

ATILIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE MASTER'S PROGRAMME

**LIBERAL FEMINISM AND THE CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY: JANE
AUSTEN'S *EMMA* AND LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN***

Master's Thesis

Hanady Ahmed Abdulwahhab AL-HAJMEE

Ankara-2022

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Ankara-2022

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis titled “Liberal Feminism and the Concept of Autonomy in Jane Austen’s *Emma* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*” and prepared by Hanady Ahmed Abdulwahhab AL-HAJMEE meets with the committee’s approval unanimously/by a majority vote as Master’s Thesis in the field of English Culture and Literature following the successful defense conducted on 8/6/2022

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

I accept and acknowledge that I have prepared this thesis study, prepared in line with the Thesis Writing Guidelines of Atılım University Graduate School of Social Sciences;

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ÖZ

Al-HAJMEE, Hanady Ahmed Abdulwahhab. Jane Austen'in *Emma* ve Louisa May Alcott'un *Küçük Kadınlar* adlı eserlerinde Liberal Feminizm ve Özerklik Kavramı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Bu tez, Jane Austen'in *Emma* ve Louisa May Alcott'un *Küçük Kadınlar* adlı eserlerindeki liberal feminizmi ve özerklik kavramını Emma Woodhouse ve Jo March adlı iki baş kadın karakter üzerinden incelemektedir. Bu tez, Emma ve Jo karakterlerinin onları özerk ve öz yönelimli yapan ve aynı sebeple romandaki diğer kadın karakterlerden ayıran, kişisel ve belirleyici özelliklerini incelemek üzere Amy Baehr, Susan Wendell ve Marilyn Friedman'ın kuramlarına odaklanacaktır.

Jane Austen ve Louisa May Alcott dünyaca tanınan ve en ünlü feminist yazarlardandır; On Dokuzuncu yüzyıl Britanya ve Amerika'sında cinsiyet eşitsizliğini ve kadın haklarını konu alan, katı toplum kurallarına meydan okuyan olağanüstü romanlar yazmışlardır. Örneğin, Jane Austen ve Louisa May Alcott *Emma* ve *Küçük Kadınlar* adlı romanlarında güçlü ve bağımsız kadınlar tasvir ederek kadın haklarını savunmuşlardır. İki romanda da, kadın haklarıyla alakalı görünenin altında yatan derin ve karmaşık konular yer alır. *Emma* romanında Jane Austen kendi dönemindeki kadınları ilgilendiren ciddi konulardan bazılarını öne sürer. Austen, kendi zamanındaki kadınların hayatlarını tasvir eder, kadınları baskılayan ataerkil topluma dikkat çeker ve evlilik Kurumunu eleştirir.

Diğer bir yandan *Küçük Kadınlar*, Alcott'un feminist yazarlar arasında yerini almasını sağlayan en ünlü ve başarılı romanı olarak düşünülür. Roman, Amerika'nın iç savaş döneminde, dört March kızkardeşin hayatlarının, büyümelerinin ve kendilerini kanıtlamalarının izini sürer. Ailenin ikinci kızkardeşi olan Jo March'ın yazar olma yolundaki yolculuğunda Jo'nun özgürlük ve bağımsızlık başarısına odaklanır.

Bu çalışma, Austen ve Alcott'un feminist yazarlar olarak tanımlanmalarını sağlayan düşüncelerini romanlarındaki Emma ve Jo karakterleriyle nasıl yansıttıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Emma*, *Küçük Kadınlar*, Feminizm, Liberal Feminizm, Özerklik.

ABSTRACT

Al-HAJMEE, Hanady Ahmed Abdulwahhab. Liberal Feminism and The Concept of Autonomy in Jane Austen's *Emma* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2022.

The thesis explores the concept of autonomy and the aspects of liberal feminism in Jane Austen's *Emma*, and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, through the two main female protagonists, Emma Woodhouse, and Jo March. The thesis will focus on the theories of Amy Baehr, Susan Wendell, and Marilyn Friedman, to examine the traits and characteristics of Emma Woodhouse and Jo March, which make them autonomous and self-oriented characters, and distinguish them from other female characters in the two novels.

Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott are two of the most famous and worldly acknowledged feminist writers of all time; they have created marvellous novels challenging their strict societies and discussing women's rights and gender inequality in the nineteenth-century Britain and America. To illustrate, Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott have written confidently to defend women's rights by portraying strong and independent female characters in their novels, *Emma*, and *Little Women*. In both novels, deep and intricate issues related to women's rights lie beneath the surface. In *Emma*, Jane Austen asserts critical issues concerning women of her era. Austen, in *Emma*, describes women's lives of her time, highlights the patriarchal society that suppresses women, and criticizes the institution of marriage.

Little Women, is considered Alcott's most popular and successful novel, which has established her name among feminist writers. The novel portrays the life of the four March sisters and their journey of growth and self-realization during the American civil war and focuses on the second sister in the family, Jo March and her attainment of freedom and independence throughout her journey of becoming a writer.

Thus, this study portrays the two writers, Austen's and Alcott's ideas that have established their names as feminist writers, and how these ideas are reflected in the two novels and presented through the main characters, Emma, and Jo.

Keywords: *Emma*, *Little Women*, Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Autonomy.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis presents an exploration of liberal feminism and the concept of autonomy through Jane Austen's *Emma* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, by discussing the goals and aspects of liberal feminism of gaining unlimited freedom for women, political and legal equality for both sexes, allowing women's access to education and marketplace, and emphasizing women's ability to be part of and participate in social life. And the concept of autonomy, which is related to liberal feminism and is defined as an individual's capacity to be self-governed or self-determined. The study uses the ideas of several important theorists, including Amy Baehr, Susan Wendell, and Marilyn Friedman, concerning autonomy and liberal feminism.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the history and emergence of liberal feminism as a distinct and main branch of feminism in the nineteenth century and its implications for women's lives and society, how this branch has originated from liberalism and the reasons for its emergence in the domain of feminism. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the main aspects of liberalism and its relation to liberal feminism and its history. The chapter also presents the dominant and most famous theorists and activists of liberal feminism throughout history, including Olympe de Gouges, Marry Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Betty Friedan. The second part of the first chapter examines the concept of autonomy and its relation to liberal feminism.

The second chapter deals with Austen's novel *Emma* and its protagonist, Emma Woodhouse. This chapter explores the feminist ideas of the writer and how they are reflected in the novel through the character of Emma. Emma is an independent woman, who runs her own life and holds autonomous ideas, distinguishing her from other female characters in the novel and making her equal to her male counterparts. Furthermore, what makes Emma a different and interesting character is that despite being aware of women's social status in her society and the dominance of men over women and how to behave accordingly, she rejects to adhere to the inferior position of women in the hierarchal society in which she lives. Through the character of Emma, Austen asserts that women can be responsible for themselves and that they have the

choice to do and choose what they want, thus achieving equality between men and women.

The third chapter centers on Alcott's novel *Little Women*, in which the events occur in the United States. Alcott in the novel asserts her main idea regarding women's empowerment by presenting an unconventional heroine. Jo March, the protagonist is presented with many masculine traits; these traits are shown as being caused by the society in which Jo lives, that would not allow her to act as free as she wants. Jo wants to be treated equally with men; she cherishes independence and wants to be recognized as a talented writer. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss the other female characters in the novel and their development and compares their characteristics with Jo's character traits. Therefore, the concept of autonomy and the aspects of liberal feminism will be thoroughly explored in the two novels, relying on the traits each character possesses.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

LIBERAL FEMINISM AND AUTONOMY

1.1 Liberal Feminism

Feminism is a broad, often conflicting collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies inspired by or concerned primarily with the experience of women, particularly in terms of their social, political, and economic inequalities. Furthermore, as Susan Rubinow Gorsky states, feminism “implies a philosophical questioning of traditional values and ideas, from women’s intellectual and emotional capacities to male-female relationships to the ways women and men think, act, and feel.” (1). Therefore, diverse feminist groups have evolved throughout time in response to the core causes of women's oppression and subordination. While their assumptions and objectives differ, their primary objective is to reduce women's oppression to establish gender equality. Liberal feminism is the most prevalent kind of feminism and serves as the foundation for other feminist movements. It is defined by an individualistic focus on equality as well as other characteristics. Furthermore, it focuses on individual rights as well as on principles like equality, justice, and equal opportunity, with legal and social policy reforms considered as means for achieving gender equality on an equal footing with men in the private and public sphere.

Liberal feminism has its roots in the first-wave feminism of the 19th century as the main and one of the most important branches of feminism that aim at achieving gender equality through political and legal reformation. Thus, liberal feminism embraces the belief that the main reason for inequality is the denial of equal legal rights, according to Robert Stephens: "The principle of equality, even the identity of men and women as beings equally possessing reason, was first put forward by liberal feminism at the end of the 18th century and defended by it until the 60s of the 20th century." (14). For liberal feminists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the objective is to achieve women's suffrage, with the hope that this will lead to greater individual autonomy. Obtaining freedom through equality, putting a stop to male cruelty against women, and earning the freedom to pursue opportunities to become fully developed individuals are all important concerns. They believe that no government or tradition should be allowed to restrict an individual’s ability to exercise personal freedom.

Liberal feminism embraces the values of liberalism and uses them to insist on women's freedom. Liberal feminism focuses on equal rights for both sexes and for women to play an active role in society. Furthermore, liberal feminism is not a revolutionary movement, so it does not aim at changing the system but believes in its capacity for reform. Liberal feminism regards women as autonomous and self-directed individuals who can govern themselves and make their own decisions. According to Robert Stephens, "The liberal concept of equality arose in the specific socio-cultural conditions of the secularization of society, the formation of an economy of free-market relations, the development of the philosophy of individualism, and the autonomy of the individual in the economic sphere." (34) Liberal feminists also want to establish a society in which there is no sex discrimination, which results in the depiction of women as weak and incompetent beings. It affirms women's capacity to be a part of and participate in social life in all its manifestations. Susan Wendell argues that:

The liberal feminist tradition, like most other feminist traditions, has always asserted that the value of women as human beings is not instrumental to the welfare of men and children and that it is equal to the value of men, and it has demanded various forms of public and private recognition of it, including respect for women's freedom and privacy. Liberal feminists have always promoted equality of legal rights for women and have more recently demanded an end to "de facto discrimination on the basis of sex," enlisting the State in attaining that goal. Liberal feminists have the traditional liberal beliefs in the power of education as a means of social reform and its importance to human fulfilment, and, since Mary Wollstonecraft, they have demanded education for girls and women equal to that offered to boys and men. (66).

To better understand liberal feminism, one must go back in time to the origins from which this movement has arisen, that is, liberalism. According to Michael Freedman, liberalism "has become indicative of ideas and policies intended to reform, to emancipate, and to open up possibilities for individuals wishing to live their lives according to their own understanding." (21). According to Collingwood (1959, as cited in Freedman, 1995), "Liberalism... begins with the recognition that men, doing what they will, are free; that a man's acts are his own, springing from his own personality, and cannot be coerced." (30). Liberalism first emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, a period when varied and profound changes have happened, and major social movements have arisen. It appeared because of the French revolution that has called for freedom and equality. Therefore, "the slogans of freedom, equality, and brotherhood of all people, regardless of their origin, have intensified women strive for equality." (Stephens 38). Thus, it can be said that liberal feminism echoes the spirit of

the French revolution. Moreover, liberalism encourages freedom in political and economic spheres. According to Amy Baehr, "Liberalism is a set of doctrines that emphasize the value of freedom and hold that a just state ensures freedom for individuals" (Baehr)

Liberalism's main key notions are freedom of individuals, equal opportunities and rights for all people, and democracy. Thus, liberal feminism emerged in Western nations as a result of the interaction of educated women with liberal ideologies. Liberal feminists seek to apply the libertarian concept to the issue of gender equality, arguing that women's oppression is rooted in their lack of political and civil rights. Therefore, to fight against this oppression, measures aiming at ensuring equal opportunity for both men and women must be implemented simultaneously. Furthermore, putting a stop to discriminatory behaviors and advocating for equal rights would be necessary steps in achieving women's freedom. Liberal feminists, thus, work on applying these concepts of liberalism to gain gender equality by putting an end to discriminatory practices and calling for equal rights.

Olympe De Gouges is the first liberal feminist to appear in France and become a prominent figure of liberal feminism after publishing her book *Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Citizens* in 1791, which consists of several articles that discuss women's rights. De Gouges is considered the most courageous woman and most tragic victim of her time. In her book, Olympe De Gouges declares that women must be treated equally to men because they are as free as men, and this will result in the welfare of all. De Gouges includes many clauses or, as she states, "the rights of women" (De Gouges 1) that have helped gain equality between the sexes, including that a "woman is born free and lives equal to a man in her rights." (De Gouges 2). In addition, the political rights, which include "liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression." (De Gouges 2). The right to divorce and the abolition of slavery and the freedom to express their opinions.

In England, Mary Wollstonecraft is considered one of the first pioneers of liberal feminism with her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. described by Lucy Mangan as " a landmark feminist treatise that identified domestic tyranny as the chief barrier preventing women from living an independent life" (16). In the book, Wollstonecraft states that women, like men, are capable of logical thought, and should be allowed full access to school and the workplace. If women are

represented as weak, she asserts, it is because they have been trained to please men, upon whom they are economically and legally dependent. Moreover, she believes that the main cause of differences between people is the lack of quality education. She describes women as "the flowers that are planted in too rich a soil." (29). Wollstonecraft, therefore, establishes a crucial feminist criterion for freedom in her time: women's actions must be of their own free will. Even though Wollstonecraft's analysis seems common nowadays, her liberal arguments are viewed as revolutionary in her time. According to Stephens, "On the one hand, Wollstonecraft called for equal civil and political rights for women and their economic independence from their husbands, and on the other hand, she argued that the civil status of women should have a different form than that of men" (38-39).

Another fundamental feminist work written a century later, specifically in 1869, is John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, in which he discusses the civil and legal rights and equality of women. In this text, Mill claims that men's oppression of women cannot be justified on basis of women's "nature," which can scarcely be recognized while women are enslaved. Although Mill argues that women's confinement to the house undercuts the goals of individual self-realization and mutual reciprocity, they do not attempt to alter the sexual division of labour. Furthermore, Mill argues that women should have equal political rights and access to education, but with one significant distinction: women should be provided access to education not because they are equal, but because they are different. Stephens argues that:

Mill believed that the differences between men and women exist, so to speak, "on average": if the average woman cannot do something that the average man does, then this does not justify the laws or taboos that prevent women from trying to do something... Mill argued that the whole society would benefit from the advancement of women, as the number of smart citizens would increase, husbands would get intelligent wives, and women themselves would become happier. (39)

Freedan states that "in the pantheon of secular liberal saints, the place of John Stuart Mill is assured." Whenever liberal ideas are discussed, sooner or later, Mill becomes a major, if not the major, point of reference". (103). Furthermore, Freedan argues that Mill is worth studying both as a philosopher and as a communicator of ideas to the public, both of which help to advance liberal ideology in new directions. Susan Wendell states her conception of Mill's *The Subjection of Women* as follows:

In *The Subjection of Women*, J.S. Mill (1870) derived the necessity for women's political equality with men from two convictions: that women need political

equality to safeguard their own interests and that political inequality interferes with the happiness of both women and men. In addition, Mill argued that women must have liberty of action because it is necessary to their happiness, both as a means to fulfilling their desires and because freedom of choice is, in itself, an important ingredient of happiness. (73).

Liberalism is divided into two branches. Classical liberalism "revolved around individual liberty, human independence, and the role of the law, and it importantly restricted what states and governments are entitled to do to individuals." (Freedman 22), and political liberalism. Each has substantial variance within its ranks and ideas. Furthermore, these branches' thoughts on freedom have major consequences for framing feminism's goal, specifying its substance, and assigning the state a specific role in the process of feminism's development. Therefore, liberal feminism is divided into classical liberal feminism, or "libertarian," and political liberal feminism, in addition to egalitarian, or "welfare," or "social" liberal feminism, each considered a family of ideas with major internal characteristics that are distinct from each other. Despite this, the divergence between classical liberal feminism and egalitarian liberal feminism thoughts on freedom has important implications for how each defines the issue that feminism seeks to solve, and how much each specifies the substance of a liberal feminism agenda. Amy Baehr, in her article "*Liberal Feminism*", explains thoroughly the two branches of liberal feminism, both classical and egalitarian. Liberal feminist thoughts on freedom have a major impact on the issues feminism seeks to solve, including the substance of a liberal feminist agenda, and the state's specific involvement in liberal feminism's efforts. According to Baehr, "Egalitarian-liberal feminists hold that much can and should be done to support the personal and political autonomy of women and to achieve parity in the processes of democratic self-governance in liberal societies like the United States" (Baehr) and conceptualize liberty as one, "personal autonomy," which means that individuals live a life of their choosing; and two, "political autonomy," which means being a co-creator of the circumstances in which an individual lives. Furthermore, Baer states that "egalitarian-liberal feminists hold that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives or that social and institutional arrangements often fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women's flourishing" (Baehr)

While "classical-liberal feminists, by contrast, tend to hold that feminism's political task is limited to opposing laws that treat women differently from men, a task

which they hold has been largely accomplished in societies like the United States." (Baehr). It is common to refer to classical-liberal feminism as a broad term for a group of doctrines that range from libertarian feminist doctrines that support little (if any) state power to feminist doctrines that support more state power while still advocating for unrestricted markets and an extended understanding of individual's rights. The following ideas are parallel among the doctrines in this family: Women, as well as men, have a right to be free from arbitrary intervention because of their position as self-owners, according to them; and coercive state authority is justified only to the degree that it is essential to defend this right. Moreover, Baehr states that feminists who are interested in this approach "hold that feminism's political role is to bring an end to laws that limit women's freedom in particular, but also to laws that grant special privileges to men." (Baehr)

According to the liberal viewpoint, individual growth demands the capacity to educate and extend one's faculties, and therefore, denying women access to school and the professions was comparable to denying them the opportunity to reach their full developmental capabilities. Furthermore, liberal feminists claim that society would indeed benefit from the contributions of women in the public sphere. As Wendell argues:

Women's developing greater individualism is not only in our personal interest but also politically important at this time, as many socialist and radical feminists, as well as liberal feminists, recognize. Women are not likely to demand rights and freedoms they think they do not deserve. Nor are women, who feel that their own worth comes from taking care of others, likely to demand that men take equal responsibility for the welfare of children, the sick, and the old. (83).

As far as social and political theories stand, liberal feminism is the most widely recognized, owing to its emphasis on equal rights and liberties for both sexes while simultaneously limiting sexual differences. Instead of focusing solely on gender roles, this type of feminism emphasizes the importance of creating and maintaining social, family, and sexual roles that support women's autonomy and self-fulfilment. Furthermore, women's suffrage activists not only demand that women be afforded the same opportunities as privileged men, but they also call into question the very merits of a western male model of life experience in which professional and public activities are deemed more important and fulfilling than community and family activities. As opposed to this, these feminists want to alter the gendered behaviors of men and

women at home and in public so that domestic caregiving will be granted the social, legal, and economic acknowledgment that is appropriate for its societal worth. Susan Wendell states:

Giving girls and boys the same early education and ending sex prejudice, which in turn will require a major redistribution of resources and vast changes in consciousness. Other reforms may also be necessary to achieve this goal. For example, many women are handicapped in reaching their employment goals by having to work a double day because of the unequal division of labour at home. Thus, it may be necessary either to get men to take equal responsibility for childcare and housework or to socialize the labour women do at home so that it does not have to be the responsibility of individual women, in order to create equal employment opportunities. (85)

Another significant figure in the history of liberal feminism is the American feminist icon, writer, and co-founder of the national organization for women (NOW, 1966), which "focused efforts on reforming American law and overcoming the concept of differentiated citizenship" (Stephens,59), Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. Friedan's book is considered one of the fundamental texts and a reference for many following writers and scholars. Women, Friedan argues, have problems that "had no name" (15)

Equal protection under the law for women have been obtained in the United States by the time of the Civil War. In contrast to Friedan's assertion, women typically lead restrictive and unfulfilling lives. They are bored and anxious because they spend too much time polishing and arranging their already clean and tidy houses. Friedan advocates for women to look for jobs that push them beyond their comfort zones and give them a sense of purpose once their children start school. Women might have a family with children, but they needed to become involved in public life and get a paid job as soon as possible. Friedan then explains the active role women play throughout history as being more than housewives, in particular in gaining the right to vote in the nineteenth century. Friedan believes that "America's greatest source of unused brain-power is women" (13). Furthermore, Friedan states that the ideal American woman of the nineteenth century is the one who "was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfilment." (13).

The great names mentioned earlier, Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, and Betty Friedan, are listed among a thousand other liberal feminist pioneers who all have one mutual opinion, that is; the main goal of women's liberation is to gain sexual equality,

or in other words, gender justice. Liberal feminists, in general, seek to liberate women from repressive gender roles, that is, the roles that are used as reasons or justifications for giving women a lower or no role at all in public spheres, such as universities, academic field, and workplaces. These feminists emphasize that patriarchal society misunderstands the difference between gender and sex, deeming professions for women only linked with the typical feminine character. Therefore, it is a necessity to give women access to education, work, and social spheres, and to be treated equally with their men counterparts so that they can become autonomous, self-reliant, and rational. Therefore, "liberal feminism insisted that the policy of equal rights for women should be gender-neutral, not taking into account any differences between the sexes." (Stephens 59). Moreover, the goals that liberal feminism has accomplished and the struggles that liberal feminists endured to reach their aim "[provided] at least a starting point for future struggles." (Bryson (200), as stated in Stephens, n.d.)

1.2 Autonomy

One of the frequent concepts or terms that is related to liberal feminism is autonomy. It is preferable to see autonomy as a nebulous concept that defies clear definition. Its meaning is derived from a family of resemblances established via its usage in a range of situations. Furthermore, autonomy has become synonymous with human dignity and an essential value in any society that claims to value individuals. Kuhler and Jenlik state that:

Autonomy is generally held in high esteem. It is a central concept in many philosophical debates, such as how to understand ourselves as persons, how to conceptualize morality, how to legitimize political norms and practices, and questions in biomedical ethics. In all such debates, the concept of autonomy is invoked either to formulate a certain constitutive moment of the subject in question or to function at least as an essential justificatory criterion, i.e., as a value to be respected when it comes to assessing a position's plausibility and validity. (ix)

The concept originated from the Greek term "autos nomos". Autos mean "self" and nomos mean "rule" or "law" and it has been used to describe the city-states of Greek that have imposed their laws and have held the general meaning of governing one's matters. According to this meaning, "the idea of personal autonomy is that a person "governs herself," i.e., independent of unwanted internal and external influences, she decides and acts according to her convictions, values, desires, and such" (Kuhler and Jenlik ix)

According to the Collins dictionary, autonomy is "the doctrine that the individual human will is or ought to be governed only by its principles." There are several types of autonomy, each related to a certain field, including political autonomy, "the property of having one's decisions respected, honored, and heeded within a political context." (Dryden), moral autonomy, "traced back to Kant, is the capacity to deliberate and to give oneself the moral law, rather than merely heeding the injunctions of others." (Dryden), and personal autonomy, which is "the capacity to decide for oneself and pursue a course of action in one's life, often regardless of any particular moral content." (Dryden)

According to this concept, the individual's goal is to be independent in self-governing and decision-making in a society where the consequences of its harsh judgments have a significant impact on the individual's free will. As a result, the concept of autonomy is derived from the notion that individuals are responsible for making critical choices that affect their lives, Marilyn Friedman states that "behaving autonomously is a matter of behaving or living in accordance with what matters to someone, not of living in accordance with characteristics of hers or categories applied to her that she does not particularly care about." (11). In general, the concept of autonomy revolves around the notions of liberty, choice, independence, self-reliance, and free choice. Catriona Mackenzie states:

Autonomy is both a status and a capacity concept. As a status concept, it refers to the idea that individuals are entitled to exercise self-determining authority over their own lives. A foundational principle of liberal democratic societies is that each individual should be respected as having this authority. As a capacity concept, autonomy refers to the capacity to be self-defining and self-governing; that is, to make decisions and act based on preferences, values, or commitments that are authentically "one's own." (515)

An autonomous individual is the one who can be self-directed. The autonomous person sets up specific goals that are significant to the path of her life and can pursue these goals and put them into action in the real world freely as Jo March in *Little Women* does. The individual also formulates these goals in accordance with her own beliefs, ambitions, and convictions, which she develops in no obligation and conscious manner. Furthermore, with autonomy, an individual can participate in effective self-knowledge, assess needs and values, and adapt actions toward the fulfilment of one's needs. As Marilyn Friedman states:

To realize autonomy, a person must first somehow reflect on their wants, desires, and so on and take an evaluative stance with respect to them. She can

endorse or identify with them in some way or be wholeheartedly committed to them, or she can reject or repudiate them or be only halfheartedly committed to them. If she endorses or identifies with her wants and desires, she makes them more truly hers, more genuinely a part of who she is, and thus, more a part of her very identity as a particular, distinctive self than are the wants and desires that she has not thus self-reflectively reaffirmed. (4-5)

When we state that a person is self-governing, we are referring to something more than the fact that the person's actions correspond to her preferences or beliefs. Thus, we are implying that the individual can decide her course of action. Moreover, an autonomous individual is also capable of achieving her aims without relying on the opinions of others on the legitimacy and significance of these aims. As Daniel Engster states, "The autonomous person is usually understood to be a self-determining agent who stands apart from outside environmental influences, including other human beings, and chooses according to their authentic preferences." (97)

Furthermore, to be autonomous, an individual must take decisions and actions based on motivations that may be considered representations of one's self, including who the individual is or who the individual wants to be at any given moment. And as a result, the concept of autonomy is linked to the concept of authenticity, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "the quality of being real or true." (Cambridge English Dictionary). Accordingly, an individual is said to be autonomous if her choices, activities, or life, in general, may be viewed as the authentic expression of who she essentially is. Engster states that "freedom for liberals generally means freedom from coercion by others or the ability to govern one's life according to one's authentic preferences without undue outside influence from others." (97)

Some liberal feminists believe that women should be able to exercise their autonomy. In other words, they believe that women should be able to live the lives of their choice. Mackenzie and Stoljar provide "procedural" accounts of one's sense of personal autonomy. According to these accounts, stating that women should be able to exercise personal autonomy implies that they are entitled to a wide variety of "autonomy-enabling circumstances" (Baehr). They state that:

On procedural, or content-neutral, accounts, the content of a person's desires, values, beliefs, and emotional attitudes is irrelevant to the issue of whether the person is autonomous with respect to those aspects of her motivational structure and the actions that flow from them. What matters for autonomy is whether the agent has subjected her motivations and actions to the appropriate kind of critical reflection. (13-14)

Procedural accounts, therefore, define criteria by which an agent's actions can be said to be autonomous, and these criteria are independent of any conception of what kinds of actions are autonomous or what kinds of agents are autonomous. Procedural accounts are used to determine whether an agent's actions are autonomous or not. They are unbiased in their assessment of what an agent considers to be good or what they attempt to accomplish as Friedman states, "On a content-neutral conception, a person is autonomous so long as the manner in which she reaches and makes her choices, or the relationship between her choices and her substantive concerns accord with certain criteria as specified by the account in question" (19). Baehr also presents a list of what the "enabling conditions" are, which include "being free of violence and the threat of violence, having access to options and being free of the limits set by patriarchal, paternalistic, and moralistic laws and policies"(Baehr). According to this viewpoint, Baehr suggests that feminist groups should endeavor to identify and encourage these conditions. To identify these enabling conditions, consideration must also be given to the specific ways in which autonomy deficits are formed in the lives of different women. Procedural accounts refrain from passing judgment on the content of women's decisions or the arrangements that result from them. For Friedman, "According to a procedural account, personal autonomy is realized by the right sort of reflective self-understanding or internal coherence along with an absence of undue coercion or manipulation by others. Autonomy, in this sort of view, is not a matter of living substantively in any particular way" (40)

Marilyn Friedman argues that the actions that define an individual as autonomous are those that reflect who the individual is and distinguish her from others. This idea is also known as " "personal identity" or "who she is" " (10) and it can be interpreted in two different ways, each presenting a feature of the individual. First, it can include "her perspective, outlook, or viewpoint, [...] her deeper wants, desires, cares, concerns, values, and commitment. " (10). The second one includes " the traits and characteristics that locate her in various classes of identifiable humankind." "(10). Therefore, the perspective of an individual, her deeper beliefs, desires, values, and so on, or the humankind categories that are used to describe her, can all contribute to her identity as the particular person she is. Or both of these factors can cooperate to form her identity as the particular person she is. In addition, Friedman refers to the first type of identity as "perspectival identity," and the second as "trait-based identity" (10).

Catriona Mackenzie suggests three aspects that define an autonomous person, each different from the other but, at the same time, interrelated. The first is "self-determination," which "involves having the freedom and opportunities to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life, that is, choices about what to value, who to be, and what to do." (17), Mackenzie also states that this aspect "identifies external, structural conditions for individual autonomy, specifically freedom conditions and opportunity conditions. Freedom conditions identify the kinds of social and political constraints that interfere with the exercise of self-determination and the kind of political and personal liberties that enable it" (17). The second aspect is "self-governing," which "involves having the skills and capacities necessary to make choices and enact decisions that express, or cohere with, one's reflectively constituted diachronic practical identity." (17). This aspect is used to identify "internal conditions." (18), including "competence and authenticity" (18). The third aspect, "self-authorization, involves regarding oneself as having the normative authority to be self-determining and self-governing. In other words, it involves regarding oneself as authorized to exercise practical control over one's life, determining one's reasons for action, and defining one's values and identity-shaping practical commitments." (18). Mackenzie argues that these aspects are essential elements in the process of women's emancipation and therefore will help enforce the idea of women's ability to be the leaders of their lives, and thus, women will be "self-governing," "self-determining," and "self-authorizing" (20).

Some theorists argue that women are not supposed to seek their autonomy because it is considered a masculine trait, or in other words, "anti-female bias traits" (Friedman, 38) Because features of autonomy have been continually connected with men, because men are given more freedom in social spheres and are expected to be dependent and free, unlike women. Friedman states that "To be sure, no respectable philosopher today would explicitly deny that a social upbringing and ongoing personal interaction are necessary to become autonomous." (40).

Additionally, Friedman argues that individuals are social creatures that develop autonomy through social contact with other individuals (40). This development occurs within a framework of values, meanings, and modes of self-reflection that cannot exist apart from the social activities that shape them. Furthermore, being an autonomous

individual is not inconsistent with accepting help and need from others, nor will it affect the overall personal development of that particular individual. She states that:

Nearly all of us remain, throughout our lives, involved in social relationships and communities, at least some of which partly define our identities and ground our highest values. These relationships and communities are fostered and sustained by the various sorts of ties that we share with others, such as languages, activities, practices, projects, traditions, histories, goals, views, values, and mutual attractions—not to mention common enemies and shared injustices and disasters. (41)

Thus, being an autonomous or self-directed person does not mean excluding oneself from social interactions and social spheres or living in isolation. On the contrary, it is considered an essential feature of an autonomous individual to interact with others and be among others, because being among other people, in a sense helps shape the individual's independent values and ideas but in a way that will not affect her personal choices or life. Christman states:

It is certainly true that any plausible philosophical or political theory must take into account the various ways in which humans are socially embedded, intimately related to other people, groups, institutions, and histories, that they experience themselves and their values as part of ongoing narratives and long traditions, and that they are motivated by interests and reasons that can only be fully defined with reference to other people and things. (144)

Lastly, the rights and freedoms that women enjoy today have been won through the dedication and suffering of unaccountable courageous women in the past in different domains. Among these women, in the literary domain are Jane Austen and Louisa May Alcott, who, with the use of a pen and a paper, have been able to defy the false view of women that have lived during the nineteenth century which, later, has marked their names among the feminist leading writers we know today. Nevertheless, gender inequality has been a long-standing issue that has not been rectified. As Gorsky states, “the nineteenth-century feminists left a legacy of change, but also a legacy of work yet to be done: they sought-as today's feminists still seek- true equality.” (4). Despite the enormous change feminism has made throughout history, women are still not equal to men since the belief that a woman only has a subordinate role still stands. While the situation differs significantly from one nation to the other, even in the Western world, which nurtures freedom and equality, there is still a myriad of indicators that women are not yet fully equal. women continue to be treated less than men and are sexualized and harassed. Additionally, still, a vast number of people in

many societies believe that women are successful only if they are married and have children. Their professional accomplishments are often irrelevant and unimportant.

Accordingly, the first chapter of this thesis presents a comprehensive discussion of liberal feminism, starting from its origins, emergence, and its place within the broad domain of feminism. The ideals it discusses and its general aim towards gaining freedom and equality for women. Also, this chapter identifies the concept of autonomy as a broad concept, its relation to the individuals, and its place within feminism. Since liberal feminism seeks the equality of genders in private and public spheres, and the inferior position of women in the nineteenth century. After reading both novels, it is noticed that the ideas that the writers, Jane Austen, and Louisa May Alcott discuss regarding women empowerment, may be interpreted in relation to some aspects or ideas that are evident in liberal feminism. Furthermore, examining the concept of autonomy, its meaning, and how it is related to feminism in general, indicates that the two characters, Emma and Jo display aspects of autonomy. Thereby, the important questions raised in this regard are: Can the female characters gain their autonomies? Are the ideals of liberal feminism being thoroughly implied in the two novels? Do the heroines succeed in breaking the nineteenth-century stereotypes? And lastly, in what regard the heroines are considered autonomous individuals?

CHAPTER TWO: JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*: THE INDEPENDENT HEROINE

2.1 Jane Austen

Numerous exceptional female authors have appeared in Britain every decade from the end of the 18th century, and this appearance brought with it new topics among them, and the most important is the status of women in society. One of these authors dealing with this issue is Jane Austen, described by Margaret Kirkham as “the first major woman novelist to make her mark on English literature” (3). Moreover, as Kirkham states,

Jane Austen became a publishing novelist in 1811, but her novels are the culmination of a line of development in thought and fiction which goes back to the start of the eighteenth century, and which deserves to be called feminist since it was concerned with establishing the moral equality of men and women and the proper status of individual women as accountable beings. (3)

Jane Austen (1775-1817), the British female writer, is considered the most influential writer of the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain. Her works, which depict family life, married life, and love tales, are delicate and realistic in their presentation. Furthermore, it is widely assumed that her family and schooling have influenced her decision to become a writer. She has grown up in a world of intellectuals, literature, and progressive ideas, due to her parents' encouragement of intellectual education in their children and appreciation of their points of view. Therefore, Austen has gained wide popularity in the literary domain. She is considered one of the most remarkable women writers in the history of literature.

Austen has lived in an era of inequality between the sexes. Therefore, in her novels, she sharply criticizes this gender discrimination by commenting on women's social status and the fact of women's marriage for a financially secured life. Leroy W. Smith states, “Her novels portray the possibility of an authentic existence for a woman. (21), and that she “exhibits the ‘rising consciousness’ of women” (25). To break with these gender differences, in her novels, Austen presents strong heroines with free will, and how their personalities progress into maturity and self-awareness in a society where women are restrained by the patriarchal norms and are living a limited life and

have few or no choices rather than to marry, for this reason, she is considered one of the significant feminist figures of the nineteenth century. According to Mary Evans;

Austen does three things that are essential to feminism and a feminist critique of patriarchy: she gives women a capacity for individual, adult, moral choice, and perception, she values the part that women play in the family and domestic life, and she portrays women as acting, and could even be said to encourage women to act, independently of men and patriarchal interests. (314)

In her novels, Austen addresses the idea of working towards a more liberal society for women. Her works have often dealt with topics such as gendered professions, wages, property, inherited, or earned social standing, appearance, courtship, marriage, and so on. Therefore, all her works are written on a social and domestic basis. According to Smith, "Austen is primarily a moral writer, she accepts the structure and values of her society, and she is indebted to the eighteenth century for her beliefs - and a radical view - her fiction exhibits a division within her mind and personality and a conflict with her society." (1)

Throughout her entire life, Austen has authored six novels. In those works, she has developed several memorable female characters that have captured the imaginations of millions of readers for centuries. According to Irene Taylor and Gina Luria,

Women novelists of the 1970s identified four 'rights' of women as the basis of a rationale for a novel about women's experience'. All four are prominent in Austen's novels. They are (1) the freedom to consider the institution of marriage critically... and from a woman's point of view; (2) the freedom to examine with some critical openness the quality of a woman's life after marriage; (3) the right to appeal ... to nature as norm [...] that is, the concept that true nobility is based not on birth but on virtues, (4) the right to open political dissent, that is, criticism of social and legal discrimination on the basis of sex. (Qtd in Smith 21)

The diverse life experiences of Austen's female characters truly represent the position of women in marriage and in society at the time of Austen's writing. It can be observed in the emergence of feminine consciousness in the books of Jane Austen. Furthermore, Austen's books encourage women to achieve self-maturity and perfection in the context of her time. It may be regarded as a significant step forward for a woman writer of her time. In her novels, Austen underlines the necessity for women to create their standards and social values in order to obtain a sense of independence or freedom. As Mary Evans states:

Austen does not conclude, like many feminists, that women can educate themselves out of subjectivity and subjection to patriarchal codes: she is

suggesting that for women, like men, the way out of being a subject and towards at least a measure of personal autonomy is through the acceptance and adherence to a sense of values and moral principles. (316)

Furthermore, Austen, in her works, aims at depicting characters who have contradictory opinions while still being a part of the community of Austen's era. Indeed, Austen works on developing heroines that have both complicated and endearing personality traits. Moreover, Austen has written tales that, alongside their romantic themes, highlight the inferior and powerless status of women in the society in which they are placed. Sayed Zareena states:

Jane Austen's novels are generally well-known owing to their themes, which question the validity of conventions in a society that lowers the place of women. In other words, Austen satirizes the values of her era by both manipulating the problems that women face and by constructing appropriate characters who contribute a lot to the reflection of female voice in her novels. (71)

Kathleen Anderson argues that Austen presents her heroines as important and equal individuals in many aspects as the heroes portrayed by male authors, she states that,

[Austen] chosen representative of the universal human being in her novel is a woman. Like all male authors whose heroes exemplify humanity as well as distinctly male subjectivity, Austen depicts heroines as the natural every person. Women are the filtering agents in her fiction, and their daily concerns are presented as not only valid, but of chief interest and importance. (xvii)

Furthermore, in a break from the traditional sentimental heroine of her day, who is recognized as a woman of emotion rather than a rational mind, Jane Austen's writing presents a compelling basis for attributing feminist rationality to her works. According to Zareena,

It is obvious that Austen understands perfectly the psychology of both women and men. While constructing the characters of her novels, she manipulates both her knowledge and observations about women and femininity and men and masculinity. Therefore, all her characters, male or female, serve Austen's aim which is to regulate equal opportunities between genders. (72)

Austen's presentation of heroines who are rather rational women is the clearest evidence of her contribution to the redefinition of femininity in her time. Moreover, "Austen writes about the problems of women in her society with fresh insight, intense but controlled feeling, and commitment to a woman's point of view." (Kirkham 26). Also, the heroines of Austen's novels are more concerned with widening their minds than they are with acquiring certain skills. The novels show how Austen's heroines

develop into rational agents capable of rational thinking about their own unique experiences and conducting moral judgment nearly completely on their own. Evans states that:

she portrays women as moral adults-and moral adults in one particularly important sense for feminists-namely that amongst her female characters are those who choose to live without men, and without male approval, rather than compromise central principles of behaviour. (314).

Furthermore, Austen is considered a social and realistic novelist; in *Emma*, she employs the character of Emma Woodhouse who is “one of the most living, and most divisive, heroine in fiction” (Wenborn 9) as a tool for social change. Thus, it can be observed that Austen wrote *Emma* to examine the role of women in her male-dominated society. Her unbiased point of view on the restricted choices given to women in *Emma* as going to be shown later is quite remarkable. As Subrata Ray states, “Austen does enter the canon in terms of her courageous endeavor to present a feminist vision of self-autonomy in the depiction of the character of Emma in the novel of the same name.” (235), while Wenborn argues that the novel “has been seen as the story of a woman’s humiliation and reform and as a rallying cry for female authority.” (9)

Another major message Austen conveys in her novels is that women do not have to be content with anything less than what they want simply because society expects them to do so. Furthermore, Austen describes a potential in women that is modern in character. Her proposals for coping with the problems of being female offer a promise of individual happiness and fulfilment, social harmony, and the full development of one's human possibilities.” (Smith 38) This means that, in a society where a woman's main choice is to marry the man that has been chosen for her to accomplish her possession in society, Austen gives her audience a heroine who shows that it is possible to make different decisions and enjoy other options. According to Smith:

Rejecting both wishful thinking and a concealed, corrosive despair, she looks for a plausible way to release women from their position of sexual inferiority and emotional vulnerability. She adopts a unifying view that combines the achievement of selfhood by the individual with an accommodation of the legitimate demands of self and society. (25)

Emma provides concrete confirmation for the independence of spirit and intellect. Emma Woodhouse has all of life's finest privileges given to a woman, beauty, a bright personality, intelligence, and, most importantly for a woman of her era, the

security of a comfortable and wealthy household. “She allows neither her gender nor the prevailing social codes to interfere with her individual standing in society. Contrary to the social position of the common women, she is in almost complete control of her household.” (Ray 236).

Unlike other Austen heroines, like Elizabeth Bennet or Anne Eliot, Emma is endowed with the unique social standing as a single heiress to Hartfield, the estate of the county's most respected family, she is “de facto mistress of her house” (Wenborn 41). As Kirkham quotes Lionel Trilling that due to Emma’s social status, she “has a moral life as a man has a moral life” (qtd. In Kirkham xxvi), according to this claim, Austen may have been advocating women's rights by depicting a female character that has equal possibilities and privileges as men in the novel, *Emma*. As a result, it is reasonable to say that Austen emphasizes equality of the sexes within the limitations of a patriarchal system.

Furthermore, in *Emma*, Austen demonstrates characteristics that will later be categorized as feminist ideals. The way she does this is by providing readers with strong and independent women who make decisions for themselves in their life. Smith states that “in Austen’s view, to be free a woman must possess self-knowledge and self-respect, judging for herself and be true to herself in making judgments, and insist on being judged as an individual and not by a stereotype.” (38)

Even though Austen’s tales conclude with the marriage of one of her female protagonists, The heroines in her tales possess admirable characteristics that enable them to engage in a happy and equal marriage. One of these heroines is Emma Woodhouse, who serves as Austen's model woman, whom Austen uses as a means to indicate that women have a variety of options in life and that they have the freedom to choose, particularly in marriage. Moreover, “Austen’s heroines demonstrate women’s condition – in material terms, at least – to be one of precarious dependency.” (Jones 283). As a result, Austen is constructing a role model for other women of her day and subsequent generations to look up to and follow. Furthermore, “Austen’s heroines sense society’s threat to their identity, and they possess the strength and courage to resist its moulding.” (Smith 34)

These heroines possess both a rational intellect and the capacity to withstand their society’s norms; it is these independent, smart, and strong-willed characteristics

that demonstrate to readers that women have the power to make their own decisions and pursue their own goals. Because of the autonomy of her heroines, Austen demonstrates what will later be known as feminist ideas by depicting the development of her heroines into powerful and rational female characters. As Smith states,

Austen defines a woman, as de Beauvoir does, 'as a human being in quest of values in a world of values' (47); she would, like de Beauvoir, give her the power to choose. Both believe that woman has the reasoning power and the potential for learning needed to break free from unreasonable external restraints and to move from ignorance and faulty perception to knowledge. (38)

2.2 Emma Woodhouse

Emma is published in 1815 in three volumes. It is a story about the clever, rich, and beautiful Emma Woodhouse who finds her delight in matchmaking because of her loneliness, leading to many complications and misunderstandings for herself and everyone around her. Although the story is about the everyday life of Emma Woodhouse and her interactions with others, Jane Austen asserts critical issues concerning women of her era in the novel. In *Emma*, Austen presents a woman who is independent, liberal, and wealthy, she is financially stable, and therefore she does not need to marry to secure her future. According to Johnson,

Austen is not embarrassed by power, and she depicts it with quite a pervasiveness and nonchalance that suggests how effortlessly she took it and the sentiments relative to it for granted. What makes Emma unusual then, is not that she is a woman freakishly endowed with self-love, but rather that she is a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it." (125)

Emma Woodhouse's description in the first lines as "handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." (4), indicates that Austen is presenting an ideal character for her time, who is beautiful, wealthy, intelligent, a good friend and an excellent daughter; talented and loved by everyone.

Furthermore, what makes Emma a different and interesting character is that despite being aware of women's social status in her society and the dominance of men over women and how to behave accordingly, she rejects being fixed to the inferior position of women in the hierarchal society in which she lives, thereby, she displays aspects of liberal feminism, she decides to live freely, regarding the constraints that

are imposed on women in general; she refuses to be controlled by others, specifically by men and strongly asserts her equal place in the society.

Smith states that “Emma Woodhouse rejects the role ordained for her sex and attempts to become as men are, a wielder of power, rather than as women are, its victims.” (32). Therefore, Emma is presented as a woman of independent mind who takes her decisions by herself and does not let other people’s opinions affect her. Thus, she represents aspects of liberal thinking and autonomy, as Friedman argues, being an autonomous include having an “array of notions” (3) such as, “being “true to myself,” doing it “my way,” standing up for “what I believe,” thinking “for myself,” and, in gender-egalitarian reformulation, being one’s “own person.” (3). Moreover, Emma’s self-determination is evident from the beginning of the story and is continually displayed throughout the entire novel. Self-determination is considered the main component of an autonomous personality, to have the power to be the one in charge of her life and her mind is the basis of developing autonomy in one’s personality, alongside reflecting her desires and wants that shapes her character. Because “Autonomous choices and behaviour must also be self-reflective [...] They must reflect, or mirror, the wants, desires, cares, concerns, values, and commitments that someone reaffirms when attending to them.” (Friedman 6)

Emma, as the story depicts, is the lady in charge of the house in which she lives since being a little girl. With her mother being dead, her sister married and a sick father, Emma obtains full authority over herself and her household which helps shape her liberal character. She is dependent on her father regarding money only, otherwise, she is seen as an independent lady, she makes her own decisions, and her opinions are appreciated and heard by almost all the people in her surroundings. She is “so great a personage in Highbury,” (18). Even her father depends on her and considers her the one in charge of the house and of him, it is she who takes care of him and not the opposite, as Johnson states,

Emma’s very difference makes her and her novel exceptional, for even in the case of that one wholly traditional bond at the centre of Emma’s life-her tender love for her father- the intellectual, physical, and even moral frailty of this paternal figure necessitates a dependence upon female strength, activity, and good judgment. Possessing these qualities in abundance, Emma does not think of herself as an incomplete or contingent being who is destiny is to be determined by the generous or blackguardly actions a man will make towards her. (124)

Moreover, what distinguishes her as an independent character is her refusal to marry unless it is for love, she says “A woman is not to marry a man merely because she is asked, or because he is attached to her, and can write a tolerable letter.” (41) because she does not need the meditation of marriage or a husband to secure her financially and socially. After all, she already possesses independence, possession, and wealth, and that marriage will not add anything to her personal and social status, this conveys another major idea discussed by liberal feminists, that is the fact of a woman’s ability to establish her equal position in society and to have everything available to men at that time, therefore, “women and men are self-owners capable of acquiring property rights over things.” (Baehr). Furthermore, Emma believes that if a woman turns down a marriage offer, it is entirely her right to do so, Emma believes that her social status is perfect and she does not need a man to be responsible for her or to complete her life because her life in many aspects is already complete, she tells Harriet,

I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Was I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But I have never been in love; it is not my way or nature, and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune, I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want; I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes as I am in my father’s. (67)

In addition to her wealth and beauty, Emma is also a talented and educated young woman, as the story depicts:

She had always wanted to do everything and had made more progress in drawing and music than many might have done with so little labour as she would ever submit to. She played and sang; —and drew in almost every style; but steadiness had always been wanting, and in nothing had she approached the degree of excellence which she would have been glad to command and ought not to have failed of. (33)

Through the character of Emma, Austen asserts that women can be responsible for themselves and that they have the choice to do and choose what they want and therefore achieve equality and independence. Emma's behaviours and opinions show her autonomous personality; she is independent and free to choose and decide; she has property, she is very wealthy, and she refuses to marry at the beginning because she believes marriage will affect her social possession, and it will not add any happiness to her. As Friedman states,

For choices and actions to be autonomous, the choosing and acting self as the particular self she must play a role in determining them. The self as a whole,

as the particular self she is, must somehow (partly) determine what she chooses and does. This could come about if the particular self that someone is has a distinctive identity and her identity is somehow implicated in her determining of what she does. (4)

When at the end of the novel, she marries Mr. Knightly, it is because this is her choice. After all, she loves him. Therefore, she is compared equally to men. Moreover, Emma is Austen's female character that comprises every quality that makes her a dominant and autonomous lady in a patriarchal society. According to Kim Sun Hee:

The author emphasizes individuality and distinction as a woman. Women in the Highbury world are poorly constrained [...] In this society, Emma is the closest thing to be an emancipated woman. Nevertheless, she also is cramped and confined, compared to the man. Directly or indirectly, Austen makes Emma push against the limits that her womanhood imposes. Emma is trying to distinguish herself from the mediocrity and trivialization that threaten women's lives. (153)

Moreover, Emma, throughout the novel, undergoes a complete moral development which helps her to become a more rational and independent character; she ends up acting as an independent moral woman, and therefore gains the respect of everyone, which makes her more powerful and controlling that leads to her being a fully autonomous woman. Austen, by making Emma concentrate on developing her mind rather than the talents associated with women, or "the superficial virtues" (Kim Sun Hee 151) that are developed at home, she implies the possibility for women to change their interests and widen their perspectives to be more independent and more liberal; thereby, more rational.

As Kim Sun Hee states, "the rationality of women, the improvement of the mind, is eventually so important to Jane Austen that she grants rather little importance to accomplishments in considering how girls would be educated." (151). Furthermore, Emma acknowledges the fact that she makes a lot of mistakes throughout the novel. Emma's mistakes help her develop her mind and character. When it is proven that she is mistaken, Emma quickly accepts her faults and grows as an individual because of her personal growth. This kind of self-improvement is believed to be in accordance with the feminist goal of the individual's independence.

Emma is, wealthy, intelligent, talented, independent, and has authority over everything in her life, Austen places Emma in an unfamiliar position for a young lady in her time. Nevertheless, Emma is not presented as a perfect character but rather a character who goes into self-improvement, which leads to her transformation into a

more rational heroine who possesses the power of the mind, self-reflection, self-determination and free choice, and who knows and values her self-worth. Therefore, she combines in her personality many aspects which shape her character as an autonomous heroine, as Friedman argues,

When someone reflectively reaffirms wants or values that are important to her in either sense just described, they become part of the perspective that defines her as the particular person she is. They embody the “nomos” of herself: relatively stable, enduring concerns and values that give her a kind of identity as the person she is. Someone is self-determining when she acts for the sake of what matters to her, what she “is.” (6)

Emma's description at the novel's opening lines also confirms her distinct traits, which give her the quality of being an autonomous and active young woman in her society. Furthermore, what indicates her independence is that she refuses the general idea of marriage, she believes that a woman, unless she is profoundly in love, she is not obliged to marry and that what happens to her in the end, she falls in love with Mr. Knightly and decides to marry him willingly. However, because it is based on love and mutual respect, her marriage does not affect her independence; she remains in control even after her marriage.

In the nineteenth century, women have obtained a very constrained position in comparison to men. Being of less importance, women have to be reliant on the male members of their households to maintain their social standing. After reaching the age of adulthood, their fathers become concerned with the responsibility of finding suitable marriages for their daughters. This situation is the result of both the common perception of women's inferiority in comparison to men and the restriction of women in public places. Women are forced into marriage regardless of their desire to do so because they have been convinced that it is the only acceptable thing for a woman and because they are unable to maintain themselves on their own when it comes to financial necessities. According to Smith,

A well-bred young woman seeks a quiet equilibrium in life-based on social and economic security, fulfilment of her duties to family and society as mother and companion, and, with luck, the development of a tender and respectful relationship with her husband, as a means of reducing her sense of subordination and dependence. (30)

But this fact is refuted by Emma. Emma proves her equality with men by refusing to accept the assumption that marriage is the single most important thing that a woman can achieve, and by demonstrating that a single woman will always possess

importance as an individual. Furthermore, Emma declares that physical appearances are the least important elements upon which a marriage should be constructed and that there should be a mutual attraction between the two people engaging in this process in order to build a strong basis for marriage, she tells Harriet, “My being charming, Harriet, is not quite enough to induce me to marry; I must find other people charming – one other person at least. And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all.” (67). Ray states that “Such a feminist declaration boldly contradicts the deep-rooted patriarchal structure where a woman never marries a man but is married by a man.” (237). Harriet’s reaction to Emma’s marriage ideas shows how Emma’s personality consists of liberal traits, Harriet tells Emma that “it is so odd to hear a woman talk so!” (67). This indicates that “Emma does not mind speaking her mind in masculine terms as she chooses man’s language to make her position clear as far as her marriage thoughts are concerned. It is also a vehement violation of the social code of conduct which has always been imposed upon the women of the day.” (Ray 237)

Emma is the daughter of the richest man in town, and she has the characteristic of constantly being the dominant figure in her family, which shows her sense of equality. Furthermore, Emma becomes interested in matchmaking, which highlights the reversal of roles that are generally handled by males. Emma “views freedom as a means of escape from the expectations of a restrictive social environment.” (Smith 38), She is undoubtedly, in an indirect way, a rebellious against the narrow capability of a privileged woman's life, particularly a woman who is unmarried and childless, and her deliberate job as matchmaker surely exemplifies this view.

According to Ray, “[Emma] mockingly discards the predominant image of women being helplessly dependent on men in terms of social scenario. She dares to go unconventional in her outlook on life and society. She not only contradicts the patriarchal social pattern but also hints at an alternative avenue.” (239). Emma's rejection of the idea of marriage as a fundamental requirement for women may also be demonstrated by her feeling about being a single woman. Emma argues in her discussion with Harriet that a single woman may still enjoy all the advantages that a married woman can have if she desires. She may continue to engage in events, as well as receive and provide affection and care to other people if she chooses. Therefore, Emma believes in the idea that despite being a single woman, she can enjoy her life in

every possible way, be a complete woman, and live a meaningful life. This is illustrated in the following paragraph,

If I know myself, Harriet, mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many independent resources; and I do not perceive why I should be more in want of employment at forty or fifty than one-and-twenty. Woman's usual occupations of hand and mind will be as open to me then as they are now, or with no important variation. If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work. And as for objects of interest, objects for the affections, which is in truth the great point of inferiority, the want of which is really the great evil to be avoided in not marrying, I shall be very well off, with all the children of a sister I love so much, to care about. (68)

Furthermore, Emma believes that being an old maid is a status that does not require much overstatement by people. Being an old maid does not necessarily indicate that the woman is a meaningless creature in her sense. The only thing regarding an old maid that makes her appear inconvenient is her economic inequality. Because an old maid does not have anyone who can provide her with financial support, she is more likely to be criticized by other people. Emma, on the other hand, will never encounter such a situation because she has sufficient wealth to support herself for the rest of her life as indicated in the following passage,

I shall not be a poor old maid, and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable, old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else! (68)

A single woman, on the other hand, must deal with not just the threat of poverty but also the threat of social disgrace. The fact that Emma is opposed to this kind of discrimination demonstrates that she possesses liberal aspects of her personality. The quotation here, also, indicates Emma's view that there should be equality between husband and wife in marriage. This type of equality is attained through their mutual participation. She requires to be acknowledged as a significant individual for her husband to meet her needs, and likewise. Additionally, the quotation explains that Emma believes she is not required to marry owing to her privileged status as a wealthy young woman, a beloved daughter, and a respected young lady. She believes that she already possesses all the benefits that marriage can ever provide her; she is financially independent, socially acceptable, and respected. Furthermore, "Emma stands unyielding with her own sets of beliefs, ideas, and judgments. On many an occasion, she may have been wrong on her raw judgmental tendencies, but she

never allows herself to be submissive in terms of social expectations which demand women to be meek and yielding to men.” (Ray 240).

Furthermore, Emma’s opinion toward women’s subordination in matrimony is shown through the following conversation with Mr. Knightley.

You are a very warm friend to Mr. Martin; but, as I said before, are unjust to Harriet. Harriet's claims to marry well are not so contemptible as you represent them. She is not a clever girl, but she has better sense than you are aware of, and does not deserve to have her understanding spoken of so slightly [. . .] let me tell you, that in the degree she possesses them, they are not trivial recommendations to the world in general, for she is, in fact, a beautiful girl, and must be thought so by ninety-nine people out of a hundred; (49)

In the quotation, the conversation between the two shows that a lady who is both attractive and obedient is an ideal wife in the nineteenth century. For the same reason, men do not desire clever wives, because they also want to control them. The dominance of the husband over his wife is an indication of the inequality that exists between men and women.

Furthermore, Emma can cope with marriage without having to adhere to the institution herself thanks to the help of matchmaking. It provides her with the skills she needs to exercise her authority as a social member in a manner that is regarded as proper for a female leader. She can preserve her position as a social member, a position that is often filled by a man. In doing so, she affirms her belief in the equality of men and women in society. Thereby, displaying another idea conveyed by liberal feminists, that is “promoting women’s recognition of their value as individuals and public and private recognition of that value by others.” (Wendell 82)

Most women in the nineteenth century were instructed by their families on whom to choose as a partner, and this was generally accomplished without consideration for the daughter’s feelings for the person or what she desires. Emma opposes this point of view in her attempt to find Harriet the proper husband. She tells Harriet,

This is an alliance which, whoever—whatever your friends may be, must be agreeable to them, provided at least they have common sense; and we are not to be addressing our conduct to fools. If they are anxious to see you happily married, here is a man whose amiable character gives every assurance of it; — if they wish to have you settled in the same country and circle which they have chosen to place you in, here it will be accomplished; and if their only object is that you should, in the common phrase, be well married, here is the comfortable fortune, the respectable establishment, the rise in the world which must satisfy them. (60)

Emma differentiates between the terms 'happily' and 'well' married in this passage. According to her, the perfect marriage should include the two, which means that a married woman must seek satisfaction on all levels, including personal, social, and economic. Emma's aim in her role as Harriet's matchmaker is to ensure that Harriet has the best possible match for the rest of her life. Furthermore, Emma desires to make Harriet as equal as possible to men by providing Harriet with something that most nineteenth-century women do not have, the ability to choose for themselves. As a result, Emma wishes to demonstrate that in marriage, a woman is not just an entity, but also an equal person.

Emma herself marries at the end of the novel, her marriage demonstrates that she has achieved her goal and that she is not opposed to the concept of marriage, but to the notion that women must marry in order to be happy in their careers and families. Emma demonstrates that marriage is a decision that both men and women may make on an equal basis with one another. Therefore, Austen's idea about marriage, presented through the character of Emma, is that the institution of marriage should be established on basis of equality, and affection, in addition to sufficient and mutual knowledge, as Smith states,

Austen offers her ideal marriage as a real rather than a fanciful possibility. The key properties, in addition to physical attraction, are mutuality and reciprocity, self-knowledge and knowledge of the other, friendship, esteem, equality and freedom- properties that mark one's escape from patriarchal limitations and one's success in the quest for selfhood." (43)

In this regard, Emma Woodhouse represents several feminist characteristics: equality and independence are on top of these characteristics. Emma's views on marriage and her choice to act as a matchmaker represent the feminist aspect of equality, while the feminist element of independence is shown in Emma's resolve to make decisions on her own. Emma's maturity and awareness are due, in part, to the feminist aspects of freedom, but she will also become a better person because of her independence. Emma, as the protagonist, is portrayed as the superior female character in the novel, she is independent-minded and free to act the way she wants and choose what she wants, and express her ideas and opinions very honestly. Therefore, all these traits are considered representatives of an autonomous person and show how the character holds liberal ideals because the more one reflects one's desires and wants, the more she displays autonomy. Therefore, "what matters to someone, what she self-

reflectively cares about, when effective in and reflected in her action, makes her behaviour autonomous.” (Friedman 9)

While Emma Woodhouse is a typical representation of her class gender in the Victorian Era, she is also a rebel who seeks to avoid the fulfilment of her domestic obligations as a wife or to be a supporter of the moral principles of patriarchal society. Moreover, “Her social, financial, and intellectual position is no less than the men belonging to the highest rank of the social ladder. All this may stand as direct defiance against oppressive social stereotypes.” (Ray 236). Even though she fully understands the need for a woman of her social rank to marry and find a decent partner, Emma places more emphasis on the rational reasons for this requirement than on emotional goals. It might be concluded that Austen’s heroine represents resistance against submitting to the most important act that a woman of her social class is allowed to do. As a result, “having enjoyed an unusual degree of independence, Emma rejects the conventional female destiny and aspires to the privileges of power that society accords young men.” (Smith 37).

Therefore, by displaying an independent mind and a fixed opinion, Emma shows the autonomous traits of her personality, for one of the most important traits of an autonomous person, is her ability to determine independently. According to Claudia L. Johnson, “in its willingness to explore positive versions of female power, *Emma* itself is an experimental production of authorial independence unlike any of Austen’s other novels.” (126)

Thus, Austen's novel, *Emma*, in which she depicts the class system, economic realities, and gender issues of the period, effectively conveys feminist viewpoints. As a realist, Austen understands that life can be difficult, particularly for women. However, rather than focusing on how society's limits may passively affect women’s life, Austen concentrates on the logical abilities that women need to live, which is the ultimate feminist assertion in *Emma*. According to Smith,

Woman's role and place is a subject constantly on Austen's mind, and she attends to it as an end in itself, not a means, an accident, or the unintended distillate of unsuccessful repression. She is moved, as modern feminists are, by dismay and anger over the conditions of woman's existence in a patriarchal society; and her treatment is thoughtful, penetrating, and complex (45)

Moreover, what distinguishes Austen's heroine as a symbol of female identity is that she possesses almost the same characteristics that are essential in the

construction of a self-realizing female figure in society. Jane Austen believes that women should be given the same rights and opportunities as men. Therefore, many of the female characters in her writings are equal to or superior to the male characters. According to Smith,

Despite the enormous problems that women face, Austen shows a way to overcome them. The first step is to treat a woman as a subject in her own right, that is, to observe the world from her point of view. The next step is to view her positively, as she seems to herself to be, not as she appears to men. [...] Then Austen describes the possibility of a woman's developing an authentic self in place of the false self encouraged by sex roles and sexual stereotyping. (40)

In *Emma*, Austen expresses a distinct point of view about a woman that differs from other conventional women, and this point of view is what distinguishes her as a feminist writer. Women ought to be treated on an equal footing with men. Therefore, Jane Austen has composed her books with the belief that women are as intellectual and rational as men. In the marriage market, into which her heroines are often pushed, the woman is just as likely as the male to be equally in charge. Thus, the independence of character, freedom of thought, and autonomy are evident traits in Emma's character in *Emma*. Emma is displayed as an independent-minded woman who expresses her ideas and opinions without any constrictions; she is free to choose everything according to what she desires and has the ultimate authority over herself. Therefore, "An autonomous life is one lived by someone who has the capacities for autonomy and can exercise them frequently over a substantial period. She lives her mature and lucid years in accord with what matters deeply to her; her life reflects those concerns to a significant degree" (Friedman 13)

CHAPTER THREE: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*: THE STORY OF WOMAN EMPOWERMENT

3.1 Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) is born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, the United States. Her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, is a "Transcendentalist philosopher, and educational reformer" (Bomarito and Hunter 297), and a believer in child learning necessity and the importance of enjoying the process of learning. Therefore, Alcott has grown up in an admirable milieu which has helped to shape her talent; she has been taught to read and write from an early age by her father and her mother, Abigail May Alcott. According to Jessica Bomarito and Jeffrey W. Hunter, "Both her parents strongly influenced her education and the development of her social and political views." (297).

Alongside the teaching which her parents have provided her, Louisa May Alcott has received education from famous authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, and Ralph Aldo Emerson who were family friends. As Diamant states, "The Alcotts were well-known members of that Transcendental circle which included Emerson, Thoreau, the Peabody sisters, Margaret Fuller, and Nathaniel Hawthorne" (5). Moreover, Alcott is not just a novelist, she was a poet and a short story writer, and she used the incidents of her life as the primary source of her writing inspiration.

It is said by many critics that Alcott has faced severe poverty which has helped provoke her desire to become a writer in order to be able to provide for herself and her family financially. Among the critics are Bomarito and Hunter, who state, that because of Alcott's father's excessive spending, the family became "severely impoverished" (297). Furthermore, Bomarito and Hunter state that "her father's financial instability may have contributed to her powerful desire to achieve a steady income through her writings." (297). Regarding her personal life, Alcott has been interested in women's rights, and she has joined the women's suffrage movement, she was "a staunch supporter of both abolition and women's suffrage." (Bomarito and Hunter 298). Furthermore, she is the first woman to vote in the state of Connecticut. "It was impossible that she should not be interested in lightening the burdens which lay upon

women, in the race of life, and though never a prominent worker of the cause, she was a zealous believer in the right of women to the ballot.” (Beach 310).

Alcott is well known for her support of women’s autonomy and the empowerment of women; she constantly expresses her feminist ideas in her writings. In *Little Women*, she presents characters with ambition and a tendency to be free and independent. According to Bomarito and Hunter, “During her lifetime, Alcott spoke publicly on feminist causes, including suffrage, equal pay, and women’s right to education. As a prolific professional author, she also set an important precedent, demonstrating the viability of fiction writing as a career for women.” (297). Just like Jane Austen, Alcott did not need to marry; she preferred to lead an independent single life. Moreover, she wants the same fate for her heroines, but the fact that she has to fulfil her audience’s desires compelled her to make her heroines marry at the end of her novels. Thus, what marks Alcott as a famous feminist writer is her strong belief and defense of women's rights. Madeline B Stern. States:

In the course of her prolific career, she would advance the feminist cause in much that she would write. From little women, where the independent heroine, Jo March, has become a role model for the twentieth century, to her letters in the woman’s journal supporting women in all their endeavours, Alcott would prove herself a staunch feminist. (viii-ix)

Little Women, the “quintessential women’s novel.” (Bomarito and Hunter 297) is one of the most influential novels of the 19th century. The novel belongs to the "Bildungsroman" genre, which centers on the characters' journey from adolescence to maturity. And considering the period and place in which it is written, Alcott's work may be considered socially innovative regarding gender representation. *Little Women* is published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869 in two parts, which are recently being published as one book. It is considered Alcott's most popular and successful novel that has established her name among feminist writers. The story is about four sisters of the March family Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy; each portrays a different kind of womanhood. Meg being the eldest represents the sense of responsibility and maternity. Jo represents the independent woman who seeks an equal position in society. Beth is the angel of the house, who is content with her minor role in life, and Amy the youngest represents the girls who seek beauty, wealth, and superior social rank. Alcott details the story of these four young ladies from adolescence to womanhood at the time of the American civil war. Concerning the era in which the novel is written, the ideas which Alcott presents in the novel are considered before its time. Alcott, throughout the novel, raises

questions on the validity of gender stereotypes through the protagonist Jo who throughout the novel expresses an aspiration to escape being a typical female. Jo defies traditional gender stereotypes in her outlook and behaviours. And aims to have a career and enter the public sphere.

Therefore, *Little Women*, as Bomarito and Hunter state, "illustrate the struggles between adolescence and maturity, but they also represent a prominent theme in much of Alcott's fiction: the conflict experienced by women who must choose between individuality and the bonds of family responsibilities and social traditions." (298). Furthermore, the novel is considered an autobiography of Alcott's life with her three sisters, as Harriet Reisen mentions "the fictional March family, was closely moulded on the Alcott Family" (2). Jo March, the second sister ought to present Alcott's counterpart, and the struggles that Jo goes through are indeed a reflection of what Alcott had to experience during her life as Harriet Reisen states, "Little Women is a charming, intimate coming-of-age story about family love, loss, and struggle set in a picturesque rendering of mid-nineteenth-century New England life. What sets it apart is the young woman at its center. Her name is Jo March, but her character is Louisa Alcott." (24). It is believed that many of Alcott's stories were based on her personal life and experiences, as Reisen states:

An actress of professional caliber, Louisa played many roles in her life and used them in her work. Much of her fiction is not fictional at all: [...]. She was her own best character. In everything, Louisa Alcott wrote she made use of the outward details and the hidden emotional currents of her life, and her life was no children's book. She knew (3)

Moreover, Alcott is a believer in women's ability to join men in the public sphere and to have a successful career that will help them enjoy the freedom they deserve, as she states in one of her letters, "the world is full of work, needing all the heads, hearts, and hands we can bring to do it. Never was there so splendid an opportunity for women to enjoy their liberty and prove that they deserve it by using it wisely." (Qtd. in Bomarito and Hunter 310). Therefore, being a supporter of the eligibility of women's independence and equality is reflected in her work, as Bender states "Clearly, because of Alcott's history with women's rights, she was not seeking to repress her female characters. Alcott used her books as platforms to address controversial topics, such as feminism, as seen in *Little Women*" (150). Moreover, Alcott's emphasis on the necessity and eligibility of the equality between the sexes in private and public spheres and her indication of the importance of women's

participation in voting and work show that Alcott has advanced liberal feminist ideas which are reflected in the novel. As Shai Rudin states,

Alcott's vision, as reflected in *Little Women*, was to create a democratic home where both sexes could shed gender stereotypes. In this fashion, women could work and participate in political life and men could be partners in managing the household, raising, and educating children alongside women. (116)

Looking at how she presents her heroines, specifically Jo, in the novel, it can be understood that Alcott is not aiming at giving her heroine an end where she marries and lives happily after in the house under the care of her husband and filling her time with domestic tasks. However, living in a period controlled by patriarchal norms that give significant importance to marriage as being a great delight for a woman, Alcott seems to include marriage in her novel as a representation of sincere feelings and not as a striving need for a husband or as the main goal in life.

Additionally, *Little Women* is categorized as children's literature, however, the novel does not present the story of the four March sisters at a certain age or tell their childish adventure, it presents the process of their becoming mature women, and their development into a grown-up, rational women. Throughout the novel, Alcott presents the process of the female development into an independent and autonomous being, with its negative and positive sides, and its misfortunes and triumphs. Therefore, the novel is not intended for children, but it belongs to women's fiction, and it is a story written by a true feminist for it discusses a topic related to women's journey towards liberation and independence. As Jill P. May states, "*little women* are a piece of women's history or, perhaps more important, a piece of women's autobiography that depicts female aspirations, family life, and women's career choices." (320). Nevertheless, while reading the novel, it is Jo who stands out as the major character, unlike her sisters, she does not accept the role imposed on women by society as Meg and Amy do nor hides as Beth does. But she challenges her society bravely.

3.2 Josephine (Jo) March

Jo is an ambitious, brave, and intelligent girl who aspires to be a well-known writer, she "is an unconventional young woman who strives for independence and personal achievement as a writer," (Bomirato and Hunter 298). Jo, the novel's protagonist, represents rebellion and strength, she struggles powerfully against the gender stereotypes that restrict her from being free and proves her independence and

individuality in a male dominant society. She challenges the common inequalities, those related to the limitations imposed on women by society by insisting on “[doing] something very splendid;” (41). Thus, she emerges as a modern literary character with unfamiliar ideas that are opposite to women’s mentality of her era. Jo, who aspires to be a writer, as the story depicts, will fight relentlessly to accomplish her ambitions, and bravely face the many obstacles she encounters throughout her journey. Moreover, her personality is described thoroughly by Reisen, as follows:

Jo March is a dazzling and original invention: bold, outspoken, brave, daring, loyal, cranky, principled, and real. She is a dreamer and a scribbler, happiest at her woody hideout by an old cartwheel or holed up in the attic, absorbed in reading or writing, filling page after page with stories or plays. She loves to invent wild escapades, to stage and star in flamboyant dramas. She loves to run. She wishes she was a boy, for all the right reasons: to speak her mind, go where she pleases, learn what she wants to know—in other words, to be free. (2)

Furthermore, Jo describes herself as “the gull, strong and wild, fond of the storm and the wind, flying far out to sea, and happy all alone.” (658), she is an assertive character, she stands against the patriarchal norms of her society and refuses to fit in or accept the patriarchal norms as her sisters do, she wants to be free, and independent to the extent of wishing to be a boy, according to her, being a boy will make her life much easier. Furthermore, a conventional woman is the one who should be as docile, submissive, and elegant as she can. Such a traditional woman, in Jo's opinion, is living without a particular ambition, much like a statue that sits motionless. she says:

I hate to think I have got to grow up and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It is bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys’ games and work and manners! I cannot get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it is worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman! (4)

Alcott presents Jo, in the first part of the novel with many masculine traits; which are caused by the society in which she lives which will not allow her to act as free as men are; Jo wants to be equally treated as men, because of the general belief imposed by society that men can do anything and allowed to live the way they want while women must stay at home to handle domestic work, therefore being a woman is an obstacle for Jo. She cherishes independence and wants to be recognized as a talented writer because “to be independent” (151) is what Jo wants mostly, and not to be caged at home, learning how to do women's works such as needling or embroidery, or seizing her mind to trivial thinking such as caring for being elegant or not, attending parties or look for a suitable husband. Jo refuses the idea of her being a conventional woman,

she dreams of moving away from home and society by travelling abroad and earning money by becoming a writer. Additionally, by making Jo act in conduct that does not resemble a delicate and sophisticated lady, Alcott emphasizes equality between the sexes. As Bender states, “throughout little women, Alcott breaks traditional gender stereotypes, encouraging her readers not to label themselves or others simply based on gender. By transcending the normal rules of the time, Alcott encourages people to see each other as equals.” (151)

Moreover, in the physical description of Jo, many masculine traits and behaviours are presented to indicate Jo’s representation as a “tomboy” she has “round shoulders, big hands and feet, a fly-away look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and did not like it.” (10). She uses "slang words" (8) and even acts as if she is a boy "Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle." (8), she uses the abbreviation “Jo” of her name because it is more "boyish" (8) and because “Josephine” is “so sentimental!” (32) for her, and playing the role of brother to her sisters. These traits are not indicated by Jo herself only, but also by her family, Meg advises her to stop acting like a boy, Amy criticizes her boyish behaviours, and her father calls her "son Jo" (212). By presenting Jo in this way, Alcott indicates the fact that girls like Jo find themselves obliged to behave against their nature because of the restricting society they live in. Furthermore, it is shown many times throughout the novel how she attempts to alter her speech by speaking in a deep voice to sound like a male, emphasizing the fact that nineteenth-century women's voices were suppressed by the patriarchal discourse.

Another trait of Jo’s personality is that she works hard in order not to be a burden on her family; she strongly believes that she can do any work and she can earn her own money without the assistance of a man and therefore, she does not feel the need to marry a rich man. She believes that no one can help her but herself, she does not want to rely on anyone because she wants to remain free and does not want to lose her liberty under any circumstances. As she says, “I do not like favours; they oppress and make me feel like a slave; I would rather do everything for myself and be perfectly independent.” (283).

Jo is portrayed as having the ultimate freedom to express her independent ideas and thoughts throughout much of the novel which sets her as an autonomous and self-

determining character, she is “a woman of means” (227) who has “great plans fermented in her busy brain and ambitious mind,” (227), she longs to be a writer and to have a career in order to be responsible for herself, and she is the only girl in the novel who travels to work in another city and liberate herself from familial and societal restrictions. Jo knows what she wants in life and how to live her life according to her ideas and beliefs, and not according to others’ expectations, according to Marilyn Friedman:

When someone reflectively reaffirms wants or values that are important to her [...] they become part of the perspective that defines her as the particular person she is. They embody the “nomos” of herself: relatively stable, enduring concerns and values that give her a kind of identity as the person she is. Someone is self-determining when she acts for the sake of what matters to her, what she deeply cares about, and, in that sense, who she “is” (6)

Women who lack independence and are obligated to remain at home to assist their mothers or look after the children are not characteristics that match Jo’s character. She is a woman who desires to travel the globe rather than be confined to her house and repeat the same tasks and actions every day. Jo, by realizing that her chances of achieving her ambition are higher if she lives in the city, becomes much more interested to experience life there, because she feels trapped in her home, and that it prevents her from developing her skills and establishing them in the form of a profession she strongly desires. Thereby, Jo travels to New York City alone, lives in a dorm, works as a teacher for two girls, and starts writing stories for the Weekly Volcano magazine which provides her with extra money, and as stated in the novel:

The teaching would render her independent, and such leisure as she got might be made profitable by writing, while the new scenes and society would be both useful and agreeable. Jo liked the prospect and was eager to be gone, for the home nest was growing too narrow for her restless nature and adventurous spirit. (314)

Jo cannot bear to think that her role as a woman is seized to wearing gowns, acting gracefully, and spending her life doing domestic work when she can do and be more than that, she wants a free life full of adventures, she wants to work and to have equal opportunities as men, that is her greatest dream and ambition, as she says,

[...] I would write out of a magic inkstand so that my works should be as famous as Laurie’s music. I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle, something heroic or extraordinary that will not be forgotten after I’m dead. I do not know what, but I’m on the watch for it and mean to astonish you all someday. [...] I think I shall write books and get rich and famous that would suit me, so that is my favourite dream." (254-255)

Through this quotation, Jo's traits as an autonomous heroine become more evident; she expresses her ideas freely and openly, she rejects all her society's restrictions and she refuses to live a life confined to the home, doing dull tasks and behaving as any proper young woman of her age. She hates the idea of being married, what she wants to do is to live unlimitedly, have adventures, achieve her dreams, be free and independent, leave a strong impression on others, and have a legacy. Therefore, "through Jo, Alcott exemplifies her ideas about feminism well. She provides a picture of a woman who can be not only feminine but also strong and vocal." (Bender 151)

Friedman discusses an idea of an autonomous person named "The First Person" (56), according to this idea, the life an individual lives becomes more valuable and meaningful if the individual lives it in accordance with her desires and perspectives. Furthermore, if this individual possesses a self-perception of herself being a person who can make a change, then she should direct her mind and actions towards achieving the goal that she believes is the most important in her life. And if this individual acts in an opposite way to what matters the most to her, or according to the desires, wants, or values of others and not of her own, she will be an odd person who acts against her nature, because "those wants, and values express how [she] wants to live [her] life and how [she] thinks [she] ought to live it. [her] life, after all, is who [she] is, it is the narrative, space-time trajectory that is [her]" (57). This idea that Friedman discusses is implied in the novel, Jo is throughout the novel presented as an individual who acts and thinks according to her conceptions and perspectives in life, she never tries to live according to what others tell her to do or think about her. She is a free person who does not allow others to interfere in her own life or alter her ideas about herself or how to live, for if she behaves according to the opinions of the others she will become "a mere instrument of someone else's intentions." (57). And therefore, she will lose her self-value and independence, thus, she will yield to the traditional society's expectations. Furthermore, Jo, by forming independent ideas indicates her autonomous nature as a woman who has the freedom to live her life according to her perspectives, as Wendell states, "It might be maintained that the only philosophical justification for individual liberty is some view that all, or at least most, human beings can best decide for themselves how to develop themselves or accomplish their well-being." (71)

Jo is an intellectual woman whose mindset is different from that of her sisters because unlike them, she believes in a woman's ability to do anything without the help of a man and without being forced to enter the marriage institution, which she views as a "mischief", she is, as she declares, "the only one that has sense enough to keep out of mischief" (306). In chapter 35, when Laurie, her best friend, proposes to her, she refuses the proposal because she believes that she will never marry, her belief arises from the idea that she has more important dreams than being a wife and that marriage might prevent her from achieving these dreams, moreover, Jo believes that by keeping herself away from marriage and relationships is a rational and sensible decision, and she has no time to waste on "such nonsense!" (192). She says, "I am happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man." (346). Therefore, Jo is presented as a rational rather than sentimental character, because sentimentality is accompanied by being gentle and more feminine, and thus less in control of her life and mind, as is indicated in the story, "Jo's brain developed earlier than heart, and she preferred imaginary heroes to real ones because when tired of them, the former could be shut up in the tin kitchen till called for, while the latter were less manageable." (307).

Furthermore, being more rational is another trait that indicates her independence and equality with men, because it is commonly believed men are supposed to be the more rational beings. Therefore, valuing reason over emotions is another main ideal of liberal feminism, as Wendell states, "Liberal feminists have long maintained that women have the same capacity to reason as do men, are no more emotional by nature." (77). Jo even assigns herself the role of "the man of the family" (11), and she plays the role very well, she becomes the one who financially responsible for her family. Indicating once again her equality. She begins to feel powerful because "she saw that money conferred power; money and power, therefore, she resolved to have." (327). According to Smith "stories like Jo's awaken in women their potential to become equal with men in intelligence and determination." (14)

Jo's opposition to marriage is indicated further when her sister Meg is about to marry. She believes that by marrying, Meg is surrendering to a life of unhappiness and she will not be able to pursue her dream of becoming an actress which is true, and that marriage or love affairs can cause hardships. Meg chooses to fulfil the role of a traditional nineteenth-century young woman by accepting to marry and live a domestic

life. At the beginning of the novel, Meg is portrayed as a vain character, she likes to be admired and complimented by others as she tells her mother, “It is nice to be praised and admired, and I can’t help saying I like it.” (96). Alongside her dream of becoming an actress, she dreams of marrying a wealthy man and being the mistress of her house. As she says, “I should like a lovely house, full of all sorts of luxurious things – nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money. I am to be mistress of it, and manage it as I like, with plenty of servants, so I never need work a bit”. (138).

Meg dreams of living a luxurious life, she dislikes her family’s poverty and does not want to work as a governess but rather to be rich. According to Smith, “Within the world of *Little Women*, Alcott equips readers with the prescribed notions of femininity within Meg March, Jo’s eldest sister, who also provides Jo with a glimpse into her future if she concedes to a traditional female role. “(2). From the very first pages of the story, it is evident that Meg despises being poor and is determined to become wealthy and a lady of social standing. It is the very first thing she says in the story, and that being impoverished is "so dreadful!" (Alcott 3) Meg's biggest problems are summed up in these phrases throughout the story. This is, of course, until she arrives at the Moffat's, who is a wealthy upper-class family, for a week of parties and the chance to enhance her social graces. But she comes to realize the quality of her life despite being poor and she starts her process toward self-realization and maturity.

It is shown later in the novel that Meg’s dream of marrying a rich man and becoming wealthy remains a “castle in the air” (138) when she decides to marry a poor man, Mr. Brooke, but she shows self-growth and maturity when she decides to marry for love rather than for money and rank. As she tells Aunt March, “I shall marry whom I please, and you can leave your money to anyone you like.” (219). Therefore, her ability to choose a husband freely and argue her right of choice is shown as a sort of self-liberation from the society, and reveals her progress into a more autonomous character, by knowing what she wants and behaving according to it, “So long as a person’s choices and actions reflect and issue from the self-reflections on her deeper wants and values that she undertakes from her overall perspective at some level of thought, they have at least a minimal degree of autonomy” (Friedman 8). Meg’s understanding of what is more important in life is the development that her character

goes through, Meg dismisses her earlier goal of wealth and status for “a blissful dream, lifted far above such common things as bread and butter.” (222).

Throughout the story, Meg learns to leave her false pride after she experiences the emptiness and shallowness of the luxurious life after the Moffat’s party. And she starts to value the simple life she lives. Apart from that Meg is presented as a passive character who accepts her traditional domestic role rather than fighting for her freedom. Bender states that “it seems unlikely that Alcott held such a negative view of women who pursued a domestic lifestyle. Alcott addresses the fact that this lifestyle could have negative results” (147). Nevertheless, Meg becomes more mature in valuing herself and her simple happy life. Therefore, she shows self-development and awareness. But Jo, with her belief that there is nothing more important to a woman than achieving her ambitions, and no matter what, a woman should not give up her dreams to marry, is not able to accept the fact that her sister chooses marriage over liberty. This belief indicates how Jo's ideas are ahead of her time and reflects liberal ideals.

Amy, the youngest sister is presented as the prettier among her sisters and the one who displays ladylike behaviours the most. Therefore, she is shown as the opposite of Jo, her opposition to Jo arises from Jo’s resistance to social norms of femininity and her rejection to be conventional, while Amy shows great conformity to display feminine traits. Throughout the first part of the novel, Amy is presented as the selfish and spoiled daughter who is very pretentious, her main concern is her beauty and her aim to join the upper-class society, just like Meg, she is determined to find a wealthy husband. But, like Jo, she has an ambition of becoming a famous artist, and she travels abroad in order to develop her talent. According to Meghan Lydon and Emily Von Kohorn, “while Meg and Beth conform to society’s expectations of the role that women should play, Amy and Jo initially attempt to break free from these constraints and nurture their individuality.” (13).

Nevertheless, as the story progresses and Amy grows up, her beliefs alter as she comes to cherish and value the family and true love over money and rank, and to focus on achieving her goal rather than searching for a rich husband when she turns down the proposal of a rich suitor. Amy learns to correct her arrogant behaviours and false pride and becomes humbler and adopts modest manners. Therefore, she refutes the idea that in order to attain social significance, a woman should seize the wealth of

a man. Amy's character shows substantial improvement throughout the novel, and she grows up to be a fine lady by the end of the novel. Though she as well prefers marriage over freedom, but in her marriage to Laurie, they are portrayed as equal to one another. May argues that the March sister, besides Beth, are "knowing what they do about their world, they are actively involved in determining their fates." (322). Furthermore, Amy's character highlights the difficulties associated with attempting to advance in the society's social hierarchy and reveals that although Amy wishes to develop her abilities, she prioritizes marriage above the profession.

Moreover, despite the many conventional characteristics of Amy's personality, throughout the entire story, she is portrayed as a woman who knows what she wants in life, and she is determined and focused on achieving what she aspires to. This indicates that Amy is an autonomous character, she is independent in making her own decisions and ideas despite her submission to her society's convictions. As Friedman states, "self-determination, or autonomy, occurs so long as a whole self, as someone with a distinctive particular identity as the self she is, plays a role in partly determining her behaviour." (8). By playing a major part in determining her choices and behaviours, Amy is reflecting autonomous ideas which help shape her independent character. Because "When she chooses or acts in accord with wants or desires that she has self-reflectively endorsed, and her endorsement is somehow part because of her behaviour, then, according to this familiar generic account, she is behaving autonomously." (Friedman 5).

Another character who is portrayed as the traditional nineteenth-century woman is Beth. Beth is presented as more passive than Meg, she does nothing besides being at home, helping their maid with the housework, she does not even have dreams or aspires for anything in life rather than being professional in playing the piano. Beth is an unbelievably domestic character, she has docile manners, and has no flaws rather than being shy. Her ultimate dream is "to stay at home safe with father and mother, and help take care of the family," (138). Furthermore, later in the novel, Beth dies because of an illness, and her death symbolizes how weak girls like her, are unable to survive in the world that Jo aspires to concur. Beth's character embodies the perfect woman of the nineteenth century, who is pleased to remain at home and serve others. Beth has often been referred to as a flat character. Her character remains unchanged, and her only desire is to be fair, lovely, and pleasing. As with many other women of

her day, Beth's commitment to domestic life seems to have contributed to her end. As Bender states, "Alcott uses Beth's death to symbolize the death of the ideal woman. In doing so, Alcott is challenging the idea that such a role is the only acceptable female lifestyle." (141)

Thereby, Meg's character represents the challenges that arise when a woman marries into poverty and the implications for her role as a wife and mother. In contrast to her sisters, Beth's portrayal demonstrates the importance of remaining in one's childhood home rather than attempting to participate in society as an adult. Whereas Jo and Amy are more rebellious or ambitious by nature and seek self-government, Meg and Beth appear to be more restrained and unmotivated to become independent women. Rather than that, they want to live in harmony with their family. With contemporary feminist ideas in mind, it becomes evident that the rebellious type, as shown by Jo and Amy, is more appealing to women than the restrained kind, as exemplified by Meg and Beth. However, it can be said that by portraying four distinct types, Lydon and Von Kohorn states:

Throughout the four different sisters, Alcott explores four possible ways to deal with being a woman bound by the constraints of nineteenth-century social expectations: marry young and create a new family, as Meg does; be subservient and dutiful to one's parents and immediate family, as Beth is; focus on one's art, pleasure, and person, as Amy does at first; or struggle to live both dutiful family life and meaningful professional life, as Jo does. (13)

Jo, unlike her sisters, is shown as living by her own will, she shows contradictory personality traits over the stereotypes that have been imposed on women in the nineteenth century which block them from living independently and becoming successful in the public sphere. Therefore, Jo March emphasizes the importance of freedom and equality by challenging society and by gaining recognition for her hard work, which she deserves throughout the novel. Thus, Jo shows the values of liberal feminism through her character several times in the novel which includes "a great deal of emphasis on women's value as individuals." (Wendell 77)

At the time of the novel, women have been assumed to be engaged in the domestic spheres only and not attempt to interfere in the public sphere or the men's world, because it is considered inappropriate for a lady to do so. Young women are expected to stay in their homes, waiting for the perfect husband and learning all the skills that prepare them to be good wives. In the novel, Alcott, through the character of Jo indicates that a woman is not obliged to follow her society's expectations and

that she can live freely and be independent and successful. As Smith states, “Jo March represents girls and women who refuse to adhere to the restraining gender standards forced upon women and who vow to deliver themselves from tragic fates of submission or destitution.” (13). Jo refuses to follow society's common rules and decides to live her life by her own rules. She proves that she can do everything a man can do despite being single and alone.

Therefore, she is a liberal in the sense that she chooses freely to be independent and makes her dream a reality, and that she can participate in the public sphere alongside men. Additionally, the 19th century has witnessed the appearance of an enormous number of prolific writers, among them there have been female writers, but they have been a minority and have faced many obstacles and difficulties because writing as a profession for a woman is not accepted by society. Therefore, in the novel, Jo is portrayed as a woman who struggles to take her place in the men's domain. According to Smith, “Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* offers a thoughtful inspection of the female struggle to redefine womanhood and gain financial independence in a world of men.” (1) Furthermore, the novel also depicts how Jo grows into a more rational woman, she speaks for herself more freely on various occasions and with different people. Therefore, her confidence and determination to be recognized as a female author shows the liberal values in her personality and how she thinks autonomously without fearing her society’s reaction. According to Friedman,

It is necessary only that selves emerge somehow with beliefs, desires, values, and so on that constitute their perspectives as the distinctive persons they are, and from which they can reflect on and evaluate particular wants and concerns they find themselves to have. A person is autonomous with respect to what she does so long as her doings reflect and stem from what she reaffirms self-reflectively as important to her. (13)

Jo believes that men and women are equals regardless the society's norms and limitations towards women that prevent them from having dreams and pursuing them. Jo believes that she has the right to have an equal opportunity to be successful as men are in the public spheres, which she shows throughout the novel by being ambitious and strong-willed, and that it will not affect her femininity, or make her less of a woman. As Smith states, "Alcott's Jo broadens the meaning of femininity and encourages a more diverse definition of what it means to be a woman. Through this newfound womanhood, Jo finds the freedom, independence, and success that is barred

to the conventional woman."(2). Furthermore, Jo as a grown-up woman realizes that being a woman is not an obstacle to a life full of adventures and freedom, which contradicts her earlier opinions and ideas about her gender, therefore, by altering her ideas she displays a great maturity. She also acknowledges the idea that marriage is not the end for an independent and determined woman, and that she can manage both family life and her career. Therefore, "it seems that Louisa May Alcott intends to grant Jo the perfect blend of maintaining her true self but also balancing that with femininity." (Bender 151)

As the story depicts, Jo through the first half of the novel constantly expresses her discontentment with the idea of marriage, but as she grows up, she becomes more convinced with the fact that if she is independent and successful, she can be an equal to her husband. Therefore, as the story folds, Jo decides to accept professor Bhaer's proposal, who is a tutor at the place where she works as a teacher, and a good and supportive friend. Jo's marriage happens after she becomes a rational and mature woman; she comes to realize the fact that she does not need to reject her femininity in order to be independent and successful in the public sphere, and after being personally and financially independent. Therefore, her marriage is seen as an act done by a rational person, based on genuine feelings and companionship not merely as a social and economic duty or to fulfil a necessity. Furthermore, what conveys this idea is the fact that professor Bhaer is not a rich man, he respects her passion for writing, her ambition for it, and her desire to work; he encourages her to write better and "help her in many ways" (339). Furthermore, he helps Jo and stands by her side to open and run her school. Therefore, the equality between them is very evident and admirable. Earlier in the novel, Jo expresses how she likes fictional heroes rather than real men, but after meeting Professor Bhaer, her opinion changes, as the story depicts, "Jo was discovering a live hero, who interested her despite many human imperfections." (332).

Alcott seems to show to the readers that marriage and a career together are possible for a woman, a woman is not forced to choose between being a wife or achieving her ambition, she can choose both and the roles would not interfere with one another. In the end, Jo does not give up her quest for freedom, or compromise her ambition in writing and teaching, she only renounces her solitude by having a life partner. According to Smith, "as a way of pushing the boundaries within the predestined society structure, Alcott allows her Jo character to experience success

before she is married. Jo receives admiration and payment for her writing but must marry please nineteenth-century publishing standards." (15). The general conception about women in the nineteenth century is that women are inferior in many aspects to men. Women are considered less rational, less intelligent, and less responsible which causes their exclusion from public spheres. However, liberal feminism seeks to create a society of equality and freedom. Liberal feminism's main concern, as mentioned earlier, is equality in all spheres for both men and women. Therefore, Louisa May Alcott being an activist in the women's liberation movement conveys the idea that liberal feminist calls for through the character of Jo. Jo's character traits indicate that women are as rational, responsible, and intelligent as men are. she is rational enough to lead her own life, responsible enough to take care of her family financially, and intelligent enough to achieve her dream and success of becoming a writer and having an independent life. Jo embraces all the traits that distinguish her as a liberal and autonomous character. Thus,

Louisa May Alcott's *Jo March* [...], is a model for dismantling the narrow barriers between masculinity and femininity. She teaches young girls- and adult women- that being masculine or valuing masculine traits, such as ambition and financial independence, does not prohibit a woman's potential for happiness and success in life. (Smith 12)

In *Little Women*, Jo at first is a tomboy who is dissatisfied with female standards and traditions. She has a profound fondness for writing and aspires to join men in their public world by selecting a writing career at a period when it is socially unacceptable for women to do so. In the mid-nineteenth century, ideal young women are supposed to be gentle, attractive, docile, sensitive, and demonstrate classy and graceful conduct. By contrast, Jo violates these moral standards; she is just a striving girl who aspires to be a writer and be independent in every aspect. Female independence, self-assertion, ambition, and boldness all contribute to Jo's pursuit of her literary profession. Jo is the girl who begins the novel alone and finishes it in a relationship, and whose pride has been not equal to romance. The one whose determination on being independent and liberal distinguishes her from the others.

Therefore, it can be said that Jo's character represents the aspects of a liberal and autonomous woman in diverse ways. She breaks society's stereotypes by refusing to be a conventional woman and adopting masculine traits that make her an outspoken person who expresses her ideas and thoughts freely and an open-minded who believes in women's ability to be what they aspire to be. According to Friedman, "Each woman

is better able to discern for herself what to do to improve her life the more capable she is of making choices and acting in ways that cohere with her wants and commitments, and the less she is dominated by the conventions and traditions upheld by others with power and influence over her.” (69). Jo is shown, from the beginning of the story as an independent woman, she works to earn her own money, she is ambitious enough to never give up her dream and is courageous, and establishes her place among men in the public sphere. She proves that she is an equal individual and that women, in general, are as rational and capable as men are. and finally, she asserts the idea that a woman can combine feminine and masculine characteristics and it would not affect her personality as a woman or reduce her femininity. Furthermore, being independently successful and happily married. According to Smith:

Alcott's blending of femininity and masculinity within Jo March critiques the stiff gender roles of antebellum America that cultivated acquiescent womanhood and equips Jo with the masculine attributes necessary to redefine womanhood and gain independence, all while mirroring Alcott's journey to success as a female writer in the nineteenth century. (3)

Jo goes through a journey of self-realization as she challenges societal norms. Jo grows from a tomboyish girl to a mature woman, and her path to mental maturity is influenced by both her natural personal features, such as her tomboyish character, desire for independence, and strong mother guidance. While the story begins with a female heroine whose natural and societal influences are in opposition, by the novel's end, she exhibits the potential of harmonic reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the concept of autonomy and several aspects of liberal feminism through Jane Austen's *Emma* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, as explained by Marilyn Friedman, Susan Wendell, and Amy Baehr. In both novels, the writers present unconventional heroines, Emma Woodhouse and Jo March who are considered among the most popular fictional characters in the literary world. Through these characters, Austen and Alcott have been able to challenge the typical gender stereotypes of nineteenth-century Britain and America. The nineteenth-century has been a period of change in different domains, one of them is women's position, but it is not until the late nineteenth century that women begin to be recognized as individuals alongside men, and gain freedom and independence in light of feminism. Nevertheless, this century remains a period of inequality and oppression for women, whose attitudes, thoughts, and actions have been repressed by society.

What is remarkable about the selected novels is that they are written and published earlier than the rise of the feminist movement. Furthermore, Austen and Alcott by presenting independent heroines and calling for equality through their writing, have established their names among the pioneers of feminism. *Emma* is published in 1816, in Britain while *Little Women* is published in 1868 in America. Therefore, the first thing to notice is that the novels have different backgrounds, each novel is set in a different social environment and addresses a different audience, but what links them both is the ideas both of them discuss which are similar in the British society and the American society. Emma and Jo are presented as independent-minded heroines, who express their ideas freely, know what they want and bravely define their position as equal individuals regardless of society's constraints. The only difference is that in the time of Alcott's novel, society begin to be more developed because women's positions begin to change gradually. In Austen's *Emma*, the heroine is a wealthy young woman who is ultimately in charge of her life and possesses many traits that distinguish her as independent and equal. Jo displays the same traits, in Alcott's *Little Women*, and it is noticed that Jo is even more autonomous than Emma in many aspects.

In *Emma*, Jane Austen challenges society's social norms by portraying a young and strong woman who chooses her path in life and precisely determines to whom and when to marry. Emma Woodhouse is placed among Austen's most autonomous

characters. She is independent and self-oriented for many reasons; she is wealthy and lives in an estate where she is in charge of everything, she is responsible for managing the household, she has a powerful personality that influences many people around her, and the most important trait is her refusal to marry because of her belief that marriage will not add to her position or life in general. Emma is represented as a woman with economic power and moral traits, which makes her in every aspect equal to men. Furthermore, the aspects of liberal feminism are detected in the novel through Emma's management and authority of her life and her household. Therefore, by making her heroine the governor of an estate and the only one in charge of her life, Austen is showing liberal ideas in the novel and calling for equality.

In *Little Women*, the heroine is rather younger and poorer than in Emma, Jo March is presented at the beginning of the novel as the girl who is dissatisfied with her gender, to be a woman is the main obstacle in her life. Jo is presented as a free-spirited young woman, she longs for a life full of adventures, but her gender hinders her from living a life like this. She aspires to be a writer, a job available for men only, and to be wealthy to be the one responsible for the family, which is another trait associated with men. Therefore, throughout the first half of the novel, Jo adopts every masculine trait of a character to make her way in the public sphere, but as she grows up, Jo realizes the fact that being a woman is not an obstacle to reaching her goals and that as a woman she can be anything she aims to be and do anything she wants. Therefore, Alcott indicates a crucial idea presented by liberal feminists, which is woman's social, moral, and intellectual equality with their male counterparts; women are as able to work, be successful and lead an independent life as men are.

In addition, Alcott presents her heroine as a woman with an independent mind and soul, who works hard to achieve her dreams and establish her name in society. As a young girl, she dreams of travelling, becoming a known writer, and earning her own money, which she achieves. The novel also presents a journey of the development of three women of the March family, except for Beth, the fourth March sister who dies at an early age, and therefore, her character is not shown as a developing one. Meg and Amy are also important characters in the novel. Even though Meg and Amy are presented as less independent than Jo is, they show a growth of mind and personality throughout the novel, especially Amy, whose growth leads her to have an equal marital life. Moreover, Alcott presents Jo as an outspoken woman, she is never afraid to

express her thoughts or opinions earnestly, another trait that distinguishes her from other girls in the novel and her society in general. Therefore, Jo March is considered a truly autonomous character for she has a dream; she is ambitious about reaching it and works hard towards reaching it. Louisa May Alcott writes to empower young ladies of her time; she works on encouraging women to lead an independent life through her novel. In *Little Women*, Alcott presents a fictional version of herself, through the character of Jo, Alcott allows her readers to discover her personality and her opinions; Jo is, like Alcott, aiming to be free and independent, to have a job, and to lead her own life as Alcott has done, Jo is presented as the master of herself, she has made her path in life and pursued her dream of being a known writer.

To conclude, both Austen and Alcott focus their works on female characters, which, of course, implies that, in terms of the period in which they have lived, they deal with similar subjects, but each represents them from a distinct perspective, their characters are unconventional individuals. Therefore, after applying the theory and thoroughly exploring it in the two texts, it is proven that both Austen's and Alcott's characters represent some values of liberal feminism as autonomous individuals who possess equal positions to men in society. The fact that both Emma and Jo are free-minded and outspoken young women; both possess independent and equal positions like men in the above-mentioned novels.

Furthermore, despite their opposition to marriage at the beginning of the novels, they end up marrying. What is remarkable about the marriage of Jo and Emma is that it happens after the two characters become more mature and ready to share their independence with other people. Mr. Knightly and professor Bhaer are presented as open-minded men who appreciate women's individuality and freedom. Therefore, Jo and Emma have a marriage based on equality and mutual social status. The major difference between Emma and Jo is their financial status, Emma is very wealthy therefore she does not need to work to gain money and be responsible for herself, contrary to Jo. One of Jo's dreams is to work and support her family financially because of their poverty. In both cases, they are not forced to be dependent on men because they are as equal as men are regarding money. In addition, Jo has a dream of becoming a writer while Emma does not. Thereby, Jo's dream enables her to seek an equal social position with men which makes her more liberal and independent than Emma is. Another difference is that Emma has lived alone from an early age, after the

death of her mother and her sister's marriage, therefore, because of her loneliness, she becomes dependent on herself only and learns how to be independent and in charge of her life. Jo, on the other hand, is surrounded by her family and her love for them in some parts motivates her to be independent and in charge of herself and increases her desire to work and gain money. Thereby, it can be concluded that Jo is a more autonomous character and represents liberal values more broadly.



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