

Louisa May Alcott

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Louisa May Alcott



Louisa May Alcott

Pseudonym: A. M. Barnard

Born: November 29, 1832
Germantown, Philadelphia

Died: March 6, 1888

Occupation: Novelist

Nationality: United States, New England

Writing Civil War

period:

Subjects: Young Adult stories

Influences: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau

Website: www.Louisamayalcott.org

Louisa May Alcott (November 29, 1832 – March 6, 1888) was an American novelist. She is best known for the novel *Little Women*, published in 1868. This novel is loosely based on her childhood experiences with her three sisters.

Contents

- 1 Childhood and Early works
- 2 Literary success and later life
- 3 Selected works
- 4 Published as
- 5 References
- 6 Further reading
- 7 See also
- 8 External links

Childhood and Early works

Alcott was a daughter of noted Transcendentalist

Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail May Alcott. Louisa's father started the Temple School; her uncle, Samuel Joseph May, was a noted abolitionist. Though of New England parentage and residence, she was born in Germantown, which is currently part of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She had three sisters: one elder (Anna) and two younger (Elizabeth and May). The family moved to Boston in 1834 or 1835,^[1] where her father established an experimental school and joined the Transcendental Club with Emerson and Thoreau.

During her childhood and early adulthood, she shared her family's poverty and Transcendentalist ideals. In 1840, after several setbacks with the school, her family moved to a cottage on two acres along the Sudbury River in Concord, Massachusetts. The Alcott family moved to the Utopian Fruitlands community for a brief interval in 1843-1844, and then after its collapse to rented rooms, and subsequently a house in Concord purchased with her mother's inheritance and help from Emerson. Alcott's early education had included lessons from the naturalist Henry David Thoreau but had chiefly been in the hands of her father. She also received some instruction from writers and educators such as Ralph Waldo

Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller, who were all family friends. She later described these early years in a newspaper sketch entitled "Transcendental Wild Oats", afterwards reprinted in the volume *Silver Pitchers* (1876), which relates the experiences of her family during their experiment in "plain living and high thinking" at Fruitlands.

As she grew older, she developed as both an abolitionist and a feminist. In 1847, the family housed a fugitive slave for one week; in 1848 Alcott read and admired the "Declaration of Sentiments" published by the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights. Due to the family's poverty, she began work at an early age as an occasional teacher, seamstress, governess, domestic helper, and writer — her first book was *Flower Fables* (1854), tales originally written for Ellen Emerson, daughter of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In 1860, Alcott began writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and she was nurse in the Union Hospital at Georgetown, D.C., for six weeks in 1862-1863. Her letters home, revised and published in the *Commonwealth* and collected as *Hospital Sketches* (1863, republished with additions in 1869), garnered her first critical recognition for her

observations and humor. Her novel *Moods* (1864), was also promising.

A lesser-known part of her work are the passionate, fiery novels and stories she wrote, usually under the pseudonym **A. M. Barnard**. These works, such as *A Long Fatal Love Chase* and *Pauline's Passion and Punishment*, were known in the Victorian Era as "potboilers" or "blood-and-thunder tales" and were later referred to as "dangerous for little minds" in Alcott's own novel *Little Women*. Their protagonists are willful and relentless in their pursuit of their own aims, which often include revenge on those who have humiliated or thwarted them. These works achieved immediate commercial success and remain highly readable today.

In contrast, Alcott also produced moralistic and wholesome stories for children, and, with the exceptions of the semi-autobiographical tale *Work* (1873), and the anonymous novelette *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877), which attracted suspicion that it was authored by Julian Hawthorne, she did not return to creating works for adults.

Literary success and later life

Louisa May Alcott's overwhelming success dated from the appearance of the first part of *Little Women: or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*, (1868) a semiautobiographical account of her childhood years with her sisters in Concord, Massachusetts. Part two, or *Part Second*, (1869) followed the March sisters into adulthood and their respective marriages. *Little Men* (1871) detailed the characters and ways of her nephews who lived with her at Orchard House in Concord. *Jo's Boys* (1886) completed the "March Family Saga."

Most of her later volumes, *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag* (6 vols., 1871–1879), *Eight Cousins* and its sequel *Rose in Bloom* (1876), and others, followed in the line of *Little Women*, remaining popular with her large and loyal public.

Although the Jo character in *Little Women* was based on Louisa May Alcott, Alcott, unlike Jo, never married. She explained her "spinsterhood" in an interview with Louise Chandler Moulton, "...because I have fallen in love with so many pretty girls and never once the least bit with any man."^[2]

In 1879 her younger sister, May, died. Alcott took in May's daughter, Louisa May Nieriker ("Lulu"),

who was two years old. The baby was named after her aunt, and was given the same nickname.

In her later life, Alcott became an advocate of women's suffrage and was the first woman to register to vote in Concord, Massachusetts.

Alcott, along with Elizabeth Stoddard, Rebecca Harding Davis, Anne Moncure Crane, and others, was part of a group of female authors during the U.S. Gilded Age to address women's issues in a modern and candid manner. Their works were, as one newspaper columnist of the period commented, "among the decided 'signs of the times'" ("Review 2 – No Title" from *The Radical*, May 1868, see References below).

Despite worsening health, Alcott wrote through the rest of her life, finally succumbing to the after-effects of mercury poisoning contracted during her American Civil War service: she had received calomel treatments for the effects of typhoid. She died in Boston on March 6, 1888 at age 55, two days after visiting her father on his deathbed. Her last words were "Is it not meningitis?".^[3]

The story of her life and career was initially told in Ednah D. Cheney's *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life*,

Letters and Journals (Boston, 1889) and then in Madeleine B. Stern's seminal biography *Louisa May Alcott* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1950).

Selected works

- *The Inheritance* (1849, unpublished until 1997)
- *Flower Fables* (1854)
- *Hospital Sketches* (1863)
- *The Rose Family: A Fairy Tale* (1864)
- *Moods* (1865, revised 1882)
- *Morning-Glories and Other Stories* (1867)
- *The Mysterious Key and What It Opened* (1867)
- *Little Women* or *Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (1868)
- *Three Proverb Stories* (includes "Kitty's Class Day," "Aunt Kipp," and "Psyche's Art") (1868)
- *Part Second of Little Women* (1869)
- *An Old Fashioned Girl* (1870)
- *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* (1872-1882)
- *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (1871)
- *Work: A Story of Experience* (1872)
- *Eight Cousins* or *The Aunt-Hill* (1875)
- *Beginning Again, Being a Continuation of Work* (1875)

- *Silver Pitchers, and Independence: A Centennial Love Story,"* (1876)
- *Rose in Bloom: A Sequel to Eight Cousins* (1876)
- *Under the Lilacs* (1878)
- *Jack and Jill: A Village Story* (1880)
- *Jo's Boys and How They Turned Out: A Sequel to "Little Men"* (1886)
- *Lulu's Library* (1886-1889)
- *A Garland for Girls* (1888)
- *Comic Tragedies* (1893)

As A.M.Barnard

- *Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power* (1866)
- *The Abbot's Ghost, or Maurice Treherne's Temptation* (1867)
- *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866 - first published 1995)

First published anonymously

- *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877)

Published as

- *Little Women, Little Men, Jo's Boys* (Elaine Showalter, ed.) (Library of America, 2005)

ISBN 978-1-93108273-0.

References

1. ^ Obituary: Louisa May Alcott, *New York Times*, March 7, 1888. The obituary indicates that the family moved to Boston when Alcott was 2 years old, therefore in 1834-5. This is supported by the United States Census, 1850 which records that her younger sister, Elizabeth, was born in Massachusetts and was aged 15 (therefore born around 1835) at the time of the census.
2. ^ Little Women Introduction, Penguin Classics, 1989. ISBN 0-14-039069-3
3. ^ vu.union.edu - Famous Last Words
 - Shealy, Daniel, Editor. *"Alcott in Her Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends and Associates."* University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 2005. ISBN 0-87745-938-X.
 - "Review 2 – No Title" from The Radical (1865 - 1872). May 1868. American Periodical Series 1740 - 1900.[1] (link is password only) (29 January 2007).

Further reading

- Saxton, Martha (1977). *Louisa May: A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott*. Houghton Mifflin. ISBN 0-395-25720-4.
- MacDonald, Ruth K. (1983). *Louisa May Alcott*. Twayne. ISBN 0-8057-7397-5.
- Myerson, Joel; Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern (1987). *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Little, Brown. ISBN 0-316-59361-3.
- Myerson, Joel; Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern (1989). *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Little, Brown. ISBN 0-316-59362-1.

See also

- Orchard House, where Alcott lived when writing *Little Women*
- Walpole, New Hampshire, where the abundant lilacs in the town inspired Alcott to write the book *Under the Lilacs*

External links

- Works by Louisa May Alcott at Project Gutenberg

- Obituary, NY Times, March 7, 1888, *Louisa M. Alcott Dead*
- Works by Louisa May Alcott listed at the Online Books Page
- Louisa May Alcott, the real woman who wrote Little Women A new web site about Louisa May Alcott which will be the foundation for a documentary film, published media and educational programs.
- Biographical information
- E-books by Louisa May Alcott at Classicistranieri
- Bibliography (including primary works and information on secondary literature - critical essays, theses and dissertations)
- Read Louisa May Alcott at American Literature
- The Louisa May Alcott Society A scholarly organization devoted to her life and works.
- Lesson plans for *Little Women* at Web English Teacher
- Jack and Jill Audiobook

Retrieved from
["http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisa_May_Alcott"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisa_May_Alcott)

Categories: Cleanup from January 2007 | All pages needing cleanup | American children's writers |

American novelists | Women in the American Civil War | Female wartime nurses | Massachusetts writers | People from Philadelphia | 1832 births | 1888 deaths | Female authors who wrote under male or gender-neutral pseudonyms | Philadelphia writers | Concord, Massachusetts

- This page was last modified 22:15, 7 August 2007.
 - All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)
- Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.