

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**EXPLORING GENDER
AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT:
RE-READING *LITTLE WOMEN*
FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this academic exercise was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This exercise has not been submitted to any other institution or non-academic institution for my degree or qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation will examine the novel *Little Women* (1868), written by Louisa May Alcott in order to explore whether the concept of gender is more of a social construct than a biological reality. My study will focus on analysing the lived experiences of the March sisters, Jo, Amy, Meg and Beth as portrayed by Alcott in the novel. Through my analysis of the March sisters, who are growing up to develop into conventional women against a particular socio-historical context, I will attempt to argue that the motif of gender is dynamic in process and is often bound to perform stereotypically according to certain socio-cultural dictates. My literature review will be divided into three sections. In the initial section I will discuss my theoretical framework in detail. I have selected Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subject* (1792), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and the concept of 'Gender Performativity', proposed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) in order to develop my theoretical framework. In Socio-Historical Framework: The Life and Times of Louisa May Alcott I have focused on the socio-historical context of my primary source. I have discussed Louisa May Alcott's life and times and her literary outputs, the impacts of the American Civil War on the society in general and on women in particular and the critical receptions of *Little Women*. My reading and analysis of *Little Women* will attempt to signal that the concept of gender is mainly developed through certain socio-cultural dictates.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini akan menganalisis novel Little Women (1968), karya Louisa May Alcott untuk mengkaji konsep gender melibatkan status sosial berbanding keadaan biologikal individu. Kajian ini akan memfokuskan kepada empat watak utama di dalam novel iaitu Jo, Amy, Meg dan Beth. Melalui analisis adik beradik March yang membesar dalam keadaan wanita perlu mengikut ketetapan yang dibuat oleh masyarakat tanpa diberi peluang untuk membuat keputusan. Kajian literatur ini akan dibahagikan kepada tiga kerangka utama melibatkan Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subject (1792), Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (1949), dan konsep 'Gender Performativity', yang dibuat oleh Judith Butler dalam Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990) untuk membina kerangka teori. Pembacaan dan analisis terhadap novel Little Women adalah untuk menunjukkan bahawa konsep gender adalah melibatkan sesetengah status sosial.