



Reconstructing Feminism through Gender Roles, Women's Opportunities, and Love in Greta Gerwig's Little Women

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Abstract: The study is about the feminism issues faced by women in the film Little Women (2019) directed by Greta Gerwig which is adapted from the classic novel by Louisa May Alcott. The content issue is about the feminism which is always relevant to the women's life. This study also examines the representation of feminism in Greta Gerwig's Little Women focusing on gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and the institution of love and marriage as sites of inequality and restriction. Using a qualitative descriptive method, a feminist approach and textual analysis, selected scenes and dialogues are examined to reveal how gender roles shape women's ambitions and how marriage functions not merely as a romantic resolution but as an economic and ideological institution. The findings show that Jo March values independence and pursues a career in writing represented as gender roles, Amy March works to develop her artistic skills while aiming for financial independence represented as women's ambition, Meg March balances traditional household duties and financial limitations, and Beth March prioritizes her family and personal interests over restrictive gender norms represented as love and marriage. In conclusion, Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of Little Women honors the many, nuanced ways that female autonomy can manifest while underlining the structural inequities that restrict women's lives, effectively reimagining Louisa May Alcott's classic novel as a powerful feminist work for the contemporary era.

Keywords: *feminism, gender roles, women's ambition, marriage, Little Women*

INTRODUCTION

Feminism has long been a central discourse in literary and film studies, particularly in

examining how women's experiences are shaped by social, cultural, and ideological structures. As a critical framework, feminism seeks to uncover gender-based inequalities embedded in texts and

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visual narratives, especially those related to gender roles, women's ambitions, and institutionalized expectations such as love and marriage. Film adaptations of literary works provide a significant space for reinterpreting feminist ideas, as they allow contemporary perspectives to engage with classical narratives.

Little Women (2019), directed by Greta Gerwig, is a cinematic adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's nineteenth-century novel that foregrounds women's struggles within a patriarchal society. Unlike earlier adaptations, Gerwig's version emphasizes female agency, economic independence, and the complexity of women's choices. The film portrays four female protagonists—Jo, Meg, Amy, and Beth March—each representing different responses to societal expectations imposed on women, particularly regarding domestic roles, career aspirations, and marriage. Through these characters, the film reflects the tension between personal ambition and social restriction experienced by women. *Little Women* already discussed by many researchers, the following discussions are the studies already issued.

Similar and previous studies about *Little Women* film are; *Feminism Portrayed in Greta Gerwig's Movie Little Women; Analysis in Modern Era* by Nurmala et.al. The study tries to search the types of feminism on the main character using Tong and Botts's theory. (Dewi, Nurmala, n.d.), *Challenging Female Gender Stereotype in Little Women*, thesis by Natasha, the study highlights the existences of gender stereotypes in society and explores the efforts of Jo March, Meg March, and Amy March to challenge these stereotypes. (Nathasya, 2024), *The Influence of Feminism in the Construction of Female Characters in Greta Gerwig's Filmography* by Villaorduna, it analyzes the influence of feminism in the construction of female characters throughout Greta Gerwig's filmography. (Villaorduña et al., 2024), *Characterization Analysis and the Feminism Reflection of Jo March in the Little Women Movie* by Putri & Alhakim, it analyzes the

characterization and the feminism reflection of Jo March in the *Little Women* movie (Putri & Al Hakim, 2024), *Analisis Feminis Perbedaan Pandangan Emansipasi Perempuan oleh March Bersaudara dalam Film Little Women* (2019 by hafidhoturrofia, It communicates the message of gender equality and the woman freedom. (Khafidhoturrofia & Utami Dwi Isma, 2024), while the research gap of *Reconstructing Feminism through Gender Roles, Women's Opportunities, and Love in Greta Gerwig's Little Women* is focus on 3 points; gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and the institution of love and marriage.

Although *Little Women* (2019) has been widely discussed in feminist scholarship, many existing studies tend to employ a single feminist perspective—most commonly liberal or existentialist feminism—and primarily focus on Jo March as the central figure of resistance. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how different feminist theories can simultaneously illuminate the varied experiences of all female characters, particularly in relation to gender roles, women's ambitions, and marriage as interconnected systems of inequality.

To address this gap, this study employs a multi theoretical feminist framework, drawing on liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern feminist theories. By applying multiple feminist perspectives, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how *Little Women* reconstructs feminism through diverse female experiences. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How are gender roles and expectations represented in *Little Women* (2019) (2) How do women's opportunities and ambitions reflect feminist concerns? and (3) How are love and marriage portrayed as sites of inequality and negotiation? Through this approach, the study contributes to feminist literary and film studies by demonstrating the significance of multi theoretical analysis in capturing the complexity of women's lives experiences.



The previous points explained how Little Women film from the novel semi autobiography written by Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) already discussed many times in many studies, in many previous literary studies. The team researcher shows two different and significant points of study than other studies before about feminism. Firstly, the Little Women film studies taken from theory of Beauvoir and Millett. Secondly, the theory explores feminism issue from perspective of gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage. The team researcher shows how this study different from others in the following paragraph.

Where intersectional feminism doesn't fit: Energy transition and Ubuntu feminism? by Chipango, it reveals that the analysis is timely because there is an urgent need for a more comprehensive moral energy policy to move from one that only seeks to 'include' women in technology and energy transition. (Chipango, 2025), Does Islam have a Place in Gender Equality? Perspectives from Muslim Feminism and Secular Feminism by Hardi, this study questions the sustainability of Islamic feminism as a distinct movement versus a pragmatic strategy within the Middle East and North African region. (Hardy, 2025), Unpopular feminism: Popular culture and gender politics in digital China by Liao, the study documents the interweaving of feminist politics in contemporary China through gendered, classed, racialized, and ethno-national discourses in transnational encounters. (Liao, 2025), Feminisms and entrepreneurship: a systematic literature review investigating a troubled connection by Lagrasta, the study shows that most papers agree on recognizing the crucial role of feminisms in: (i) women's entrepreneurial empowerment, especially in traditionally male-dominated cultural and geographical contexts and (ii) challenging the neoliberal paradigm. (Lagrasta et al., 2024), A Social Psychological Critique on Islamic Feminism by Bakhshizadeh, it aims to re-read the Qur'an from a modern egalitarian perspective, which is outside the traditional and

patriarchal interpretation of Islam. Islamic feminists reclaim an ethical vision of the Qur'an by presenting a reinterpretation, especially regarding verses that deprive women from having equal rights in the family, as well as in society (Bakhshizadeh, 2023), Feminism and Counter-Trafficking: Exploring the Transformative Potential of Contemporary Feminism in Portugal by Clemente, The article argues that, due to a structural weakness within feminism itself and the profound institutionalization of counter-trafficking, any possibility of challenging dominant discourses on trafficking remains a distant dream. (Clemente, 2023), Feminism Means Business: Business Feminism, Sisterhood and Visibility by Lauri, the analysis shows that feminism is renegotiated into ownership by reshaping the feminist discourse of sisterhood into business support and advice. Furthermore, competition is reshaped into a positive value of expanding the feminist community, and making profit is reshaped into a feminist discourse of equal pay. Business feminism produces an individual, visible, affluent and entrepreneurial feminist subject who does not challenge economic structures or ownership conditions. (Lauri, 2021). From seven related studies above about feminism, it is proved that issue of feminism of Little Women based on Beauvoir and Millett theory with viewing gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage is truly the novelty of this study.

Gender roles and expectations in Little Women are depicted as socially constructed norms that limit women's access to public spaces and professional opportunities. Women are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities and marriage over self-actualization, while men are positioned as economic providers and decision-makers. These expectations create structural inequalities that restrict women's ambitions and reinforce dependency. Feminist theorists argue that such roles are not natural but culturally produced to maintain patriarchal dominance (Wollstonecraft, 1792; Beauvoir, 1949).

In addition to gender roles, women's opportunities and ambitions constitute a crucial feminist concern in the film. Jo March's desire to become a writer, Amy March's pragmatic pursuit of economic stability through marriage, and Meg March's choice to embrace domestic life illustrate diverse forms of female aspiration. These ambitions, however, are consistently negotiated within restrictive social frameworks. As Friedan (1963) argues, women's dissatisfaction often emerges not from personal failure but from the denial of opportunities to realize their intellectual and creative potential.

Furthermore, love and marriage in *Little Women* are portrayed not merely as romantic ideals but as social and economic institutions that regulate women's lives. Marriage is shown as a means of economic security and social legitimacy, particularly for women who lack financial independence. From a feminist perspective, this reflects how marriage operates as a site of power relations rather than a purely personal choice (Mill, 1869; Engels, 1884). The film challenges the traditional portrayal of marriage as a universal goal for women by presenting it as one option among many, each carrying different consequences.

Feminist Issues: Inequality and Restrictions on Women

Feminism is a movement and theoretical approach that seeks to understand and challenge inequality between men and women. Feminist theory argues that women's oppression is not caused only by individual attitudes but is deeply rooted in social institutions, cultural norms, economic systems, and dominant beliefs (Beauvoir, 2011; Millett, 2000). Issues such as gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage are key areas where inequality and restriction are created and maintained (Wollstonecraft, 2014; hooks, 2000).

1. Gender Roles and Expectations

Gender roles are socially constructed expectations that shape how men and women are supposed to behave, think, and identify themselves. Feminist theorists argue that these roles are learned through socialization rather than determined by biology. Simone de Beauvoir's well-known statement that women are made by society, not born, highlights how femininity is produced through cultural norms and practices (Beauvoir, 1949/2011). In patriarchal societies, women are commonly associated with the private sphere of domestic work, caregiving, and emotional labor, while men are linked to the public sphere of politics, leadership, and economic power (Millett, 1970/2000).

These gender roles contribute to structural inequality in several ways. They present women's subordination as natural by defining traits such as obedience, care, and passivity as feminine. They also restrict women's self-development and social mobility by discouraging independence, ambition, and intellectual authority. In addition, gender roles create double standards, in which qualities admired in men, such as assertiveness and ambition, are often criticized in women (hooks, 2000).

From a feminist perspective, gender roles operate as a form of ideological control that shapes women's choices and desires, making inequality appear normal or acceptable. Liberal feminism criticizes gender roles for limiting individual freedom and equal opportunity, while radical feminism views them as mechanisms of patriarchal power that maintain male dominance over women's bodies, labor, and identities (Tong, 2009).

2. Women's Opportunities and Ambitions

Feminist theory emphasizes that women's opportunities and ambitions are often limited by social, economic, and cultural barriers. Historically, women were excluded from education, professional work, property ownership, and political participation. Although many legal restrictions have been removed, gender inequality continues in the form of wage gaps, limited access to leadership positions,



occupational segregation, and the persistence of glass ceilings (Tong, 2009; hooks, 2000).

Women's ambitions are also shaped by internalized sexism, which develops through socialization. From an early age, girls are frequently encouraged to value appearance, relationships, and caregiving over intellectual achievement or career advancement. As a result, many women hesitate to pursue ambitious goals due to fear of social criticism, rejection, or being labeled selfish or unfeminine (Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Socialist and Marxist feminist theorists argue that women's limited opportunities are closely connected to capitalism, which depends on women's unpaid domestic labor to support the paid workforce. This economic arrangement reinforces women's dependence on men and restricts their power both within the household and in society more broadly (Federici, 2012). Intersectional feminism further explains that women do not experience these barriers in the same way, as gender inequality intersects with race, class, ethnicity, and colonial history to create different forms of disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989).

Therefore, feminism views women's ambitions as political rather than purely personal. Individual struggles for education, career success, and independence are understood as part of a collective effort to transform unequal social structures and achieve equal access to opportunity and economic autonomy (hooks, 2000).

3. Love and Marriage

Love and marriage are central concerns in feminist critiques of inequality because they are often presented as private and personal choices, even though they are shaped by social norms and power relations. Historically, marriage has functioned as a patriarchal institution in which women's legal rights, economic independence, and sexual autonomy were limited, reinforcing male dominance within both the family and society (Millett, 1970).

Feminist theorists such as Kate Millett and Germaine Greer argue that romantic ideals encourage women to measure their value through relationships with men. The cultural belief in "true love" can hide unequal power relations by promoting self-sacrifice and emotional dependency, often leading women to place men's needs above their own ambitions and well-being (Greer, 1970; Millett, 1970).

Marriage also reinforces gender inequality through the unequal division of labor. Women are typically expected to perform most domestic work and childcare, even when they participate in paid employment. This unpaid labor reduces women's time and opportunities for personal and professional growth (hooks, 2000). In addition, strong social pressure to marry often marginalizes single women, portraying them as incomplete or unsuccessful and reinforcing the belief that women's primary role is domestic.

From a feminist perspective, love and marriage are not rejected but critically examined. Contemporary feminist thought supports relationships based on equality, shared responsibility, and individual autonomy, challenging traditional models of marriage that reproduce dependency and inequality (Tong, 2009).

The film *Little Women*, and the novel itself may have already passed 6 to 7 years (2019), but the study and the issue reveal in this study is quite relevant and still be in force with the recent phenomena of our life.

Film Analysis Theory

There are some scholars as well as film critics who concerned a lot about gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage at the same time, they are; Laura Mulvey (British film critic and theorist born 1941 (Most Iconic – Essential in Nearly All Gender-Focused Film Research), her essay was a groundbreaking intervention that launched much of second-wave feminist film theory by combining psychoanalysis with feminism. Her main theory: *The Male Gaze*. She argues that classical Hollywood cinema is

structured around male pleasure (drawing on Freud and Lacan). The film form positions the spectator as a heterosexual male viewer. Women on screen function primarily as objects of visual pleasure rather than active subjects, Bell Hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), an American Black feminist writer, activist, and cultural critic. She critiques Mulvey's theory as overly focused on white, middle-class experiences. Her main theory: The Oppositional Gaze, Black women (and women of color) cannot simply adopt the "male gaze" pleasure described by Mulvey. Mainstream cinema marginalizes them, offering no empowering identification. Instead, they develop an oppositional gaze—a resistant, critical way of looking that refuses objectification and internalized inferiority, Claire Johnston, British pioneer of feminist film theory (1940–1987), her main theory: Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema Patriarchal cinema treats women as myth (in the Barthesian sense) or empty signs/symbols constructed for male fantasy (e.g., mother, whore, virgin). Women are not real subjects but projections of male desire. The solution is counter-cinema—women's filmmaking that disrupts these myths and shows complex female realities.

The team researcher admits that those theories are quite relevant with the feminism in *Little Woman* film. Their theories are still relevant with the real life of the woman now, the problem challenge the woman in this era, especially digital era. The trinity issue in this study; gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage discussed, elaborated much by these film critics above in their works. That goes without saying the trinity issue of the study in *Little Women* are still relevant with scholars of feminism theories and scholars of film critics theories even though the film was already released 7 years ago

METHOD

Research has a significant part in solving any issue that arises in human existence. This research applied is qualitative method, where the available data is thoroughly analyzed to explore the film

background through descriptive analysis. Dabbs in (Lune & Berg, 2017:12) explains that qualitative refers to the what, how, when, where, and why of a thing its essence and ambience. Qualitative research, thus, refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. As explained by Dabbs, qualitative research seeks to identify the essence and details of a subject through in-depth examination. W. Laurence Neuman in Djamba & Neuman (2002:10) also argues that data from qualitative research can be in the form of words, images, or objects. This study also adopts a qualitative content analysis to examine feminist themes in *Little Women* which focuses on three main aspects: gender roles and expectations, women's opportunities and ambitions, and love and marriage. The primary data source is the film itself, while secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and feminist theory relevant to gender analysis (Creswell, 2014; Tong, 2009). The team researcher examines and presents data regarding feminism-related issues brought up in this movie. This serves as a way to encourage more women to fight for their rights and freedoms, increase the number of individuals who care about it, and raise awareness of how important it is for women to exist.

Techniques of Collecting Data

The data needs to be collected, analyzed, and observed surely for this research. The data is divided in two types as follows: Primary and Secondary data. Primary data is data collected directly from the source for specific research purposes. The primary source of data originates from *Little Women* movie and Greta Gerwig's script of *Little Women* movie, which features several feminist activities carried out by characters including Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy. (Hox and Hennie (2004_593). While Secondary Data is data that has been collected by other researchers and made available for use by the larger research community is referred to as secondary data. Secondary sources for this study



data include websites, dictionaries, journals, articles, and several books that provide additional information for the primary sources. This data can be used to enrich and verify the findings of the primary data sources.

Techniques of Analyzing Data

Data analysis is an important part of research as it attempts to determine the reliability and validity of a set of data. The following steps are used in data analysis: Watching Little Women movie, Reading the movie script, Taking notes of important parts that required for the purpose of study, Sorting, Classifying, and Arranging. The first step of this research is watching the movie until understand and get the meaning of the movie. By watching the movie, it will be easier to analyze the issues that exist in the movie. To avoid misunderstandings regarding the overall story, the writer carefully reads and analyzes the dialogue between the characters in this step. The next step in the process of study is to make notes, analyze the feminist aspects that were made clear by describing the dialogue, and compile a list of various elements that indicate feminism movements. Sorting the data is an important step in the research process that increases the research accuracy.

The findings are currently categorized in accordance with various kinds of feminism after the data is sorted. The next step is about organizing all the data and compiling it into a summary of the study. The final step is coming to a conclusion related to the feminism that the characterized in the Little Women movie presented after organizing the entire story. The analysis involved interpreting characters' actions and dialogues to examine how each sister responds differently to social and cultural constraints. Jo's resistance to traditional gender roles, Amy's artistic ambition, Meg's negotiation with economic limitations, and Beth's nurturing role were analyzed to explore how the film reconstructs feminist ideas for contemporary audiences. The findings were validated by comparing the analysis with established feminist theories and previous studies on gender and

women's roles (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; hooks, 2000).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are three points that will be discussed. The first point is How the characters experience gender inequality, the second point is Female Opportunities and Ambitions, and the third point is Love and Marriage in the movie Little

This study discusses three main aspects in the film Little Women. The first aspect examines how the female characters experience gender inequality. The second focuses on women's opportunities and ambitions, particularly how social and economic limitations affect their personal goals. The third explores representations of love and marriage, analyzing how these themes reflect gender expectations and power relations within society (Gerwig, 2019; Tong, 2009).

1. Gender Roles and Expectations

The movie emphasizes the restrictions and demands made on women in the 19th century. The March sisters, go against society's expectations of what it means to be a woman by following their own goals, looking for intellectual and creative fulfillment, and opposing social pressure to fit into stereotypical feminine roles. This can be illustrated from several conversations between characters.

Jo March

Scene 1 (00:03:53 - 00:04:03)

Jo : Should I tell my, my friend that you'll take another if she had one better than this?

Mr. Dashwood : We'll look at it. Tell her to make it short and spicy. And if the main character's a girl make sure she's married by the end or dead, either way

The dialogue reflects gender bias in literature, where women's stories were restricted to marriage or death. It also shows that female writers were underestimated, and their success was seen as challenging male authority.. According to Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1949), Beth is the perfect example of a woman confined to immanence because she views the repetitive, unpaid work of caring for others as her fundamental responsibility and hardly ever expresses her own preferences or boundaries, even in situations where resources are limited and her sisters publicly put their own goals (Jo's writing, Amy's art) first.

Scene 2 (00:14:42 – 00:14:51)

Jo : She reminds me to be good so Father will be proud of me when he returns.

Laurie : Where is he?

Jo : Volunteered for the Union Army. I wanted to go fight with him. I can't get over my disappointment in being a girl.

Jo is portrayed as a tomboy who rejects traditional gender norms for women. She dislikes being limited by expectations to be delicate or domestic, and instead prefers active, independent behavior. She also ignores conventional beauty standards, choosing comfort and freedom over fashion. Jo feels the existential annoyance of being positioned as the immanent "Other," according to Simone de Beauvoir's perspective (*The Second Sex*, 1949). Her gender is perceived as a barrier that prevents her from transcending through significant, public action (war, heroism, contribution beyond the hearth). The patriarchal portrayal of female as essentially passive and ornamental is challenged by her jealousy of male freedom and her willful contempt for traditional femininity, giving comfort, functionality, and unrestricted mobility precedence over fashion or "delicacy." This instance highlights how gender standards cause profound psychological struggle and "disappointment" with one's own body and social status in addition to limiting women's options.

Amy March

Scene 3 (01:04:38 – 01:05:05)

Amy : I do think that male or female, I'm a middling talent.

Laurie: Middling talent? Then may I ask your last portrait be of me?

Amy : (laughs) all right.

Laurie : Now that you've given up all your foolish artistic hopes,

what are you going to do with your life?

Amy : Polish up my other talents and be an ornament to society.

Amy refuses to accept the traditional role of women as only housewives. She pursues an artistic career to challenge gender stereotypes and seeks financial independence so she can control her own life. Despite failures, she continues to develop her talents and remain independent. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Amy repudiates passive immanence as the "Other"

characterized by male validation; instead, she adeptly maneuvers economic reliance by cultivating "other talents" for leverage in matrimony, concurrently retaining acute awareness of systemic limitations. This moment confronts gender stereotypes by depicting ambition as both adaptive and resilient—Amy does not forsake her quest for autonomy but instead channels it towards financial independence through strategic decisions, rejecting confinement to domesticity or unfulfilled aspirations.

Meg March

Meg represents a more traditional woman who accepts conventional gender roles. She faces the challenge of adapting to social expectations that require her to focus on family and household responsibilities.

Scene 4 (00:26:40 – 00:26:53)

Meg : Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas because our men are suffering in the army. We can't do much, but we should make our little sacrifices and do it gladly.

Jo : Don't play mother just because she's not home.

This feminist issue highlights women's role in supporting their families, especially men in the military. Meg's statement shows that women were expected to make sacrifices and become the backbone of the family while men were at war. According to Simone de Beauvoir's framework in *The Second Sex* (1949), Meg is characterized as the immanent "Other," anticipated to prioritize the collective good, dictated by male absence and national obligation, over her own needs and aspirations; her sacrifices are portrayed as natural, voluntary, and morally superior, thereby reinforcing women's subordinate status. Jo's incisive response—"Do not assume a maternal role merely due to her absence"—reveals the performative aspect of this function, emphasizing how young women like as Meg are conditioned from an early age to absorb and emulate parental self-sacrifice.

Scene 5 (00:08:41 – 00:09:07)

Sallie : Oh Meg! That would look so lovely on you. I know just the dressmaker to send you to. You'll be the prettiest wife in Concord.

Meg : Oh no, John needs a new coat for winter and Daisy and Demi need new clothes and –



Sallie : And his wife needs a new dress.
Meg : I can't... it's, I just can't.
Sallie : He'll be so pleased with how you look that he'll forget all about the expense.
Meg : I don't suppose it's such an extravagance.

This dialogue shows social pressure on women to look beautiful and fit the ideal role of a wife. While Sallie urges Meg to focus on her appearance, Meg prioritizes her family's needs instead. This reflects how women struggle between meeting beauty standards and exercising their own choices. This illustrates the patriarchal formulation of femininity as performative and decorative: a wife's worth is linked to her appearance and her capacity to enhance her husband's image, thereby reinforcing Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the "Other," whose identity is shaped by male validation and observation (The Second Sex, 1949). Meg's repeated resistance—"I can't... it's, I just can't"—and her prioritization of family needs (John's coat, the children's clothes) over personal extravagance demonstrate her struggle to assert agency within marriage. She assimilates the expectation to forgo her own needs for others while subtly scrutinizing the rationale of investing in herself merely to augment her husband's gratification.

Scene 6 (01:01:45 – 01:02:24)
Meg : I'm sorry, John. The silk was the first real expense.
John : Fifty dollars, while a lot, is not, I suppose, too much for a dress, with all the notions that are needed to finish it these days.
Meg : Well, it's not exactly even a dress yet... It's just the fabric.
John : Oh I see.
Meg : I know you are angry, John. I don't mean to waste your money, but I can't resist when I see Sallie buying all she wants, and pitying me because I don't. I try to be contented, but it is hard, and, and... I'm tired of being poor.

Meg feels frustrated by economic inequality, seeing that others have more access to money than she does. This highlights limited economic opportunities for women and how traditional gender roles make her dependent on her husband instead of financially independent. According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Meg embodies the dependent "Other," with her

access to material comfort and personal aspirations contingent upon male support. Her frustration arises not solely from poverty but from the systemic denial of independent economic opportunities for women, compelling her to contend with envy, social comparison, and self-reproach within the institution of marriage. The scenario exposes how patriarchal norms—where the legal and financial identity of married women is subsumed by their husbands—intensify emotions of impotence and resentment towards inequity, as Meg internalizes the shame of desiring "more" while being unable to attain it independently.

Beth March

Beth is portrayed as kind and gentle, enjoying a simple life at home. She is selfless and always willing to sacrifice and support her family.

Scene 7 (01:16:56 – 01:17:08)
Beth : You all haven't been to see the Hummel's. We should go.
Jo : Oh Bethy, we barely have enough to feed ourselves. Besides, I have to finish this story.
Beth : Marmee said that we....
Amy : Marmee told us to do so many things, but we can't possibly do them all.
Beth : But I always go by myself and you haven't been keeping up with your tasks.

This conversation highlights women's expected role in caring for others and handling household duties. While Beth reminds her sisters to help others, Jo and Amy stress the need to consider their own needs and limitations. According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Beth epitomizes the woman relegated to immanence; she embraces the monotonous, unpaid labor of caregiving as her fundamental obligation, seldom asserting her own desires or boundaries, even when resources are limited and her sisters openly pursue their individual aspirations (Jo's writing, Amy's art).

2. Female Opportunities and Ambitions

The movie portrays the difficulties women face in developing their creative ambitions. It emphasizes the need for women's voices to be recognized and shows how their work often struggles to be taken seriously in a male-dominated society. The film also reveals how limited career opportunities for women were at that time.

Jo feels frustrated when Friedrich criticizes her writing, as she is sensitive to rejection. However, she learns that constructive criticism can help her improve as a writer. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existential framework (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Jo rejects the role of the dependent "Other," ardently seeking authorship as a means to independence and self-actualization; however, the scene reveals the devaluation of women's creative labor—Jo's published works generate income but lack artistic esteem, compelling her to choose between financial survival and genuine expression.

Jo shows resistance to the social conventions of her time. Instead of following Aunt March's advice to become a traditional housewife, she chooses to pursue success in her writing career independently. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Jo rejects the role of the passive, appreciative "Other" whose future relies on satisfying others; instead, she affirms her transcendence through self-determined ambition, opting for the precarious route of professional writing rather than the conventional security of traditional womanhood.

Amy is deeply dedicated to her painting. She not only has talent but also works hard to develop it further. She pursues her ambitions with determination because she wants to be financially independent rather than relying on her husband or family. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existential philosophy (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Amy surpasses the position of the passive "Other" by seeking transcendence through creative endeavors rather than relational reliance. Her motivation is directly linked to economic independence—she subsequently states that marriage is a "economic proposition" due to women's lack of financial resources—rendering her pursuit of painting not mere vanity but a calculated endeavor for financial liberty, unencumbered by dependence on a spouse or family.

Although career opportunities for women are limited, Amy shows courage and independence by expressing her dream of becoming a painter. This highlights the importance of women having the confidence to voice their ambitions and not allowing social restrictions to stop them from reaching their potential. It also stresses the need to challenge the limits and stereotypes found in patriarchal societies and to encourage women to pursue their careers and goals. Utilizing Simone

de Beauvoir's existential feminism (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Amy rejects the characterization of the passive "Other" fated for marital subservience; rather, she asserts her transcendence through dedicated creative endeavors, regarding painting lessons as vital preparation for authentic independence. Her courteous evasion of Aunt March's insistence—though seemingly acquiescent—exhibits subtle bravery: she does not openly rebel but persistently prioritizes her aspirations, resisting the overshadowing of her drive to become a serious artist by patriarchal expectations of marriage as the ultimate objective

3. Love and Marriage

Little Women challenges the idea that marriage is the ultimate goal for women. It emphasizes personal freedom and independence as the characters struggle between social expectations and their own desires in love and marriage.

Aunt March believes marrying a rich man is the best way for a woman to live well and help her family. In contrast, Jo rejects this idea, valuing independence and her writing career over marriage, which she sees as limiting her freedom and ambitions. This reflects Simone de Beauvoir's critique of women as the economically dependent "Other" (*The Second Sex*, 1949), whose survival hinges on alliance with male power rather than self-determination. Jo's resolute statements, "Marmee loves her life," "he was right," and her tacit rejection of Aunt March's cynicism, dismiss this transactional perspective on marriage, emphasizing intellectual autonomy, moral integrity, and her literary aspirations over financial concessions.

Jo has a close friendship with Laurie that challenges social norms. When Laurie proposes, Jo refuses because she believes a relationship should be based on true feelings and strong emotional connection, not social expectations. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist critique (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Jo rejects the role of "the Other," whose identity is overshadowed by marriage and male validation; she values genuine selfhood and autonomy over society expectations to marry for security, status, or friendship. Her self-characterization as "homely and awkward and odd" and her foreboding of unavoidable discord ("we would quarrel... we would be unhappy") reveal marriage as a prospective entrapment that would



suppress her aspirations (“you’d hate my scribbling”) and compel her into a disingenuous position as “mistress” of an elegant household.

Jo believes that love must be mutual, not one-sided. She criticizes the idea that women exist only to be loved or must marry, and emphasizes that women should be valued for their abilities, not just their relationships. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir’s framework (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Jo rejects being relegated to “the Other,” whose identity is contingent upon male affection and matrimony; she unequivocally asserts the necessity for acknowledgment of women’s intellect and spirit alongside their emotional capacity, ambition, and talent in addition to their physical allure. Her acknowledgment of loneliness exposes the terrible consequences of such resistance in a society that correlates female value with romantic affiliation.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of Greta Gerwig’s “*Little Women*” (2019) reveals how the film reinterprets Louisa May Alcott’s classic through a feminist lens, illuminating the persistent constraints of 19th-century gender expectations while celebrating diverse paths to female agency, ambition, and fulfillment. The key findings demonstrate that the March sisters navigate rigid patriarchal norms in multifaceted ways: Jo fiercely resists confinement to domesticity or marriage, prioritizing her writing career and independence; Amy pragmatically pursues artistic excellence and financial security, refusing to romanticize talent without economic autonomy; Meg grapples with poverty and the performative demands of wifely beauty and sacrifice, yet chooses love-based marriage on her terms; and Beth quietly prioritizes familial harmony and private musical passion, embodying a gentle but profound rejection of public visibility. These portrayals collectively expose how societal structures—economic dependence, limited professional opportunities, and expectations of self-sacrifice—systematically limit women’s ambitions, yet the sisters’ resilience and mutual support underscore varied, valid expressions of womanhood beyond singular feminist ideals.

The discourse closely correlates with fundamental feminist theories, especially Simone de Beauvoir’s existential analysis in “*The Second Sex*” (1949), wherein women are characterized as the immanent “Other,” defined by relational dependency rather than autonomous

transcendence. Jo and Amy publicly confront this by affirming their creative and professional identities, whereas Meg and Beth exemplify the internalized repercussions of immanence through sacrifice and self-restriction. The film subverts elements of Laura Mulvey’s male gaze theory by focusing on female subjectivity and sisterly interaction, thereby reducing objectification and highlighting active agency in love and ambition. *Little Women*’s focus on love as reciprocal freedom and practice is further reflected in instances where marriage is redefined as a personal option rather than an obligation, facilitating reciprocity and self-authorship. These theoretical considerations underscore how Gerwig’s adaption reinterprets Alcott’s book as a contemporary feminist critique, challenging systemic obstacles while affirming diverse aspirations without establishing a hierarchy.

The findings conclusively address the research issues regarding gender roles, women’s possibilities and aspirations, and love/marriage in the film: Gerwig depicts 19th-century patriarchy as a restrictive force that undermines female aptitude and mandates dependence; nonetheless, the sisters’ narratives assert that women have rightful claims to self-determination, intellectual endeavors, economic autonomy, and relational choices free from societal norms. Instead of a singular feminist narrative, the film showcases pluralism—Jo’s autonomy, Amy’s tactical pragmatism, Meg’s relationship satisfaction, and Beth’s serene contentment—illustrating that empowerment arises from authenticity through diverse avenues.

These discoveries have profound significance for feminist film studies, indicating that adaptations of canonical works can challenge conventional perspectives and patriarchal constraints by emphasizing female plurality and agency. Gerwig’s “*Little Women*” contributes to contemporary discussions in the subject, prompting future works to investigate intersectional, non-hierarchical portrayals of women’s experiences that celebrate both resistance and relational delight in the quest for equality.

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