



Little Women

STUDY GUIDE

BY ZOLA FEASEL





THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR

Louisa May Alcott

- Alcott was born on November 29th, 1832.
- Her father was a transcendentalist, someone who believed that divinity pervaded nature and that held progressive views on feminism. Alcott received much of her education from him.
- Alcott was a volunteer nurse during the Civil War, during which time she contracted Typhoid.
- Never fully recovering, she turned briefly to domestic life and then began to write. Alcott's first publication, *Hospital Sketches*, in 1863 was of her letters during the Civil War.
- She is known primarily for writing *Little Women* (1868 & 1869) and the accompanying series following the March sisters as adults.

THE BELOVED STORY

- Purpose: Written for pressing financial needs
 - Originally released in II parts
- Based on recollections of Alcott's own childhood
- She created a realistic, wholesome picture of family life

FAMILY TIES

- Loosely inspired by Alcott's own biography
 - Second of four sisters
 - Under the watchful eye of an intelligent, steadfast mother
 - Alcott's father was a present financial failure while Mr. March was an absent chaplain
 - Her sister passed away from scarlet fever

THE ALCOTT FAMILY

Louisa Alcott

Anna Alcott

May Alcott

Lizzie Alcott

Marmee Alcott

Bronson Alcott

THE MARCH FAMILY

Jo March

Meg March

Amy March

Beth March

Marmee March

Robert March



FROM PAPER TO PLAY

The History of Little Women

FEATURE FILM: 1917

First adaptation of *Little Women* to the big screen.

FEATURE FILM: 1918

A silent film shot in Alcott's home.

FEATURE FILM: 1933

Starring Katherine Hepburn, the March sisters resonated with the Great Depression audience.

FEATURE FILM: 1949

An MGM production with Janet Leigh, June Allyson, Margaret O'Brien, and Elizabeth Taylor as the March Sisters.

FEATURE FILM: 1994

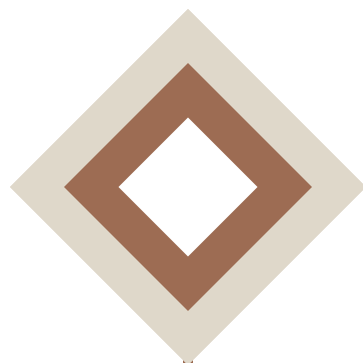
Considered one of the best film adaptations starring Winona Ryder, Christian Bale, and Susan Sarandon.

FEATURE FILM: 2019

A reboot with writer and director Greta Gerwig's star studded cast.



There have also been several television versions, an opera, and the 2005 Broadway Musical starring Sutton Foster!
In 2009, ACU Theatre produced the musical version of *Little Women* directed by Adam Hester.



Kate Hamill

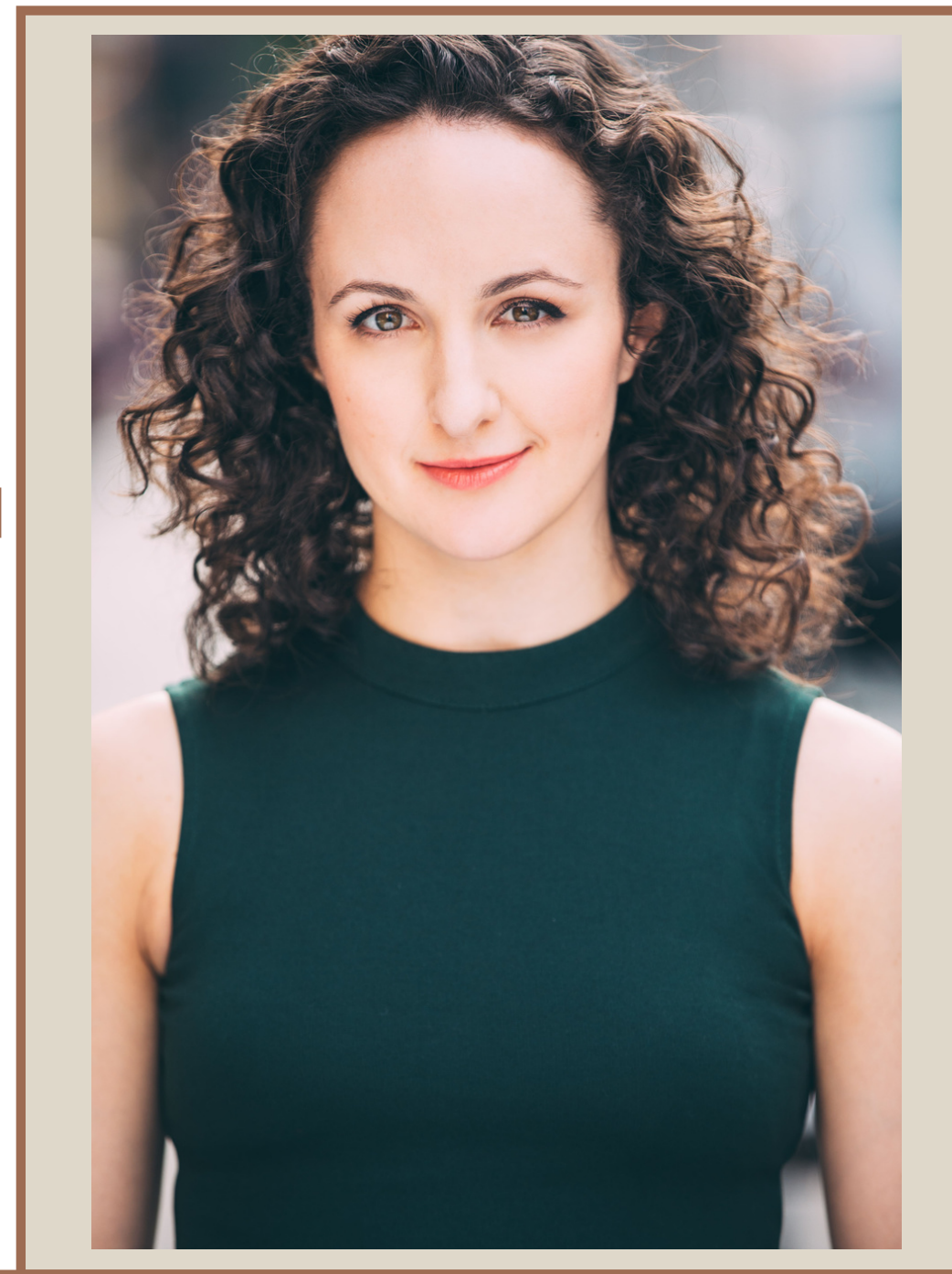


Background

- Kate Hamill is an award-winning playwright and actor from upstate New York.
- She is currently one of the ten most produced playwrights in the United States.
- She's deeply passionate about creating "new feminist, female-centered classics"

Other Works

- *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*
- *Vanity Fair* (an im-morality play)
- *In the Mines*, and more!!



THE 21ST CENTURY PLAYWRIGHT

A RADICAL ADAPTATION

“AN ADAPTATION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A MUSEUM PIECE, IT CAN EMBRACE WHAT THEATRE IS.”

“When rereading the novel with an eye towards adaptation, I was really moved by the wit and depth of relationships.”

“The play is dedicated to my mom.”

“Each generation creates a *Little Women* for themselves.”

“I specifically wanted my *Little Women* to reflect America today.”

— Kate Hamill

“Kate Hamill has written what is arguably the most contemporary sprint to date on the March sisters coming of age.”

— Sarah Pfladderer, San Diego Magazine

A New Generation

PRODUCTION HISTORY

JUNE 2018

Kate Hamill developed *Little Women* at the Colorado New Play Festival in Steamboat Springs, CO.

SEPTEMBER 2018

Little Women premiered in September 2018 at the Jungle Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Directed by Sarah Rasmussen)

JULY 2019

Little Women makes its NYC debut at Primary Stages.

WINTER 2021

Little Women plays at the Old Globe Theatre.

THE YEAR OF UNIVERSITIES, 2022

Simpson College, Colorado University, Adams State University, Virginia Theatre Festival

ACU THEATRE 2023



ALEX ORGAN

Acu Alum



- Alex Organ was involved in the Old Globe production of *Little Women*.
 - He played Robert March.
- Since 2014, Organ has served as artistic director of Second Thought Theatre.
- He is part of the repertory company of the Dallas Theater Center.
- He is a voice actor.

- **The transition from youth to adulthood.**
- **Motherhood and Postpartum Depression.**
- **Struggle to conform to society's strict ideals of femininity in the midst of poverty; Optimistic outlook from modest means.**
- **Praise in the midst of chaos.**
- **What does it mean to reject a conventional label?**
- **Achieving social equality.**



**HAMILL'S VERSION RETAINS THE CHARM OF
ALCOTT'S MARCH SISTERS, WHILE
STRENGTHENING THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT IN A MALE-DOMINATED
SOCIETY.**

"How do you deal with becoming a woman in Louisa May Alcott's society and today's society when the world wants you to fit in this tiny box"

-Kate Hamill

With a focus on the depth of the March's relationships, Hamill departs from the original: Amy accidentally burns Jo's manuscript rather than intentionally.

Both a conscious exploring and explosion of archetypes found in the novel, and those of the four sisters under one roof.

Growth in Different Ways



"The rose would wilt if she gave it the care of another flower, and the violet too. One isn't better than the other. They just need different things to grow...
You are whatever you are supposed to be. Look at them: aren't they beautiful together?"

MARMEE MARCH



SOCIETAL ROLES

The Sphere of Womenhood

- Money was equated to status.
- One discretion would be a woman's downfall.
- Women were supposed to counterbalance the tainted morality of the public sphere where their husbands labored.
- Higher education was out of the question. Accomplishments, or liberal arts skills, were necessary.
- A woman's duty was to prepare the next generation.
- The stereotyped, "natural" characteristics of men and women defined the Ideology of Separate Spheres.
- A "trust woman" was virtuous with the characteristics of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.
- The wife managed the "women's sphere." This was considered a complementary role- a male and female obsession.
- 1830s: The invention of the crinoline, a bell-shaped garment that made it impossible to do certain tasks.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Civil War

THE CONSCRIPTION ACT OF 1863:

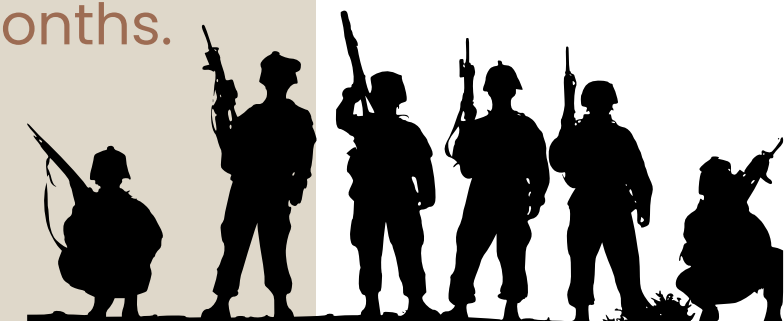
Because of the low number of volunteers in the Union Army, the first national draft system was created. Every male citizen or immigrant between the ages of 25–45 was required to register.

- Despite this, both the union and the confederate armies relied on volunteers.
- Four-hundred women disguised themselves as men and fought on both sides. Many worked as nurses, and served in whatever way possible.
- The war expanded what Americans considered “true womanhood.”

“THE WAR BETWEEN STATES.”

- It served as the beginning of the Reconstruction Era of America. The war commenced on April 12th, 1861.
- Rebels opened fired on Fort Sumter, the entrance to the harbor of Charleston, SC.
- There were no victims.
- President Lincoln called for 75,000 militiamen to serve for three months.

Hamill’s *Little Women* takes place between December 1861 to the early fall of 1863

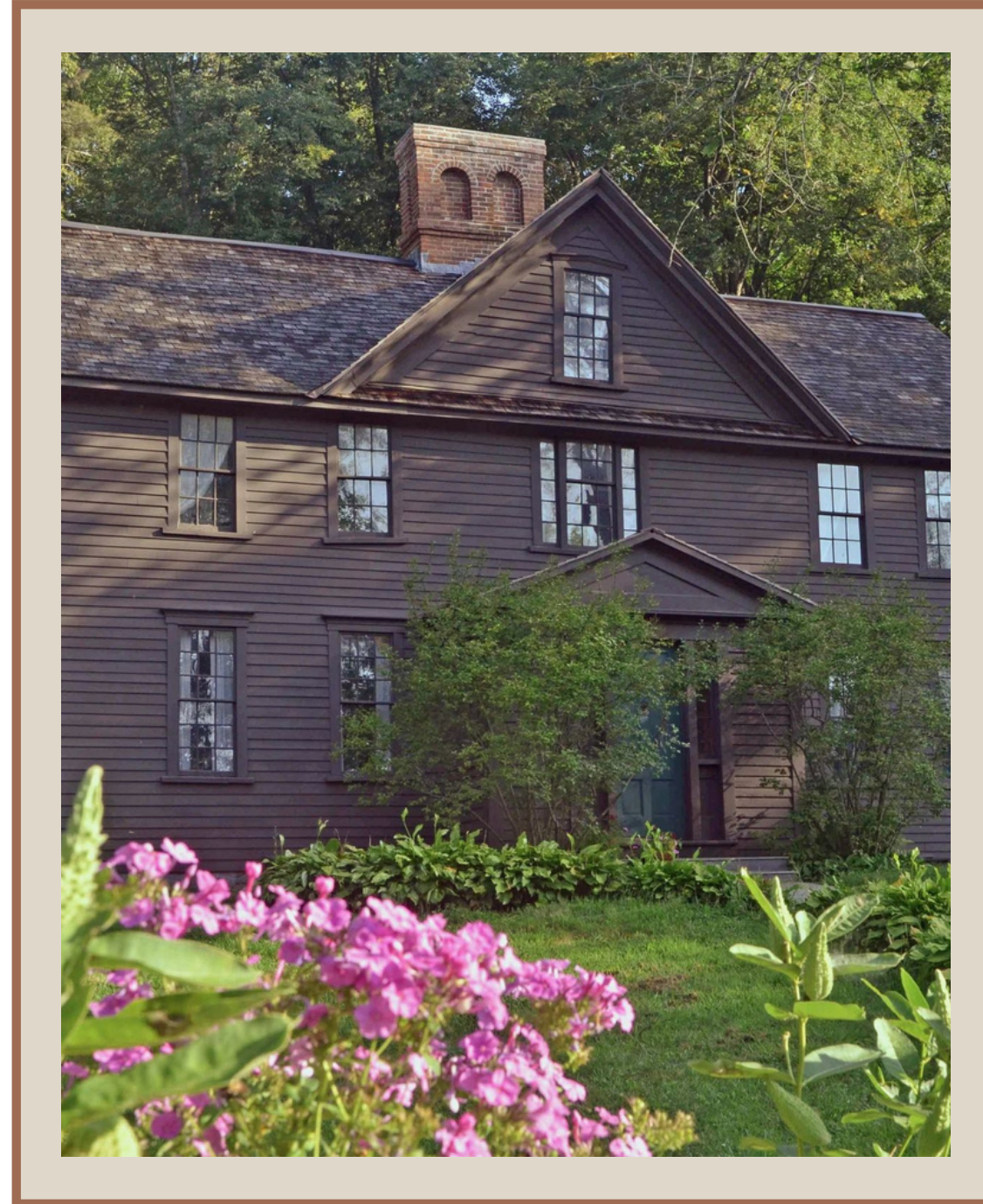


LOCATIONS

New England

The entirety of Hamill's *Little Women* takes place in Massachusetts. Their precise location is based on Concord, where Alcott's Orchard House remains to this day.

The other major location mentioned is Europe, where Jo hopes to escape with Aunt March.



ACU THEATRE *Cast*



JO MARCH:

Layla Rorem

HANNAH:

Ella Root

AUNT MARCH:

Karis Cox

BETH MARCH:

Hannah Galambos

ROBERT MARCH:

Gary Varner

MRS. MINGOTT:

Zola Feasel

AMY MARCH:

Anna Grygier

LAURIE LAURENCE:

Caleb Shields

MR. DASHWOOD:

Zeke Merchant

MEG MARCH:

Patti Maisano

MR. LAURENCE:

Ryan Shupe

MESSENGER:

Gabriella Collins

MARMEE MARCH:

Rose Lee-Alliston

JOHN BROOKS:

Jack Bledsoe

THE DOCTOR:

Tyrell Naicker

Discussion Questions

GROWING ROOTS

HOW CAN WE RESPECT OUR ROOTS AND
STILL BE TRUE TO OURSELVES?

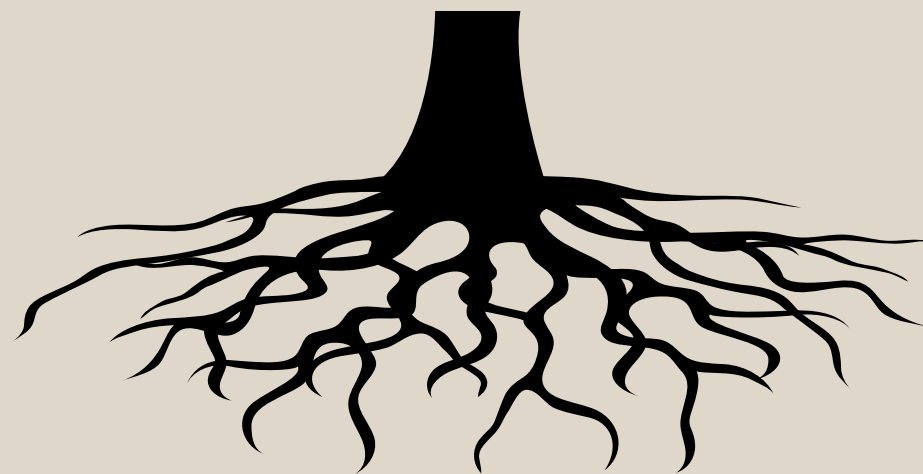
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A
FAMILY?



WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR PURPOSE
IN LIFE IS?



DO YOU MEASURE YOUR WORTH BY YOUR
ACCOMPLISHMENTS, OR DO YOU VIEW
YOURSELF THROUGH A LENS OF GRACE,
LOVE, AND GROWTH?



Glossary



Castoffs: something, especially a garment that is no longer wanted

Homely: (of a person) unattractive in appearance

Governess: a woman employed to teach children in a private household

Libel: a published false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation; a written defamation

Spoil: a good stolen or taken from a person or place

Spelling primers: originally referred to a prayer book, commonly used to help children learn to read; came to mean any general reading book

Hothouse: a plant-keeping structure that provides enough heat for the cultivation of tropical/semitropical plants in mild climates

Shakespeare, Thackeray, Dickens: allusions to William Shakespeare, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens

Theatrical: dramatic performances

The Battle Hymn of the Republic*: by Julia Ward Howe, gained popularity around Charleston, South Carolina, sung as a Methodist Camp Meeting song, at churches belonging to free blacks, also used as a marching song on army posts; gathered new verse after Harper's Ferry, led by John Brown who became a martyr to African Americans and abolitionists

Pariah: an outcast, a member of low castes in southern India in a historical context

Glossary



Pickled Limes: key limes cut into chunks, submerged in brine and allowed to cure for three to four weeks, 19th Century New England

Nasty Old Cat (no information for this -- just a generalized insult)

Billiards: referring to games, used in the context of "business and billiards"; a variety of games played on a billiard table in which cues are used to strike balls against each other/into the pockets around the edge of the table

Spandy: neat, very good or fine; smart

Autocratic: reference to a ruler who has absolute power, taking no account of other people's wishes/opinions

Mustachios: a long or elaborate mustache

Abominable: causing moral revulsion

"Desgusibus non est desputadum": a Latin maxim/memorable expression; "In Matters of Taste There is No Dispute", quoted in Act 1 of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

Kitty: an amount of money gathered from several people, which is meant to be spent on things that these people will share/use together

Glossary

Thorny: causing distress, difficulty or trouble

Tenements: a house divided into/rented out as separate residences, overcrowded and run-down; a piece of land held by an owner

Nappies: British, a piece of absorbent material wrapped around a baby's bottom and between its legs to absorb and retain urine and feces; a diaper

Cravat: a short, wide strip of fabric worn by men around the neck and tucked inside an open-necked shirt

Purist: a person who insists on absolute adherence to traditional rules/structures, especially in language or style

Puerile: childishly silly and trivial

Malapropisms: the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with an unintentionally amusing effect (i.e. Amy)



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