'Little Women'″, *Scientia et Humanitas: A Journal of Student Research*, 4, 53–63.
14. Smith, Shardai (2021), ″Dismantling Gender Roles and Redefining Womanhood in Louisa May Alcott's 'Little Women'″, *Locus: The Seton Hall Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 4, 1–12.
15. Strickland, Charles (1985), *Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott*, Alabama UP, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
16. Waters, Karla (1994), ″Seeking Home: Secularizing the Quest for the Celestial City in 'Little Women' and 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz'″, in: John C. Hawley (ed.), *Reform and Counterreform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 153–171.
18. Welter, Barabara (1966), ″The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860″, *American Quarterly*, 18(2), 151–174.

ŽENSTVENOST I DEMOKRATSKO DOMAĆINSTVO U *MALIM ŽENAMA* LUIZE MEJ OLKOT

Sažetak:

Ovaj rad se bavi pitanjima ženstvenosti i demokratskog domaćinstva u *Malim ženama*, romanu Luize Mej Olkot. Teoretski okvir istraživanja je klasični esej Barbare Velter o kultu „prave" ženstvenosti u viktorijanskoj Americi. Iz analize četiri glavne osobine ženstvenosti, tj. njihovog prisustva u romanu, proizilazi zaključak da izrastanje Meg, Džo, Bet i Ejmi u žene istovremeno potvrđuje ograničenost ženskog potencijala u viktorijanskoj Americi i svedoči o borbi za aktuelizaciju. Razvoj četiri devojke je pod istovremenim uticajem rodnih diskursa koji preovlađuju u društvu i progresivnih ideja njihove majke. Međutim, kako svaka devojka tumači ove vizije različito i prilagođava ih svojim raličitim ličnostima, svako postajanje ženom je jedinstveno. Konačno, rad sugeriše da sestre Marč pokušavaju da uspostave ravnotežu između aktuelizacije i potrebe da se prilagode porodici, dve podjednako važne, ali oponirajuće aspiracije. Proizilazi zaključak da aktuelizacija Meg, Džo i Ejmi, najpre ugrožena ograničenjima patrijarhalne kulture, biva dodatno komplikovana njihovom potrebom da ostanu verne majčinom učenju, što je naročito naglašeno tokom pokušaja Džo i Ejmi da ostvare svoje umetničke ambicije.

Ključne reči: Luiza Mej Olkot; *Male žene*; ženstvenost; demokratsko domaćinstvo; aktualizacija

Author's address
Adresa autorice

Nataša V. Ninčetović
University of Priština in Kosovska Mitrovica
Faculty of Philosophy
natasa.nincetovic@pr.ac.rs