

# BOOK REVIEW ON LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S "LITTLE WOMEN" THE ORIGINAL AND THE TRANSLATED VERSION BY GEMA MAWARDI

Silfi Dwi Agustin and Drs. Siswo Harsono, M. Hum

English Departement, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang

---

## ABSTRAK

*Little Women* adalah novel klasik karya Louisa May Alcott. Novel ini berkisah tentang kehidupan empat perempuan bersaudara, mereka adalah Meg, Jo, Beth dan Amy March. Mereka hidup dalam kemiskinan oleh Mrs. March atau biasa dipanggil Marmee. Sedangkan ayah mereka Mr. March sedang bekerja pada di medan perang pada saat itu. Dengan cinta Marmee membesarkan ke empat anaknya. Banyak kegiatan keseharian mereka yang membuat keluarga yang miskin itu menjadi keluarga yang manis. Banyak pesan yang dapat kita ambil dari novel ini melalui setiap karakter. Berbagai pertengkaran, perkelahian, cemburu, cinta dan kasih sayang yang timbul dalam novel ini membuat kita seakan-akan larut dalam cerita. Buku ini bagus dan menarik, terlihat pada pembuatan buku ini yang tidak hanya dibuat sebuah novel tetapi juga dibuat dalam beberapa versi yakni sebuah film, serial TV, panggung opera, hingga drama musical.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Literature are image born form the creative mind of the writers that is transformed into written art. Writers are often inspired through many aspect of life and its problematics that are illustrated through literature. According to Wellek and Warren in *Teori Kesusastraan*, "sastra menyajikan kehidupan dan kehidupan sebagian besar terdiri dari kenyataan sosial, walaupun karya sastra juga meniru alam dan dunia subjektif manusia" (1989 :109). Literature are images or impression of daily life in society. These images even though are not exact

reflection, they usually matched between reality and fiction of a novel. Novels are form of literature that is very popular among literature enthusiasts. The story within a novel is usually taken from reflection of human life, so it is hoped that readers will understand the moral behind the story. This novel *Little Women* may be a novel that tells us a story about daily life. It is written by Louisa May Alcott, the best novelist of classic novels.

### 1.2 Purposes of the Writing

The main purpose of this writing is to review the Little Women by Louisa May Alcott because it is one of bestseller classic novels. The writer's purposes of the writing are:

1. To give the summary of "Little Women" and the biography of Louisa May Alcott.
2. To review about "Little Women" especially its five intrinsic aspects of novel there are character, theme, setting, plot; and writing style which includes the strengths and the weaknesses of the book.
3. To review about the comparison of strength and the weakness original book and translated edition of "Little Women".

### **1.3 About the Author**

Louisa May Alcott is one of American's female writer in the late 19th century. She was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania on 29 November 1832 from the couple Bronson Alcott and Abigail 'Abba' May. The father is an educator who believes that children are Tabular razes or like a blank piece of paper ready to write. Unfortunately, what he believed caused misery to Bronson who considered him as a perfect figure or often assumed him as an angel. Anyone who opposed her would be considered as a crime and Louisa was one who dared to oppose her father.

Under such, pressure, Louisa experienced a lot of emotional conflict with herself. Writing is one way to express her feeling since the age 7 years

Louisa started writing a diary and when she entered teenagers, Louisa began writing short stories, fairy tales and novels. She wanted to fulfill the economics needs of families. As the second daughter, Louisa felt partly responsible for the financial needs of her family. Various kinds of work are done by reading the books for elderly people, teaching kids at home even becoming a waiter a for the wealthy people. However, the writing seemed to be her substantial source of income, so she decided to write to the end. Published in 1868, Little Women was set in the Alcott family home, Orchard House in Concord, Massachusetts and was loosely based on Alcott's childhood experiences with her three sisters. The novel was very well received and became popular children's novel today. Alcott was an abolitionist and a feminist. She never married, and she died in Boston.

### **2. Summary of the Book**

This novel tells about the daily activity that is occurred in March family's house. A family consists of Mrs. March and her four daughters Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. Her father, Mr. March fights in the civil war that is occurred around the year 1860. Meg as the eldest and the most beautiful woman among them all and she wants to become a housewife. Jo is a tomboy character and she has a dream to become a famous writer. Beth is a soft girl and she loves to play music. She hopes she could be a great musician. Meanwhile, Amy is a spoiled girl who wants to be a great painter. They are very lucky because they have a mother like a Mrs. March. She has a soft heart nature and she is wise. Although she must take care her four the children alone, she never complained.

Alcott story begin with the four March girls sitting in their living room, lamenting their poverty. The girls decide that each of them will bring a gift for their mother, Marmee, instead of having a gift for themselves on Christmas. Marmee comes home with a letter from Mr. March. The letter inspires the girl to struggle against their burdens more cheerfully and not to complain about their poverty. On Christmas the girls then give Marmee her gifts and perform a play, operatic tragedy. One day, Meg and Jo attend a New Year's Party at home of Meg's wealthy friend, Sally Gardiner. At the party, Jo meets Laurie, the grandson of old Mr. Laurence. Mr. Laurence is the best friend of Mr. March.

The girls have various adventures. Meg and find work outside the home to help support the family. Meg spends her days teaching small children as a governess. Jo spends time reading and caring for her Aunt March and wishes that she could read all the books in her Aunt's library. At some point, Laurie invites Jo and Meg to watch the Seven Castle of the Diamond Lake. Jo refused to let Amy go with her to theater. Upon arriving home Jo learns that Amy burns Jo's manuscript which her feel so hurt and crushed that she cannot ever forgive Amy. In her anger, she nearly lets Amy drown while ice skating. Because of Marmee, finally Jo can forgive her little sister. Then story resolves around Pretty Meg who attends Annie Moffat's party. However, Meg is ashamed that her family is poor and that she cannot afford a new dress like the others girls. While at the party, she hears that people think she intends to marry Laurie just for his money.

One day, the family received a telegram saying that Mr. March is sick in

the hospital in Washington, D.C. Marmee goes to treat him and Jo sells her hair to help financing the trip. While Mrs. March on Washington, the baby of Hummel family is very ill which results in Baby's death of scarlet fever. Beth returns and is confined to bed, Amy is sent to Aunt March's house because of the fear of her contracting the fever. Beth are dying on the brink of death until Marmee returns. Finally, the fever breaks. Later, the story tells about Mr. Brooke who will get a job. Then he asks Meg to marry him. Jo is very upset at the prospect of losing her sister, but Marmee tries to comfort her. On Christmas Day, Mr. March returns home. The girls are happy to see him and finally the March family is complete.

### **3. REVIEW OF THE BOOK**

#### **3.1 Elements Aspect**

Intrinsic elements are the major aspects for brief description of a novel or literary work. Based on Burhan Nurgiyantoro, *"unsur intrinsik sebuah novel adalah unsur-unsur yang (secara langsung) turut serta membangun cerita"* (2012:23). In this situation the writer will try to review the novel of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott using five intrinsic aspects; they are character, theme, setting, plot and writing style of the novel. Therefore, this review includes the strengths and the weaknesses of the novel of "Little Women".

##### **3.1.1 Character**

According to Burhan Nurgiyantoro, *"tokoh cerita hendaknya bersifat alami, memiliki sifat lifelike 'kesepertihidupan' paling tidak itulah harapan pembaca"* (2012:168). In this novel, Alcott tells about the life of four

daughters of March lifelikeness. Meg, the oldest of the March sisters, is responsible and kind. She is pretty, simple, loving and she is interested in the luxurious things in life. Jo, the second oldest of the March sisters and the protagonist of the novel. She hates romance in her real life because she is a tomboy woman. Beth, the third March sister, is very shy and timid. She loves music, her doll collection, and her many cats too. Amy, the youngest March sisters is, a little artist and a very important person (according to her own). Mother or Marmee- the mother of the March girls. She tries very hard to raise her girls to be little women (intelligent, kind and modest). Marmee is the moral role model for her girls. She counsels them through all of their problems and works hard but happily, while her husband in the war. Mr. March, the father of the March family, he is in the war at the beginning of the story. He is a very intelligent and philosophical man. All of character are so lively and interesting, like theatrical play in the house, picnic, making their own newspaper, and the other events that made them into a grown up women. Exploration of the character and the several events that happened upon the four daughters of March is described proportionally. Every chapter alternately tells one of them as the center of the story. Although the character of Jo who is the reflection of Alcott's personality seems dominate the story.

### 3.1.2 Theme

Based on Burhan Nurgiyantoro, *"tema sebuah karya sastra selalu berkaitan dengan makna (pengalaman) kehidupan"* (2012:71). Little Women is a morality tale. Each chapter not only contains the lives and adventures of the four sisters, but also lessons on how to

be a good person, and how to achieve happiness in life. It also teaches about female independence against poverty's life. This novel also contains story that has sacrificial and humanity values, either between March family or the other people. For example in chapter 15 *"Sehelai Telegram"* when Jo willingly cut her hair, in order to be sold to a salon, she do it in order to get more money for her mother's trip to Washington to visit their father because he is dying. Character of March reflects women naturally, "Possessed virtues of faith, simplicity, goodness, self-sacrifice, tenderness, affection, sentimentality and modesty" (2004, 10). She educates their children with patience and sincerity. Also when Jo is angry with Amy at chapter 8 *"Jo Bertemu dengan Apollyon"*. No one spoke of the great trouble, not even Mrs. March, for all she learns by experience it is when Jo is in that mood words were wasted. Later, it is revealed that the wisest course is to wait till some little accident, or her own generous nature, softened Jo's resentment and heals the breach. However, Mrs. March whispered gently, *"sayangku, jangan biarkan matahari membakar kemarahanmu, kalian harus saling memaafkan, saling membantu dan esok memulai langkah baru"* (2011: 121). Because it actually is not easy to take care of them in an early age without the help of a husband but she is able to prove it through this novel.

### 3.1.3 Setting

Little Women is set in the 1860s in a New England town modeled on Concord, Massachusetts. Most of the action in Part I revolves around the March's family's home. With Mr. March away, who serves as a clergyman for soldiers fighting in the Civil War, the four daughters and their mother remain at home, struggling to live as

comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

#### **3.1.4 Plot**

According to Burhan Nurgiyanto, *"mengemukakan bahwa plot adalah sebuah karya fiksi yang merupakan struktur peristiwa-peristiwa, yaitu sebagaimana yang terlihat dalam pengurutan dan penyajian berbagai peristiwa tersebut mencapai efek emosional dan efek artistik tertentu"* (2012:113). The overall plot of the novel is simple. Four girls begin the story as teens and each of them matures through a variety of experiences to enter adulthood. As they grow, they learn values on things of worth and they establish their individual priorities. First, in the Initial Situation, Jo March and her sisters work hard to keep their family together although they are in poverty. The second one is Conflict when Mrs. March get a letter which says Mr. March is seriously ill. A letter not also make Mrs. March sad but also her four daughters too. Third is the Complication when Mrs. March don't have money to go Washington D.C. The next is climax when Jo goes to cut her hair and sells them so that she can give her \$25.00 to the family for financing the Marmee's trip. The Suspense is when Beth is sick because she is contaminated from the Hummel baby who was died of scarlet fever. Next is denouement when the doctor says that Beth will die like the baby, however the fever finally breaks. Then the Conclusion when Christmas Day arrives and Mr. March returns home. Story ends with the happiness.

#### **3.1.5 Writing Style**

This novel may be good for a children because the novel have a family life genre and the writing style can be didactic. However, Louisa May

Alcott is the daughter of a well philosopher, and her command of language is impressive. She writes complex, balanced sentences and uses a simple vocabulary to make it easier to understand.

#### **3.2 The Strength of "Little Women"**

From the character aspects, Louisa May Alcott describes each characters proportionally to make the reader understand who the protagonist and the antagonist are. From the writing style, the story is very interesting and it uses simplicity language, so it makes the reader easily to understand the story. From the theme, Little Women is a novel which teaches the reader to share with other people, it also gives an example that in humble women's life, the beauty of life is still possible to achieve. The novel has educational values, positive message and positive role models, so this book is good for a children too. There is no such thing that is more valuable than having a family who could complete each other. In addition, it is as the social paradigm concerning happiness which is only achievable by money. In Alcott's novel, the family is considered to be the most important aspect has gives its members strength to overcome life's obstacles and teaches about the value of selflessness.

From the plot. Louisa May Alcott uses good plot to write her novel. It does not confuse the reader with the main story. She writes the dialogue in order to make the reader easily understand the story. She explains the setting more clearly, which makes the story real. It should be note that the appearance of the novel it self becomes one of its strength. The package of the novel, both the original version and

Indonesian version, is similar in their small size. Overall, the story of the novel makes it different from the others. Louisa May Alcott twists the plot in a new way. The reader cannot be predicted the ending of the novel. Moreover, "*Little Women*" by Louisa May Alcott is one of bestseller classic novels.

### **3.3 The Weakness of "*Little Women*"**

Over all, the novel is good, with an interesting story. However, the writer thinks that the novel has a weakness from the statement of Jo March, "*aku tak bisa menekan rasa kecewaku karena tidak dilahirkan sebagai laki-laki*" (2011:5). Supposedly a lady should not say something like that. It is like Jo does not accept herself as a woman. Also at Chapter Eight, it is shown when Jo hit Amy's ear because Amy burns Jo's manuscript. Her action is not ladylike. Hitting is not a behaviour of a lady. Women should behave and speak softly to everyone.

The characteristics of Jo is assumed to be the main weakness of this book. At the beginning of the story; it is described that Jo hates men so much. The author of the book depicts her hatred in obvious ways. This may become its weakness because the value will be accepted by the reader, especially children, who read this book

### **3.4 The Strength and The Weakness of the original book *Little Women* and *Little Women* Translation.**

The translated edition has its own strength compared to the original edition. The strength can be seen from its structure. The flow of the story follows the original edition which makes it have the similar taste. The whole

translation is synchronized to the original text, grammatically and transformed to daily language style. Also there is connection with cultural, nationalism and social habits issue contained in the story. It makes them easier to understand each plot of the story. *Little Women* is a classic novel that is widely known by common people. The use of original title becomes another strength of this book. The title "*Little Woman*" is already accepted by the world wide. The translated edition uses this title in order to maintain its popularity.

Cover design is one of the important elements in book marketing. In publishing company, the work for the cover design is seriously handled by a certain departement which is the same level as editing as well as marketing departements. According to writes's opinion, the cover of the translated edition is not exciting enough. Because there is only a sketch of four ladies, while the original edition has detail image of the four ladies. The other weakness point of this novel lies in its story telling. The original version of the books contains the author's expressions more than the translated one. It is because the original language is translated to another which annihilates its purity.

After reading the novel, the writer enjoyed the original edition by Louisa May Alcott. A novel has special tones and expression from original author language style compared with the translated edition.

### **3.5 Personal Opinion**

Louisa May Alcott writes this novel using a new theme. It does not make the reader become bored. This

novel is interesting to be read. It teaches us lessons on how to be a good person, and how to achieve happiness in life. Some good things about the book are the ways the girls care about each other. It is amazing how great they got along. The story gives a moral value to the reader. It describes a way how problems are solved in parental relationship. The theme of the story itself relates with the social issues in real life.

The writer also liked the fact of the story that sounded real. It did not seem to be a fictional book. The writer enjoys the way the author describes the characters. They are described so well that you could picture what they look like. If you want to read an exciting and loving book this is definitely the one. The writer highly recommends it.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the review of "Little Women" novel, the writer makes the summary about the novel. The novel contains five intrinsic aspects; they are character, theme, setting, plot, and writing style. The novel is an unusual example of young adult literature of the time because Alcott gives her character with both faults and virtues, avoids teaching to reader, writes in a simple but accurate style, employs simple and often humorous dialogue. Little Women is a typical of young adult books of the time in that it is episodic in structure, with its chapters often devoted to individual sisters. Each sisters searches to overcome her "burden" in life, to become a "little women" and to find true love serves as the unifying theme of the novel. This is a lovely and heart rending tale about the March family, a family who loses its wealth and gains much more, love and

unity. Young girls are only human and they have a natural yearning for worldly possessions. It is up to them how they cope it, which brings us back to the March girls. Their desire to help others even when they do not have much themselves is indeed remarkable.

This book shows how in all times, love and hope are the most faithful companions when all other aspects. Honestly and true intentions are really the most valuable possessions one can have. This novel shows us beauty of simplicity and the importance of the small human deeds that count in real life even though they can not be visibly seen. Some might not like this story but unique thing about it is that it is based on a completely true story of Louisa May Alcott's own life. The unlikely twist in this story makes it depict more humanity, since we are humans and we can not evade such scenes in our life,

The March family has a difficult time while their Dad is at in the war. However, even when times are bad Meg (oldest), Jo (second oldest), Beth (second youngest) and Amy (youngest) still have heaps of fun and make new friends. In the end they fall in love and realize that not every thing has to be glamorous as long as they have a loving family and friends in their life.

#### **5. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Wellek, Rene dan Warren, Austin. *Teori Kesusastaan* (Diterjemahkan oleh Melani Budianta) Jakarta: PT. Gramedia, 1989.

Nurgiyantoro, Burhan. *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*, Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press, 2012.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*.  
Translated by Gema Mawardi.  
Jakarta: Bukune, 2011.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*.  
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebook/514>> (13 Oktober 2011).

Alcott, Louisa May.  
<[Biography.com/people/louisa-may-alcott-9179520](http://Biography.com/people/louisa-may-alcott-9179520)> (4 May 2011).

Selden, Raman 2004. *The American Woman of the Early Nineteenth Century*,  
<<http://www.studymode.com/essays/American-Women-Early-19th-Century-97201.html>> (20 Oktober 2012).