

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Background of the study

Studying literary works is not easy for students. It is difficult for them because literary works need a deep thinking to fully understand the message from the writer of literary works to the reader or to combine the important parts in them. The difficulties in literary work sometimes discourage many students to study literature.

Some students also think that studying literary works is not important because it does not support their education but it really needs hard efforts from them. Richard Courtney (1966 : VII) argues the wrong idea by saying that from ancient times until today drama and education have been closely related. By learning literary works, the students do not only improve their vocabulary and grammar but also broaden students' knowledge and outlook and build up their personal and intellectual. Robert (1977 : 2) states, "Literature helps up grow, both personally and intellectually, it provides an objective base for our knowledge and understanding."

It is possible for students to learn another culture from literature because it shows people's attitudes, beliefs and problems. Little (1966 : 2) says, "As the principal element of people's culture, literature contains the record of people's values, their thoughts, their problems and conflict, in short, their way of life."

Student can also understand and take good examples from the way people in other places or different era face and solve their life's problems. Literature is the

representation of human action and experience and literary works reflect the problems of life and also criticize certain social conditions.

The other advantage of studying literature is entertainment. According to Barnet (1963 : 1), "Literature has its element of entertaining display and we expect literature to be in some sense of entertaining display or to afford pleasure." So in writing literary works, of course, the writers have some purposes, and one of the purposes is to create enjoyment to the readers."

All the reasons of studying literary works encourage the writer to do a literary study as the subject matter of her thesis.

In this study, the writer chooses a novel to be analyzed, since among the forms of narrative, the novel has the longest story which has a series of events arranged in time sequence. Little (1966:97) says, "The novel is the longest form of fiction, in which we may find the most extraordinary wide range of writing". In other words, novel with its length makes it possible for the writer herself to develop the elements of the novel that she is interested in. Another reason for choosing novel is from the writer's experience, most of the English department students enjoy reading novel more than other literary works. Kennedy (1983:213) states that among forms of imaginative literature in our language, the novel has been the favorite of both writers and readers for more than two hundred years. Novel also can represent the real life of past or present times through the characters like what is defined in Oxford English Dictionary a novel is a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of the real life of

past or present times portrayed in a plot of more or less complexities.(Hawthorne, 1985:1).

The writer also finds that, the novel tells a long story to be enjoyed for people with leisure time and it is full of details that give a recognizable picture of what life is like in a particular time. The story is the creation of the writer's mind, but it is real in the sense that we find there truths about life from the experiences of the characters.

The author, Louisa May Alcott, is chosen by the writer because she is a well-known American author of children and juvenile fiction. With Harriet Beecher, she is one of the two Victorian women to contribute permanent members to the America literary pantheon. She also writes a slighter work than the masterpiece of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain, but she achieves a similar end in *Little Women*. According to Madeleine Stern as quoted by Ann Douglas (1983: vii), she has recently discovered that Alcott's sensational tales or "thrillers" are stormy, unhappiness, revengeful, and sometimes brilliant narratives where women study men in miniature or at a distance in Alcott's fiction so that they can more comfortably oppose or identify with them where appropriate and necessary. Alcott in her novels does not emphasize on the role of the male characters to protect the development of her female protagonists and also because their presence is not necessary to her profoundly feminist sense of what constitutes a full, diverse fictive world.

From an early age, she publishes sketches, stories, etc. to shoulder her family's financial burden that is caused by her impractical father. She also writes

sensational novels and straight adult novels and is involved in various reform movements including women's suffrage and abolition. She achieves fame and financial security with *Little Women* (1868-1869) which is followed by several other works in the same vein. (Sir Paul Harvey, 1967:15)

According to the writer, Louisa May Alcott is a superior, optimistic, talented and independent feminist novelist who considers women should be independent and creative and can show their self-expression and these qualities could be found in Alcott's main character "Jo March" in *Little Women*. She herself tends to be independent, even from her young age, she has done many jobs such as a dolls' dressmaker, a teacher, a domestic, a potboilers' maker and writers to earn money and made her family comfortable.

A lot of novels are written by Louisa May Alcott but the writer chooses *Little Women* because among the domestic fictions has been written by her, *Little Women* has steadily attracted adults to read and enjoy it in a few decades. Jo also as the main character in *Little Women* has authorial ambitions that represent Alcott's own artistic life. In addition, fame and fortune also come with the publication of *Little Women* in 1868-1869, a domestic novel which is Alcott's rewriting of her own autobiography. Futhermore, the women and girls who dominate *Little Women* are free to express and define "masculine roles" as the provider, like Mrs. March who supplies and handles the family's material goods, the teacher, the writer. Eventually, Alcott's feminine characters can meet men as suitors on their own terms, sure of what they need, not of what society dictates that they want. They have achieved a feminist American dream (Ann Douglas, 1983:

xxii-xxiii). In *Little Women*, Jo March as the main female character represents Alcott's authorial ambitions. She is an independent and unconventional girl who aspires to be a famous writer. She has strong character that is very different from women at that time. This reason encourages the writer to analyze the main character "Jo March" who reflects feminine strength and independence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study is intended to analyze and give the description of Jo March's character which reveals the idea of feminine strength and independence. Therefore, the writer will answer the following questions. The writer would also like to analyze other characters' opinions about Jo March's feminine strength and independence.

1. How does Jo March's character reveal the idea of feminine strength and independence?
2. What do other characters think about Jo March's feminine strength and independence ?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement of the problem, this study aims to find out Jo March's character that reveals the idea of feminine strength and independence and what other characters think about Jo March's feminine strength and independence.

The writer of this thesis tries to discuss as clearly as possible the feminine strength and independence in *Little Women*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Actually, every human being in this world has the same rights, but people have been used to treating women unfairly. Thus, there are many women who want to be equal with men, for instance in careers or in the household. Therefore, by analyzing the novel, the writer of this thesis hopes that through this study, people will learn more about feminism matters and its progress and give some insights of feminism.

The writer also hopes to erase the assumption of regarding women as weak creatures because if they get the same chance, they can have the same position as men. Besides that, the writer also wants to introduce Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* as one of the most popular juvenile books ever written which is based on the author's childhood home. The story concerns the daily lives of four girls, their aspiration, how they show their self-expression and self-realization. Jo March is the girl who mostly shows her strong and independent character. Moreover, the writer also hopes that this thesis will give others more understanding to avoid misassumption toward feminism.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The writer of this thesis limits her discussion merely to the main character "Jo March" and her characters which show feminine strength in terms of moral and/or mental, not physical one, and independence. The writer would also like to discuss other characters: Meg, Beth, Amy, Mrs. and Mr. March, Laurie and Mr. Laurence. The reason why the writer wants to discuss Jo March because she shows

her strong and independent character which is rarely owned by other girls at that time.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misinterpretation in understanding this thesis writing, the writer would like to define some key terms that are related to this study:

1. A novel is a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times portrayed in a plot of more or less complexities (Jeremy Hawthorne, 1985:1).
2. A character is an extended verbal representation of human being, the inner self that determines thought, speech and behavior (Roberts and Jacobs, 1989:143).
3. Feminine is having qualities regarded as characteristic of women and girls; as gentleness, weakness, delicacy, modesty (Webster's New World Dictionary of American Language, 1957: 534).
4. Strength is the quality of being physically, mentally, or morally strong; powerful, force; vigorous (The Holt Basic Dictionary of American English, 1966:710).
5. Independence is the state or quality of being independent; freedom from the influence, control or determination of another or others (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1957:741).

1.7 Organization of the Study

This thesis starts with Chapter I Introduction which consists of Background of the study, Statement of the problem, Objectives of the study, Significance of the

study, Limitation of the study, and Organization of the study. In Chapter II, the writer reviews some related literature which can support and help the writer to do the analysis. In Chapter III, the writer deals with the methodology of the study and she presents her interpretation of the analysis in Chapter IV. Finally, the writer concludes his analysis and gives suggestions in the last chapter, i.e. Chapter V.