

وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي

MINISTÈRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

UNIVERSITÉ MOULOUD MAMMERI DE TIZI-OUZOU

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES ET DES LANGUES

DÉPARTEMENT D'ANGLAIS



جامعة مولود معمري تيزي-وزو

كلية الآداب و اللغات

قسم الإنجليزية

Domaine: Lettres et Langues Etrangères

Filière: Langues Anglaise

Spécialité: Littérature et Approche Interdisciplinaire

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillement of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master in English**

Title

**Gender and Feminist Issues in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mr . Harrison's
Confessions (1851), and Louiza May Alcott's Little Women (1868)**

Presented by:

- Messad Taous

-Djouder Sadia

Supervised by:

Dr: KHELIFA Arezki

Board of examiners:

Chair : MS. BENSABI FATIHA MMA. UMMTO :

Examiner : Mr. Cherifi Ahcene MAA. UMMTO :

Supervisor : Dr. Khelifa Arezki, MCA, UMMTO.

N° série :.....

N° d'ordre :.....

Academic year : 2020/2021

Laboratoire de domiciliation du Master : Etude des Langues et Cultures Etrangères

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor Dr. Arezki KHELIFA for his guidance, advice and encouragement throughout the fulfillment of this modest work.

We are profoundly thankful to the panel of examiners for accepting to assess and evaluate our dissertation.

We also owe special thanks to all the teachers of the Department of English for their support and generosity.

I dedicate this work to my dearest mom Cherek Ouiza who I love so much; I
thank her for
her love, kindness and courage she gives me every day, also to my beloved
father Achour for his limitless support.

To my sisters Ouardia and Nadia for their precious help.
To my brothers Merzok, Chabane, Lounis.

To all my friends and those who love me.

Sadia

I would like to dedicate this work to my dear husband Yazid, to my dear parents
and to my dear friend Kahina.

Taous

Contents

Acknowledgments	I
Dedications.....	II
Contents.....	III
Abstract	IV
Introduction	1
Review of literature	2
Issue and Working Hypotheses	5
Endnotes:	6
Methods and Materials	7
Method	7
Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist Theory: The Second Sex.....	7
The Biographies of the Authors	9
Elizabeth Gaskell's Biography.....	9
Louisa May Alcott's Biography.....	10
Materials	10
Summary of Mr. Harrison's Confessions.....	11
Summary of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women.....	11
Historical Background.....	12
End-Notes	13
Results	15
Discussion	17
Chapter One: Masculine Manifold Oppression in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mr. Harrison's Confessions and Louisa May Alcott's Little Women	17
End-Notes	26
Chapter Two: Economic Independence toward Transcendence in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mr. Harrison's Confessions and Louisa May Alcott's Little Women	27
End-Notes	35
Chapter Three: Feminine Myths and Mothering as Hindrances in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mr. Harrison's Confessions and Louisa May Alcott's Little Women	37
End-Notes	46
General Conclusion	47
Bibliography	48

Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine gender roles and feminine issues in both narratives Mr. Harrison's Confessions of Elisabeth Gaskell and Louisa May Alcott Little Women. The purpose of this dissertation is to show women's hard living conditions and oppression in British and American patriarchal society. This was realised by applying, some concepts from Simone de Beauvoir's work as it is introduced in The Second Sex (1949). Among these concepts: Domesticity, Work, Transcendence and Mothering. In fact, the interest of this theory lies in the fact that it helped us to fulfill our need to better understand women's issue. It also helped us to show their fights and struggles for the sameness and liberation from the patriarchal oppressive values and norms. This dissertation has been divided into three major sections: General Introduction, Discussion and General Conclusion. Its discussion section contains three chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Masculine Manifold oppression in both novels" we have put emphasis on the analysis of the oppressed female characters of each novel. In Mr. Harrison's Confessions it has analyzed the dominant masculine figures and the way of treating women. In Little Women it has analysed Beth's character that is confined to the domestic sphere following the duties imposed by patriarchal society. In the second chapter "Economic Independence toward Transcendence", we have studied in both novels the feminine attempts to transcend the norms and how to be economically independent. As to the third chapter whose title is "Feminine Myths and Mothering as Hindrances" it discusses the obstacles that women face and myths that are invented by men to relegate women to the second position. We have analysed the two novels and reached the conclusion that both Gaskell and Alcott defend strongly women's rights in their works; they made them struggle and act against the oppression of the patriarchal society.

General Introduction

The nineteenth century was characterised by many changes in society: British society saw many changes in economy, Therefore, England attested many changes especially in the means of transportation such as: the shipbuilding, telegraph, the expansion of the railway, as a result, all these inventions and technologies contributed to the transition from a rural society to an urban society, this led to the emergence of an industrial England during the Victorian era . Indeed, agriculture was replaced by industry as the basis of the British economy. Status of women, during the Victorian era women had few rights and they were domestic who were supposed to do only the home tasks, bringing children and taking care of their husbands. literature which saw important changes in the life style of England by discussing different aspects of life. every writer represents his or her time period through their writings as it is the case here with Elizabeth Gaskell and Louisa May Alcott, who are regarded as ones of the major literary figures of the nineteenth century, their books were the mirror picture of reality of that time¹, therefore their novels are close portrayals of to their personal experiences.

At that time women suffered from masculine oppression. Men were identified as being active, moral and rational. Whereas, women were viewed as being naturally inferior to men, subordinate, immoral and irrational. Women were under the male domination, they are concerned with domestic tasks; Women are supposed to run the household as to take care of their children and their husband's needs. In this sense Rousseau affirms:" women are naturally subordinate to men"²; men have always been recognised to be the representatives of their family, they have the right to exercise and hold authority over their wives.

These masculine advantages have given rise to the awareness of the feminist consciousness to react toward men's domination to embitter their status. A great number of writers have denounced the patriarchal societies; they started to response for the cruel critics

toward women. One of the first authors to do this in England was «Mary Wollstonecraft in her famous essay entitled a” Vindication of the Rights of Woman”.³

After a long fight, women have succeeded to improve their status and reach their goals, and having better opportunities. In this research, we will seek to comprehend on woman’s issue, how they succeeded to regain and acquire their position similar to that of man by being economically independent and being no longer dependent to man.

In this work, we will deal with gender and feminist issues in both Elisabeth Gaskell’s *Mr. Harrison’s Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* relying on Simon de Beauvoir’s feminist theory The Second Sex. We will attempt to examine the characters mainly the female ones and to follow the process in which they are seeking for independence and say how it may interact with de Beauvoir’s text.

Review of Literature

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), a much ignored Victorian woman novelist, has been revisited with new visions in the recent years bringing forth the feminist, political and social significance of her writings. In her novels, Gaskell imparts important roles to women characters in the public sphere and social production refuting the traditional Victorian domestic ideology.⁴

“His writings belong to the Victorian age when feminism had not even taken the shape of a theory. Indeed the term feminism came into existence “In the years immediately preceding WWI.”⁵ Unfortunately Gaskell is considered as a minor woman writer of Victorian age and has been ignored by the feminists, “Of all the enormous output of feminist literary criticism during the last fifteen years, none has been concerned to any major extent with Elizabeth Gaskell.”⁶

Gaskell's works are considered comparably less significant but a more conscious and unprejudiced study of Gaskell's writings reveals the vigorous feminist side of her writings. The present research will attempt to reveal that her representation of complex and dynamic women characters foreshadows a feminist age of self-discovery with a new dimension of socialist feminism of 1960s and 1980s.

Gaskell writings witnessed a society which was marked by tremendous socio-economic upheavals by virtue of the Industrial Revolution. This revolution brought to the fore and even exacerbated two basic divisions of the society: class division and gender division. "The society in which Gaskell lived and wrote was intersected horizontally by class and vertically by gender divisions."⁷ This means that, the society in which Elizabeth Gaskell has lived was divided into two spheres, in one hand the one that is related to class division including: the upper class, the working class and the lower class, indeed, in the other hand there was the gender division that includes man who presented the self and the power, and women who presented the other and being the second sex!. Gaskell's novels address both phenomena in her social quest by intrinsically relating the one with the other.

Little women received basically negative critics since her first publication .Literary critics did not accept Alcotts work as classic text to generation of readers with themes and insight valuable.

As Denniston claims that Alcott's books are not sentimental rubbish, but they are not classic either , in the sense that they have a relevance outside their time and place, a universal message to communicate.⁸

A British novelist writing in the times literary supplement reproved "there are some books which are not very big ones but manage to acquire an immortal fate such a book is

Little Women it is difficult to place this book as a work of art; yet there are few in successive generations who do not read it with something like enjoyment.⁹

Recent critics changed their vision toward Alcott's work. Neglected for over a century, Alcott has been rediscovered by both critics and the public. For his part, Geraldine Brooks declares that Alcott used his work as a guide or a platform to a controversial themes, as well as feminism. Geraldine declares that, "Louisa really was an early feminist. It's underappreciated how she was able to usher success to make her really a megaphone for feminist issues."¹⁰

Delphine Laire attests "I became fascinated by these little women to use Simone de Beauvoir's words, "There was one book in which I believed I had caught a glimpse of my future self I was particularly intrigued with Amy, for I strongly recognized myself in her".¹¹

Nina Auerbach, described Little Women as novel about the self sustaining communities of women.¹²

As such, according to Elaine Showalter, "reading this novel is "to engage with temporary ideas about female authority, critical institutions and the American literary canon, as well as with the nineteenth century ideas of relationship between patriarchal culture and women culture".¹³

Issue and working hypotheses

So many studies are carried out on Elisabeth Gaskell and Louisa May Alcott works from different perspective. It appears from the review of literature that the two works have never been analysed together; no research has involved the two novels.

This dissertation claims to show how women are seen in the two narratives during the reconstruction and Victorian Era, how they struggle to alter man's opinion and break the norms. Louisa May Alcott and Elisabeth Gaskell were not a supporters of domesticity; therefore they struggle to defend women through their writing and showed combats by opposing the idea of male superiority. This is what is shown through the female character mainly Jo March in *Little Women*, who defies the norms and values, and also Miss Thomkinson in *Mr. Harrisons Confession* who attempts to impose herself in a patriarchal society.

The general introduction gives insight about the main claim of this dissertation, which consists of gender roles and women issue in these selected works, it consists also of a summary of de Beauvoir's theory about feminism as it is introduced in her book the second sex.(1949), and includes the summaries of Little Women and Mr.Harrisons Confession. The discussion section is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of examining women in a patriarchal society; how they were oppressed by the opposite sex, and being under man's authority. This is notably shown through Beth's character in little women and miss in Mr. Harrison's Confession, who accepts to be confined in the house .The second chapter consists of examining the way women transcend the norms of a patriarchal society, and attempt to break free from the confinement and domesticity .This is mainly shown through Jo's character, who fights against the domestication of women .As for the third chapter, its aim at seeking to determine myth and false stories that that relegate women to be the second sex.

End Notes

- ¹Bedrani, Ghalia."The Representation of the Other (The Poor and Women) in Elisabeth Gaskell's North and South."Diss.Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi- Ouzou, 2010-2011, P 18.
- ² Khelifa Arezki Katia Mahmoudi, "American Women of The Colonial Period and the nineteenth Century city :In Judith Sargent Murray's On the Equality of sexes, Edith Wharton's Roman Fever and Hamlin Garland's Mrs.Ripley's Trip", 2:2013,171-182.
- ³ De Beauvoir, Simone.(1949), *The Second Sex*, New York :Random House, Inc.2009,P172.
- ⁴ Ramteke, Megha."An interaction between Gender and Class in Elisabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton: A Socialist Feminist Study». An International journal in English vol2, Issue4, p
- ⁵ Ibid.,
- ⁶ Ibid.,
- ⁷ Ibid.,
- ⁸ Lyon,Clark Beverly."The after Life of Women"John Hopkins University Press, 2014,p105
- ⁹ <https://en.Wikipedia.Org>.
- ¹⁰ Bender, Clare.Gender stereotyping in Little Women"let Us Be Elegant or Die!"Diss.University of Northernwestern-st.Paul, 2017, p150.
- ¹¹ Laire, Delphine, Little Women, a Feminist Study
- ¹² Nina, Auerbach."An Idea in Fiction"Harvard University Press
- ¹³ <https://en.Wikipedia.Org>.

Methods and materials

1. Methods

This part of the dissertation sheds light on a theory relied on our study. We borrowed some concepts which are relevant to our work from Simon de Beauvoir's theory **The Second Sex.**

Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist Theory: The Second Sex

Simone de Beauvoir is a French writer and philosopher of the twentieth century. De Beauvoir wrote many books, novels, plays and short stories. "She is the woman that first inspired and shaped the women's liberation movement in Western Europe"¹⁴. The most part of de Beauvoir's writing focus on women struggle in which the male is the dominant. The Second Sex (1949) is considered as one of the most important works of feminism. In her book de Beauvoir has dealt with two important concepts. The first one is that a woman has always occupied a second role being relegated to the position of the other, remained inessential and incidental whereas man is presented as the most essential being and occupies the role of the self. The second concept is that "femininity is an artificial posture."¹⁵

Both De Beauvoir's ideas and concepts were influenced by the French existentialist, philosopher and novelist John Paul Sartre and the feminist theorist Virginia Woolf. "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"¹⁶ is de Beauvoir's most famous statement, this means that "femininity is not derived from any innate qualities of women as existents, but is rather as a result of a situation fostered by society"¹⁷ De Beauvoir says, "Être femme, ce n'est pas une donnée naturel c'est le résultat d'une histoire."¹⁸

In her book, de Beauvoir explores many themes from different perspectives. She starts by giving an explanation of the ovum and the sperm and the link between the two, explaining the relation that de Beauvoir attributes to man and woman in the term of re-production. De Beauvoir attests that the fact of biology should not be examined only from the values and tradition, but in the light of economic, psychological and social perspective. From what is said

above, Beauvoir affirms that one of the main problems of women is motherhood. She says “One of the basic problems of women, as has been seen, is reconciling the reproductive role and productive work, has been consigned to domestic labour”¹⁹. De Beauvoir here describes women’s problems “motherhood” that had always given opportunity to man to consign women in the domestic sphere.

De Beauvoir has dealt also with the theme of marriage where she expresses her refusal and negative thought toward marriage. In an interview De Beauvoir says, “Je n’ai voulu ni me marier, ni avoir d’enfants, je ne voulais pas mener une vie d’intérieure ce qui est la chose la plus écrasante dans la condition féminine. J’avais échappé aux servitudes de la condition féminine.”²⁰ De Beauvoir declares openly that a married woman is bound to the house; she is restricted to the domestic sphere. She says, “There is no guarantee of happiness it is that it mutilates her, it dooms her to repetition and routine.”²¹

De Beauvoir has spoken about transcendence and immanence. She attributes the concept of transcendence to man, while immanence is associated with woman. She defines transcendence as “active, creative, projecting forward into the future and immanence as passive, internal, and centred on the maintenance of the species. Social norms grant men transcendence and place women in positions of constant immanence.”²²

As far as the economic level is concerned, de Beauvoir has spoken about how a woman can achieve success through economic independence so that she can emerge into the condition of transcendence, her situation will be improved by her economic condition. She says “only in work can she achieve autonomy.”²³ This means that women can enhance their living and improve their situation by working.

At the mythical level, de Beauvoir makes historical account about male invention of myths about women; she says: “These goddesses are only myths and projection of man’s mind.”²⁴ De Beauvoir discusses the eternal feminine in a chapter entitled ‘Myth and Reality’

which de Beauvoir hopes to destroy. “This myth which made woman think that they should be altruistic or considering themselves as the absolute other”²⁵. She also discusses another myth which is feminine mystery which allows man not to understand woman.

The Biographies of the Authors

Elizabeth Gaskell's Biography

Elizabeth Gaskell or also known as Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson or as simply Mrs Gaskell, was born in Chelsea, London on 29 September 1810.²⁶ She was the daughter to two devout Unitarians, William Stevenson and Elizabeth Holland. After her mother's death in 1811, she was brought up by her aunt Hannah Lumb in Knutsford, Cheshire. In 1832, she married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister and later a professor of history, literature and logic. Both were interested in new scientific ideas and literature.²⁷ The couple settled in Manchester.

Elizabeth Gaskell is a novelist, biographer and short story writer. She is best-known as the author of *Cranford* and *North and South*, and the biographer of her friend Charlotte Brontë. Her greatest books were written in reaction to the industrialisation of Manchester, where she lived for much of her life. ‘I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want’, she wrote in the preface to *Mary Barton*.²⁸

Elizabeth Gaskell was devastated by the death of her infant son in 1845 of scarlet fever, this tragedy was the catalyst for Gaskell's first novel *Mary Barton* published anonymously in 1848, won praise from Charles Dickens, who called her his ‘dear Scheherazade’ and invited her to contribute to his journals. In January 1853, she published the controversial *Ruth Cranford*, and in 1855, she published *North and South*.²⁹

Gaskell met Charlotte Brontë while on holiday near Windermere. They became close friends through their letters to one another. After Charlotte's death in 1855, Gaskell wrote a

carefully researched and protective biography of her. She was still working on *Wives and Daughters*, a humorous coming-of-age tale, when she died suddenly of a heart attack on 12 November 1865.³⁰

Louiza May Alcott's Biography

Louisa May Alcott is an American novelist, short story writer and poet who was born on November 29, 1832, in Germantown Pennsylvania.³¹ Alcott lived with her family and remained unmarried throughout her life. She faced financial difficulties which her family suffered from. Alcott received education by her father, Amos Bronson, who was an autodidact. She worked to support her family; she also sought an outlet in writing using the pen name A.M. Barnard, under which she published novels for young adults. *Little Women* is one of Alcott's best known published in 1868 which is an autobiography of her childhood. The great success of *Little Women* gave Alcott financial independence and created a demand for more books.³²

Materials

a- Summary of *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*

Mr Harrison's Confessions is a novella written by Elizabeth Gaskell about the life of a country doctor in a small provincial town of England, a story about the way the protagonist met his wife. The protagonist is a young man newly graduated in medicine answered to the proposition of his father's cousin Mr. Morgan to work alongside with him as well as to take all his clientele progressively.

At his arrival to Duncombe, Mr. Harrison must do his proofs, but as a new masculine specimen, he is seen by the ladies of that town as a huge event because he is a bachelor. In fact, widows and old women invite him for tea and lunch very often. He experiences various embarrassing situations with them.

But at last he falls in love with Mrs. Rose, the only woman, who has known how to fascinate the handsome young man Harrison.

b- Summary of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1869) centers around the family March. The story opens in Concord, Massachusetts, with the four sisters, describing their lives as the girls maturing from teenagers into little women beside their mother Marmee. The story tells how the four sisters face difficulties in the absence of their father. They suffer from financial difficulties, so the March sisters must confront, struggle and help each other.

The girls have various adventures, Boyish Joe assists her aged great aunt March; Joe is a tomboy and a writer with fierce temper. Meg has to work in order to support the family; she teaches four children of a nearby family; she is beautiful and traditional. Beth is a peacemaker and a pianist; she contracts scarlet fever. Amy is still at school. Their mother Marmee leads the family quietly; she is the moral role model for her girls .she counsels them through all of their problems and works hard, but happily while her husband is at war.

In *Little Women*, the March family serves as an example of hard working of a reformed, egalitarian family in which the sisters exercise self reliance, employ their non-domestic talents, and still maintain femininity.

Historical Background

The Victorian Era of British history was the period of Queen Victoria's reign from 20 June 1837 until her death on 22 January 1901. It was a long period of peace, prosperity, progress and great social changes for Britain. This age saw the birth and the spread of political movement, most notably socialism, liberalism and organised feminism.

During the 1800s the industrial revolution spread throughout Britain, it witnessed changes, so from a rural society to an urban one, indeed, most people were farmers and rural craftsmen, and then with this industrial revolution they became workers in factories, since Britain became industrialised, thus, a great number of factories had been established leading to huge opportunities for work, and this also resulted in the emergence of various towns. Britain during this period had noticed the birth of many scientific inventions including : the telephone, the radio, railways were constructed which replaced the traditional horse-drawn carriages as a mode of transport, the sewing machines, the steamship were all invented during the Victorian era and which proved the demise of the old rural England.

On the other hand, the family during the Victorian age was a patriarchal unit, the man represented the authority and the woman took the education of children as her main role as well as the household. The Victorian era was an era of men dominance, whereas women had not equal rights as men had in the British society. They did not have the same rights or the same opportunities that were presented to men. Women of Victorian England were believed to be inferior to men; they were subjected to their men's authority in many ways and their legal status was similar to that of children. Their fathers, husbands or other male relatives were their legal representatives and it was men who were in charge of women's property for almost the nineteenth century³³ , Society did not give the right for education to women as well as they had limited job opportunities. They were expected to be housekeepers or housewives. The role of women at that time was to take care of their children and their husbands. Women

could not vote and they could not hold professional jobs apart from teachers or domestic servants, factory workers or agricultural labors³⁴

It was the Victorian ideology of “separate spheres” according to which women belong to the ‘domestic sphere’ and men to the ‘public sphere’, and that those two were never to be confused. Therefore, Victorian ideology always imposed the idea that women must have knowledge about art, music and language to be angels of the houses; they had to learn things such as drawing, singing and dancing. In addition, the highest goal for a woman is to become a wife and a mother³⁵

At last, the Victorian era was a period of dramatic change that brought England to its highest peak of development and prosperity.

End Notes

¹⁴.Trevalyne,Rebecca.”Journal of International Womens Studies”The Legacy of Simon De Beauvoir on Modern French Visual Art 14,No,4(2013):p.6.

¹⁵. Addad, Lamia.”From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), Desire under The Elms (1924) and Willa Cather’s The Bohemian Girl(1912)”.Diss.Univeversity of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, 2018 , p.6

¹⁶.De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *the Second Sex*, New York: Random House, Inc.2009, p.330.

¹⁷.Addad, Lamia.”From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), Desire under The Elms (1924) and Willa Cather’s The Bohemian Girl(1912)”.

¹⁸. Drucker, Michel.”Qui était Simone de Beauvoir?”1975. You Tube Video, 27:45.Posted [January2018] .Http://www.ina.Fr.

¹⁹. De Beauvoir, Simon, *The Second Sex*, p168.

²⁰. Drucker, Michel. « Qui était Simone de Beauvoir3 ?1975.You Tube Video, 27 :45.Posted [January 2018] .Http://www.ina.Fr

²¹. Uhlig, Louise el. “The Institution of Marriage”. Thesis, Roskilde University, 2014, p.

²². Day, Jennifer.”Simone de Beauvoir’s Transcendence and Immanence in the Twenty First Century: The Tension between Career and Motherhood”. Simon Frazer University, British Columbia, p2

²³. Sparknotes.com

²⁴. Addad, Lamia. From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra(1931), Desire under The Elms (1924)and Willa Cather’s The Bohemian Girl(1912), p8

²⁵. Ibid., p39.

²⁶.Https://www.biography.com/writer/Elisabeth Gaskell.

²⁷.ibid

²⁸.Webb, Jean.”Realism,Fantasy and a critique of Nineteenth century society in George Macdonald’s at the Back of the North Wind”Inkling Forever2006

²⁹.Ibid

³⁰.[Https://en.Wikipedia.Org](https://en.Wikipedia.Org).

³¹. [Https://en.Wikipedia.Org](https://en.Wikipedia.Org).

³². [Https://www.biography.com/writer/louisa May Alcott](https://www.biography.com/writer/louisa-May-Alcott).Acess date February 19,2020.

³³.Taouli,Manel."Changing Roles in the Victorian Family in Elisabeth Gaskells North and South"Diss.University of Tlemcen,2016 2017,p.17.

³⁴. Ibid., p18.

³⁵. Ibid., p18.

Results

This master dissertation has focused on gender roles and women's issue in both novels Louisa May Alcott *Little Women* and *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* by Elisabeth Gaskell. Our research work has focused on women's oppression and her fight against man's superiority and transcendence. To achieve our goal, we have borrowed some concepts from Simone de Beauvoir's theory as it is developed in her essay, *The Second Sex*.

In the first part of our 'discussion' section, we have demonstrated how women were oppressed by a patriarchal society and how they were brought under the subjection of man. This is clearly shown through Meg and Beth who accept to be confined in house .in *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* through the character of Miss Caroline, Gaskell portrays how women are oppressed and seen inferior. They have failed to succeed to become economically independent. Thus, the major result is that Beth and Meg and Miss Caroline do not fit the feminist expectation of de Beauvoir's transcendental woman.

In the second chapter, we have dealt with how women react and transcend the norms and values that are imposed by the patriarchal society. As it is the case of Jo March, in *Little Women*, who defies the society's norms and determine her talent. We have come to deduce that Jo represent the ideal woman from de Beauvoir's view. She is similar to Elizabeth Gaskell's female characters, who attempted to work and improve their living by defying the norms and values that are imposed by society.

In the third chapter, we have examined the issue of mothering and feminine myths that can be seen as obstacles for women to pursue their talents, and this has been the case for Meg March in *Little Women* and Sophy in *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* who have sacrificed their life for their siblings. Thus, they were imprisoned within the house confinement. Contrary to Joe March in *Little Women*, who has fought against patriarchal values, norms and succeeded

to make a balance between her productive and reproductive capacities as conceptualised by De Beauvoir.

Discussion

Chapter One: Masculine Manifold Oppression in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

This chapter develops the masculine oppression in both narratives: Elizabeth Gaskell's novella *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. The purpose of this part is to show to what extent both narratives interact with Simone de Beauvoir's feminist perspective. De Beauvoir's theory *The Second Sex* has examined and explored themes and concepts which are necessary to the feminine struggle to alter men's opinion and attitude towards them and their social position. This discussion will focus on feminine and masculine characters in both narratives and the way they may interact with de Beauvoir's example of what an ideal woman might be.

Mr. Harrison's Confessions is regarded as one of the best works of Elizabeth Gaskell, where she chooses a masculine single hero to speak about marriage. Indeed, we find gripping characters, mainly feminine of good souls full of goodness. The novella discusses topics such as love, family, women's status, gossip, professional life, widowhood, domesticity, marriage, and social classes; all of them are themes that gather male and female characters in their different relations

In the Victorian era, woman has struggled to improve her life condition and secure a good social position. She faces hard situations and many difficulties that she would overcome and develop to a better living. For this reason, this chapter will examine women's issue, gender inequality, and examine also how this may fit de Beauvoir's feminist vision.

Mr. Harrison's Confessions is a good-humoured story of the misunderstanding and gossip that surround a young doctor trying to establish himself, both professionally and personally in a north midland country town. The ladies, of marriageable and even not-so-

marriageable, are just as much on the qui-vive for husbands as the early heroines of Jane Austen therefore³⁶, this chapter will mainly be concerned with the masculine characters that oppress women in various manners as it is shown in the novella.

At the beginning of the novella, Mr. Harrison, that young bachelor, is confused where to settle when he has completed his education as a surgeon. Accordingly he receives a letter from his father's cousin Mr. Morgan, an old gentleman, who wants to take him as his partner. At his arrival to Duncombe, a town where only single ladies and widows live, many of them would attempt to seduce him. Mr. Morgan says in this passage,

You will find it a curious statistical fact, but five-sixths of our householders of a certain rank in Duncombe are women. We have widows and old maids in rich abundance. In fact, my dear sir, I believe that you and I are almost the only gentlemen in the place _ Mr. Bullock, of course, excepted. By gentlemen, I mean professional men. It behoves us to remember, sir, that so many of the female sex rely upon us for the kindness and protection which every man who is worthy of the name is always so happy to render.³⁷

So, according to the statement above, it is stated that the women in the novella are portrayed as being occupied the second role since most of them are working as housemaids. Their unique purpose is to find a suitable husband, contrary to the male figures who are holding high positions and living a luxurious life. The illustrious example might be Mr. Morgan who is a surgeon; he possesses a capital country practice. He also pays attention to his appearance,

The next morning Mr Morgan came before I had finished breakfast. He was the most dapper little man I ever met. I see the affection with which people cling to the style of dress that was in vogue when they were beaux and belles, and received the most admiration. They are unwilling to believe that their youth and beauty are gone, and think that the prevailing mode is unbecoming.³⁸

Another important male figure who is mentioned in the novella is Mr. Bullock, who possesses a good position, working as a lawyer,

There was one invitation which seemed to promise a good deal of pleasure. Mr. Bullock (who is the attorney of Duncombe) was married a second time to a lady from a large Provincial town; she wished to lead the fashion_ a thing very easy to do, for every one was willing to follow her³⁹.

So, we can say that the male figures of the Victorian society and as they are described in the novella are powerful, holding high positions, and they are rich. Whereas the female figures in the novella are described as weak, poor, having no rights or properties; their role was limited “to rearing children and having a tendency of the house, they could not hold a job.”⁴⁰ Their tasks were restricted to the domestic sphere, taking care of their family. And we can relate this to Simone de Beauvoir when she says that, “man is subject, woman is the object and the other. Man is essential, woman is inessential. Men are active, extending out into the world and into the future, while women are passive, inward, keepers of the home and family. Men create women maintain.”⁴¹ This is why women are always regarded as inferior to man.

In *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, Gaskell speaks also about the three different social classes: the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class. This division in social classes could be perceived by imbalances in riches, education, working and living conditions.

Accordingly, the essential nature of day by day life for individuals in Victorian England rested on a hidden structure dictated by social class and formed by customary lifestyles in nation, town, and city. Furthermore, the classes lived in particular regions, Victorians accepted that every class has its own guidelines and individuals were relied upon to comply with the parts of their class and each class has its own norms and values concerning the social life⁴².

Some of the novella's characters, consequently, belong to the upper class that are mainly the masculine figures, whereas, the lower working class includes professions like tradeswomen whereby the women sell their own goods to the people of their village or work as housekeepers to the upper middle class. Thus, here, we see clearly the inequality of the two sexes.

As an important theme in the Victorian era in the late of eighteenth century, Elizabeth Gaskell exposes the theme of marriage; as a consequence, searching for a suitable husband is very important matter in the life of any unmarried woman, in the same time it was very difficult to find a husband, because of social classes and status in the society⁴³. So, as it is clearly expressed in the novella, the ladies experienced the arrival of Harrison to that town of

Duncombe as really a good surprise for them by believing at least one of them may win Harrison's heart, as Mrs. Rose, one of the ladies, states in this passage,

Your appearance and circumstances, Mr. Harrison, remind me forcibly of the time When I was married to my dear husband, Now at rest. He was then, like you, Commencing practice as a surgeon. For twenty years I sympathized with him, and assisted him by every means in my power, even to making up pills when the young Man was out. May we live together in like harmony for an equal length of time! May the regard between us be equally sincere, although, instead of being conjugal, it is to be maternal and filial!⁴⁴

Mr. Harrison meets Sophy, the vicar's pretty girl, who is helping to raise her younger siblings (who are Helen, Lizzie, and Walter) after their mother's death. Sophy is one of those Victorian heroines, and William Harrison loses his heart to her. Pretty Sophy serves only to distract the young doctor to such an extent that he is blind to the series of embarrassing attachments and misunderstanding that soon result from his presence in the town,

Soon we came to a stile which led to an open, breezy common, half covered with gorse. I helped the little girls over it, and set them to run down the slope; but I took Sophy's arm in mine, and though I could not speak, I think she knew how I was feeling for her. I could hardly bear to bid her good-bye at the vicarage gate; it seemed as if I ought to go in and spend the day with her.⁴⁵

So, Elizabeth Gaskell has depicted her protagonist as being someone that the majority of the ladies love and desire for having as husband; however, his story is full of romance, gossip and particularly much of misunderstanding.

The status of women is much discussed in the novella; they had few opportunities in many fields as: education, works, and voting. The ideal Victorian woman was supposed to be confined to the domestic sphere. They faced a lot of difficulties in different fields; they did not have enough rights. In the Victorian era, the rights of a married woman as a wife will be given over to her husband. Because the law imposed this instruction for the married couple as to become one under the law, so the only one who has the right to represent this entity was the man. The women were considered as machines, useful only to every domestic task as to take care of children and satisfying her husband. In this sense de Beauvoir says that, "The drama

of marriage is not that it does not guarantee the wife the promised happiness- there is no guarantee of happiness- it is that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine.”⁴⁶

Another case, which really indicates men’s oppression, towards female is the way in which, they treat them inappropriately and hurtfully. According to Simone de Beauvoir, this masculine behaviour can be found in high patriarchal societies in which men do not take care of women’s feelings, because they consider their wives as their own property and objects they own. Beauvoir asserts that, “woman is her husband’s prey, his property”⁴⁷. They do so just to debase and to depreciate the women and in order to feel superior. The following passage is a conversation between Mr Harrison and Miss Caroline where he shows his power over Miss Caroline, who sees her as being a weak woman,

I have saved nearly three thousand pounds. If you think you are too poor to marry without money. I will give it all to Caroline. I am strong, and can go on working; but she is weak, and this disappointment will kill her. She sat down suddenly, and covered her face with her hands. Then she looked up. “You are unwilling, I see. Don’t suppose I would have urged you if it had been for myself; but she has had so much sorrow”. And now she fairly cried aloud. tried to explain; but she would not listen, but kept saying.” Leave the house, sir! Leave the house!” but I would be heard. “I have never had any feeling warmer than respect for Miss Caroline, and I have never shown any different feeling. I never for an instant thought of making her my wife and she has had no cause in my behaviour to imagine I entertained any such Intention.” This is adding insult to injury” said she. “Leave the house, sir, this instant!”⁴⁸

. As for Alcott’s novel *Little Women*, it treats some major themes like love, women and femininity, poverty, sacrifice, work, domesticity, ambition and family through which Alcott explores various roles of women. *Little Women* centres on the four March sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy. As most of the action takes place in their private, domestic sphere. It tells about women’s struggle, the struggle of Mrs March without her husband Mr. March who serves as a chaplain in the war. Thus, the absence of Mr. March has bad impact on the family mainly in finance, so that the girls must work to get money, to improve and make a living.

Alcott’s novel *Little Women* depicts the real image of women. At that time, women were considered to belong to the domestic sphere and were supposed to give up their art and

serve only their family, husband and children. In addition, women are told that home is the best and ideal place where they can find protection and security. Man is regarded as superior and women as inferior. Women had no status in society; they did not have the same rights or the same opportunities; they are supposed to take care of their children, run the household and satisfy their husbands. Women cannot hold professional jobs apart from teaching or working as domestic servants or in factory; their jobs are limited. As to their education, they just have the right to know about music, art, and language to "Be angels of the houses."⁴⁹ The main goal of a woman is to become a mother.

Throughout the novel, we recognise the patriarchal system that consigns the March women Meg, Joe, Beth and Amy to the domestic sphere. From the beginning of *Little Women*, we learn that the March girls are not satisfied about their jobs. Meg complains about her job as a governess, and Joe working as a companion for aunt March. Beth dislikes her role as a housekeeper and Amy, who is too young for holding a job, attends school and seems unhappy. The March sisters have artistic aspiration, but their required duties prevent them from developing their skills; they are restricted to the domestic work. This is mainly shown through the character of Beth March,

Beth was too bashful to go to school. It had been tried, but she suffered so much it was given up and she did her lessons at home with her father. Even when he went away and her mother was called to devote her skill and energy to soldier's aid societies, Beth went faithfully on by herself and did the best she could. She was a housewifely little creature and helped Hannah keep the home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to beloved. Long, quiet days she spent, not lonely nor idle, for her little world was peopled with imaginary friends and she was by nature a busy bee. There were six dolls to be taken up and dressed every morning, for Beth was a child still and loved her pets as well as ever. Not one whole or handsome one among them, all were outcasts till Beth took them in, for when her sisters outgrew these idols, they passed to her because Amy would have nothing old or ugly. Beth cherished them all the more tenderly for that very reason and set up a hospital for infirm dolls.⁵⁰

In this regard, in her book *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir sought why and how women are seen inferior to men. For this reason, she attempted to study history, biology, and psychology. But she did not find convincing or satisfying reasons which can justify this

inferiority and subordination. As a result, she comes to find that it is the myths and false stories that have been invented by man that restricted women to be the other, occupying always the second role, and being relegated to the position of the other in a society. One of this myth is the feminine mystery, believing that women are “angel of house”⁵¹ women should be under man’s control and domination, their role is confined in the household and when “women contradict this myths, she is said to not be feminine, she is denied her subjectivity”.⁵² Beth can be seen as a complicit to her immanence and the society domination over her. In this context de Beauvoir asserts “for a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything.”⁵³

Beth’s life turns around her family, taking care of the house, tending their pets. She is shy; she plays second role as Simone de Beauvoir’s view. She does not have any source of income; she does not attend school. Beth is the little girl model of the nineteenth century called “Angels of the house.”⁵⁴ Beth also plays the role of the housewife, and how she should be perfect, as an ideal woman. In this area, de Beauvoir says, “A woman is shut up in a kitchen or boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.”⁵⁵ In the very first chapter of the novel Beth’s character is described as follow,

Beth, as everyone called her, was a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression which was seldom disturbed. Her father called her 'Little Miss Tranquility', and the name suited her excellently, for she seemed to live in a happy world of her own, only venturing out to meet the few whom she trusted and loved.⁵⁶

Beth is described as being timid, a peaceful girl; therefore she is the model of how a girl should be at that time. Beth accepts to be confined within the tradition and values that are imposed by society. Unlike her sister Jo, Beth knows how to keep her femininity and temperance; she is called by her father “Little Miss Tranquility” so, Beth has succeeded in

controlling her temper .In this connection de Beauvoir says, “Any self assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness.”⁵⁷

In *Little Women*, Beth’s character is oppressed and restrained to the domestic sphere; Beth is depicted like many other women of the Victorian era; she does not have strong desires and ambitions like her sisters. He sacrifices for domesticity. Unlike her sisters, Beth has no dreams and no hopes for the future. In these coming lines, she confesses to Joe,

Beth lay a minute thinking and then said in her quiet way, “I do not know how to express myself, and shouldn’t try to anyone but you, because I can’t speak out except to my Joe .I only mean to say that I have a feeling that it never was intended I should live long. I am not like the rest of you I never made any plans about what I will do when I grew up. I never thought of being married, as you all did. I couldn’t seem to imagine myself anything but stupid little Beth, trotting about at home, of no use anywhere but there. I never wanted to go away and the hard part now is the leaving, you all I am not afraid, but it seems as if I should be homesick for you even in heaven.”⁵⁸

In this sense de Beauvoir says,

Women always occupied a second role being relegated to the position of the other. She has remained within immanence, no property rights, no education, no professions, remaining the slave within the duties imposed by maternal and reproductive function.⁵⁹

Beth who is as highly skilled in playing the piano as her sister Amy is in drawing and Jo in writing, Beth is too shy and timid to show clearly that she is capable and talented girl. Unlike Jo and Amy, she does not want to demonstrate or expose her fulfilment. She always refuses to play in public. In this sense de Beauvoir portrays the negative effects of immanence, “Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is a degradation of existence into it in itself of freedom into capacity.”⁶⁰

When Beth is asked if she wants something, she answers shyly that she cannot wish for anything else since she has her little piano. As it is shown clearly in chapter *Castle in the air*, for her only wish is to “stay at home safe with father and mother, and help take care of the family. “Don’t you wish for anything else”? Asked Laurie: Since I had my little piano, am

perfectly satisfied. I only wish we may all keep well and be together, nothing else.”⁶¹ In a conversation between Laurie and Beth,

Are you the musical girl?” he asked, without any startling “Hey!” as he looked down at her very kindly. “I’m Beth. I love it dearly and I’ll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me and be disturbed,” she added, fearing to be rude, and trembling at her own boldness as she spoke. “Not a soul, my dear. The house is empty half the day, so come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you.” “How kind you are, sir!” Beth blushed like a rose under the friendly look he wore, but she was not frightened now and gave the hand a grateful squeeze because she had no words to thank him for the precious gift he had given her. The old gentleman softly stroked the hair off her forehead, and, stooping down, he kissed her, saying, in a tone few people ever heard...⁶²

Alcott says, “There are many Beths in the world, shy and quiet, sitting in corners_till needed and living for others so cheerfully that no one sees the sacrifices till the little on the hearth stops chirping, and the sweet, sunshiny presence vanishes, leaving silence and shadow behind”⁶³. In this sense, de Beauvoir affirms, “Hence a woman makes no claim for herself as a subject because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as the other”⁶⁴.

In conclusion, Beth’s character in *Little Women* fails to resist the patriarchal society; she is for de Beauvoir complicit for her immanence and society domination as a result, she does not fit the Beauvoirian ideal woman, similarly to the female characters in *Mr Harrison’s Confessions* where women’s lives are based on male’s protection and support, so, female’s characters in the novella do not succeed to improve to enhance themselves in front of the male’s superiority.

End-Notes

- ³⁶ Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" Oxford University Press 1990.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 292.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 301.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 289.
- ⁴⁰ Bedrani, Ghaliya. *The Representation of The Other (The Poor and Women) in Elisabeth Gaskell's North and South*. Diss. Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi- Ouzou, 2010-2011, p .39
- ⁴¹ Khelifa Arezki, *Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) (Lecture, Contemporary American British Fiction)*, Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, December 17, 2018).
- ⁴² Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" Oxford University Press 1990.
- ⁴³ Lamara, Samiha . *A Portrayal of Women during the Nineteenth Century in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*. Diss. University of Biskra, 2015, p12.
- ⁴⁴ Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" p.298.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 320.
- ⁴⁶ Uhlig, Louise el. "The Institution of Marriage." Thesis, Roskilde University, 2014, p35.
- ⁴⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *the Second Sex*, New York: Random House, Inc. 2009, P36.
- ⁴⁸ Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" p340 -341.
- ⁵⁰ Alcott, Louisa. *Little Women* 1992. Great Britain: Penguin popular Classics, 1994, p37.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 69.
- ⁵² Khelifa Arezki, *Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) (Lecture, Contemporary American British Fiction)*, Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, December 17, 2018).
- ⁵³ Addad, Lamia. *From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), Desire under The Elms (1924) and Willa Cather's The Bohemian Girl (1912)*. Diss. University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, 2018 , p21.
- ⁵⁴ Laire, Delphine, *Little Women, a Feminist Study*, p69.
- ⁵⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, p731.
- ⁵⁶ Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p6.
- ⁵⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, p402.
- ⁵⁸ Laire, Delphine. *Little Women, a Feminist Study*, p74.
- ⁵⁹ Khelifa Arezki, *Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) (Lecture, Contemporary American British Fiction)*, Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, December 17, 2018).
- ⁶⁰ Day, Jennifer. "Simone de Beauvoir's Transcendence and Immanence in the Twenty First Century: The Tension between Career and Motherhood". Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, p2.
- ⁶¹ Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p57.
- ⁶² Ibid., 57.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 38.
- ⁶⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, p402.

Chapter Two: Economic Independence toward Transcendence in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

Introduction

This chapter develops women issues and their struggle toward their liberty in both narratives Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mr. Harrison's Confession* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Both Alcott and Elisabeth Gaskell works embody the female issues; the two narratives deal with various interesting themes that can be related to Simone de Beauvoir's theory *The second sex* in which she discusses women's steps and ways to ensure an equal position to man; from a weak, passive and immanent woman to a powerful, active and transcendent one that was the aim of women; to liberate themselves, from the patriarchal domination. Thus, in this chapter we will speak about economic independence of women which is considered as a good step to reach transcendence and to show to what extent both works challenge the Victorian gender roles, the traditional values, and norms.

As far as *Mr. Harrison's confessions* is concerned, the two sisters: Miss Tomkinson and Miss Caroline, who are orphans, are described respectively as ones who rely on themselves. Miss Tomkinson, the elder sister of fifty-five years old, has improved her autonomy as well as her capacity to face whatever she encounters on her path; she is clearly described in this passage as,

Miss Tomkinson, on whom we next called, did not strike me as remarkably requiring protection from any man. She was a tall, gaunt, masculine-looking woman, with an air of defiance about her, naturally; this, however, she softened and mitigated, as far as she was able, in favour of Mr. Morgan.⁶⁵

After the death of their father, the sisters are obliged to work, and even to work hard in order to survive, and to improve themselves without asking for help or for charity from someone; therefore, the sisters have a piece of silk, to make two gowns to buy it, in order to earn money, the passage below tells more about it,

My wife tells me she once knew the sisters purchase a piece of silk, enough, with Management, to have made two gowns; but Carry wished for flounces, or some such Fal-lals; and, without a word, Miss Tomkinson gave up her gown to have the whole Made up as Carry wished, into one handsome one; and wore an old, shabby affair Herself as cheerfully as if it were Genoa velvet.⁶⁶

Likewise, Simone de Beauvoir's point of view, work is an essential starting point to woman's liberation from man's dominance. If a woman is economically independent, she will easily regain her autonomy and freedom. De Beauvoir claims that, "when she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence"⁶⁷. She also points out to the fact that when, she worked either at home or in small businesses, her material independence allowed her great freedom of behaviour: a woman of modest means could go out, go to taverns, and control her body almost like a man."⁶⁸

One of the most terrible cases that Mr. Harrison has experienced during his practical career as a surgeon, is the case of John Brouncker, the gardener who has small gardens to keep, suddenly falls down to injure his wrist severely, he is much beloved by the inhabitants of that town. As a result, this accident is felt like a town's misfortune. And as a great sorrow and loss for his wife and his six children who are depending on him for bread. John Brouncker says:

If you please, sir, I'd rather be done for at once than have my arm taken off, and be a burden to my family. I'm not afraid of dying, but I could not stand being a cripple for life, eating bread, and not able to earn it.⁶⁹

Both Mr. Morgan and Mr. Harrison have different modes of treatment. On the one hand, Mr. Harrison believes in the necessity of the amputation for John's right arm, while, Mr. Morgan's treatment is to take off his arm, "He was a sensible man. I told him the difference of opinion that existed between Mr. Morgan and myself. I said that there might be some little risk attending the Non-amputation; but that I should guard against it, and I trusted that I should be able to preserve his arm."⁷⁰ The kind people of Duncombe are all in sympathy and tolerance with John Brouncker's tragic accident, as they endorse him heartily as well as with his wife and his children, who are very sad since John Brouncker's sudden accident. Among

the good people of Duncombe, who have supported John's family, we find Miss Horsman, that maiden lady, who has stayed along beside John and his family. Moreover, she is really anxious about his health since she knows that John is the only one who provides his family with bread, and she is afraid that his six children become fatherless. So, Miss Horsman suggests her help because she is very kind to all the poor people of Duncombe,

Aye, bless him! He frets about not earning enough to keep us, if he's crippled; but, sir, I Care about that. I would work my fingers to the bone, and so would the children; I'm sure we be proud to do for him, and keep him; God bless him! It would be far better to have him only with one arm, than to have him in the churchyard, Miss Horsman says "Confound Miss Horsman!" said I. "Thank you, Mr. Harrison," said her well-known voice behind me. She had come out, dark as it was, to bring some old linen to Mrs. Brounker; for, as I said before, she was very kind to all the Poor people of Duncombe.⁷¹

After she recognises their bad conditions of living, Mrs. Brounker takes the decision to look for a job, as far as, her husband is still ill, and he is incapable to work again for his family. So, of course, she is the mother now who is responsible of her children to take their charge financially, and to provide them with all what they need,

When I got home from my round, I found Mrs. Rose in some sorrow. "Miss Horsman called after you left," said she. "Have you heard how John Brounker Is At High port?" "Very well," replied I. "I called on his wife just now, and she had just got a letter from Him. She had been anxious about him, for she had not heard for a week. However, all's Right now; and she has pretty well of work, at Mrs. Munton's, as her servant is ill. Oh, they'll do, never fear."⁷²

Indeed, this chapter is an illustration of the brave women, who struggle and strive to get a job, because it is through work that they can guarantee their concrete freedom, also because money means power, So, once a woman has her own job, it means she will be economically independent and no longer being submissive or under man's control, as it is the case with this powerful woman Jane Brounker, who undoubtedly relies on herself. At the same time, she denies what most men think of women as they are only householders, and that they never have any place beside man in working areas. Jane Brounker and Jo March are the ideal woman, who represent and look like Simone de Beauvoir's ideal model of woman.

For de Beauvoir, women are not allowed to do anything; so she productive and active, she regains her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects; she senses her responsibility relative to the goals she pursues and to the money and rights she appropriates. Many women are conscious of these advantages, even those with the lowest-level jobs. I heard a cleaning woman as she was washing a hotel lobby floor says, “I never asked anyone for anything. I made it on my own.” She was as proud of being self-sufficient as a Rockefeller.⁷³

From the beginning of *Little Women*, we get to know that Alcott has really succeeded to break the norms and oppose gender stereotypes. “She is removing gender expectations based on the character’s names”⁷⁴. She then, attributes Jo with masculine features and Laurie with more feminine features. Laurie and Jo were not surprised when they encounter each other for the first time. Alcott breaks and challenges gender by giving Jo and Laurie “names that belong to the opposite sex.”⁷⁵ This following conversation between Jo and Laurie shows perfectly what is written above,

“How is your cat, miss March?” Asked the boy, trying to look sober while his black eyes shone with fun.
“Nicely, thank you, Mr. Laurence; but I am only Jo”, returned the young lady.
“Am not Mr. Laurence, am only Laurie.”
“Laurie Laurence, what an odd name!”
“My first name is Theodor, but I don’t like it, for the fellows called me Dora, so I made them say Laurie, instead.”
“I hate my name, too so sentimental wish everyone would say Jo; instead of Josephine. How did you make the boys calling you Dora?”
“I trashed ‘em”
“I can’t trash aunt March, so I suppose I shall have to bear it; and Jo resigned herself with sigh.”⁷⁶

Alcott has associated masculine qualities to Jo and feminine qualities to Laurie. In doing this, Alcott wanted to break people’s expectation toward names and “quick judgment” based on names and gender. “Additionally both character’s roles and actions transcend normal gender stereotypes”⁷⁷. Jo proves an extreme dislike to be named Josephine or Miss March; she

prefers to be named as just Jo and persist on being called by a boy's name and not as "Josephine". She even accepts to be in a company with a boy. In this sense, de Beauvoir says, "From the most servile to the haughtiest, girls all learn that to please; they must give into them"⁷⁸. Their mothers urge them not to treat boys like companion, not to make advances to them, to assume a passive role.⁷⁹ Thus, Jo struggles forcibly against the gender stereotypes that limited her, and she shows a notable image with ideas about female roles that appear to be entirely opposing her social order.

Laurie presents the role of a woman in the nineteenth century; women task's is bound in the house doing "female coded activities"⁸⁰; such as playing piano. Laurie is shut up"⁸¹ like many women who stayed at home, while their husbands were outside home working. Alcott associates Laurie with female qualities to show that even man can be interested in playing piano and doing female activities, emphasising that they are not just for females. Alcott affirms that "biological sex is not what confines a person"⁸². Music and feminine activities are not specific for girl's activities. Both men and women should be free sharing these pastimes to keep away the spread of stereotypes. From this point of view, de Beauvoir says: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."⁸³

What de Beauvoir means by this is that, the roles we attribute to women do not arise from difference in biology or by virtue, but femininity is rather a construction of civilization.

Women are taught what kind of roles they can or cannot perform in virtue of being of the second sex. It makes sense, then, that if someone is taught her entire life that to be woman, she must behave in a certain way, act a certain way, play a subservient role within her family, and work only certain kinds of jobs.⁸⁴

Contrary to Jo, Meg gives up any skill or dreams she may have to be an actress with servants and pretty girls to perform behind the scenes. Like Beth, Meg also spends her artistic energies on keeping house. After she and John Brook marry, she attempts to make currant jelly, Meg cares about marriage status. Meg's desire was the result of her society values that existed at that time about the importance of marriage for a woman because a non-married woman at that time was considered odd; it is for this reason that she attends dance party to

find a husband. At the end, Meg will be engaged with John Brook and before their marriage John says to Meg “You have only to wait, I am to do the work.”⁸⁵ Meg then accepts to be confined in the house sphere contrary to Jo. From this perspective de Beauvoir says,

The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity; women have never constituted a caste establishing exchanges and contracts on an equal footing with men. Man is a socially autonomous and complete individual; he is regarded above all as a producer, and his existence is justified by the work he provides for the group; we have already seen the reasons why the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity.”⁸⁶

Unlike Beth and Meg, Joe March is entirely shown as a liberated woman; she only demands her mother’s irregular aid and advice. In the chapter “*Castle in the air*”, Jo March says, “I’d have a stable full of Arabian steed, rooms piled with books, and I’d write out of a magic inkstand, so that my work should be as famous as Laurie’s music...I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous.”⁸⁷. Jo’s dream is different from the other March sisters whose wishes are related to tradition and values; she is satisfied with writing sensational stories and very pleased for her success; Jo follows her aspiration, she is forced to work, so she has to work for her aunt March because her father is absent as he serves a chaplain in the war .she wanted to replace her father’s role .She even behaves like a boy and doing masculine activities when she declares,

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’s bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys “games and work and manners! I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and its worse than ever now, for I’m dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!”⁸⁸

From this excerpt, we get to know that Jo is completely sad realising that she is incapable to join the war as her father did because of gender. Jo shows openly her desire to be the man of the family, and not a little woman, be a soldier in the army and not a sewer at home. In this sense De Beauvoir says: “To be a complete individual, equal to man, woman has to have access to the male world as man does to the female one, access to the other.”⁸⁹

Jo ambition's is to be a particular woman who attempts to get in man's world to achieve her goal as being a writer. She recognises that men and boys are favoured in her society. Men are liberated in many ways, and this perceived liberty makes girls bothered with their role. Jo gets to know that a woman cannot reach at authorship equal to male authorship; she proves a certain jealousy for her best friend Laurie, who can go to college. She wants to be superior and greater; she has to be like a real man, so she struggles against her feminine roles, establishing a masculine orientation. She struggles against the values and the tradition that limits her skills. March sisters especially Jo and Amy follow their art and writing, evolving their talent in a patriarchal society which confined them to the domestic sphere; they defy the norms of a patriarchal society and attempt to break free from the domestic confinement.

In addition, among her sisters, Jo holds a good position of great responsibility and a "sacrificing spirit"⁹⁰ to share the charge of her family. One example is Jo's effort to sell her long beautiful hair to provide money for mother's trip to take care of her father who is ill. She insists on the fact that she ought to help her father:

I was wild to do something for father...I hate to borrow as much as
Mother does...Meg gave all her quarterly salary towards the rent, and I
Only got some clothes with mine, so I felt wicked,
And was bound to have some money, if I
Sold the nose off, my face to get it.⁹¹

Inside the domestic sphere, Jo reveals her wish and ambition to be the man of the family, when the March girls are heartbroken, "Jo always plays the central directing role"⁹². Beth, Amy and even Meg pursue her advice and direction. "Although, Jo does not take into consideration Marmee's advice, she is valued by her mother. She tells Jo that "It's a great comfort, Jo; I always feel strong when you are at home."⁹³ Jo embodies an independent female heroine. As a brilliant writer, Jo fights for independence and freedom in order to achieve her ambition of becoming a writer. In doing this, Alcott highlights that Jo's decision and power play a serious part in following her ambition as a writer. She says joyfully and

firmly” I shall write more...I am so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls...”⁹⁴In this context, De Beauvoir affirms that “Independence is won through literary artistic expression.”⁹⁵Here we can say that De Beauvoir stresses on writing skill which is for her, the first means to achieve independence. Jo will find pleasure and comfort so long as she can become economically independent and sustain her sisters. “To earn the praise of one’s she loves is her dearest wish and is also the first step to becoming a successful career woman.”⁹⁶In this concept, De Beauvoir says, “When she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence.”⁹⁷

In the nineteenth century, writing was a male dominated occupation, making it difficult for women to become writers. Female writers encounter unbearable “gender discrimination as their writings were accused of being formless, restricted, irrational, over emotional, and lacking in discipline.”⁹⁸Female writers had to fight and struggle “to cope with the dilemma of obedience and resistance to conventions”⁹⁹in this matter, De Beauvoir attests that “It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from male, work alone can guarantee her freedom.”¹⁰⁰

Another character through which Alcott presents motherhood is Marmee whom waits her daughters to look forward their productive lives and “not idle ones”. In her speech Marmee also emphasises how a good marriage has a great significance, believing that money is indeed “needful and precious.”¹⁰¹ Marmee acknowledges the importance of being rich, but believes that one’s own image, peace and love are more important than money, even in marriage. Thus, she advises her daughters to become more than just beautiful, beloved, admired and accomplished. At the end of the story, Jo March has succeeded to find a place in a society where she and her husband have equal tasks. At this point, Beauvoir says,

“The day when it will be possible the woman to love in her strength and not in her weakness, not to escape from herself, love will become for her as for man the source of life and not a mortal danger.”¹⁰²

As a conclusion, the ladies have succeeded to acquire their economic independence through their willing to get jobs and working hard in order to free themselves from men’s dominance. Thus, the female characters that are presented in this chapter symbolise and portray clearly Simone de Beauvoir’s ideal woman who are willing to work hard in order to change their status.

End-Notes

⁶⁵.Wain, John.”The Oxford Library of Short Novels”Oxford University Press 1990.P292.

⁶⁶.Ibid.,293.

⁶⁷.De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *the Second Sex*, New York: Random House, Inc.2009, P813.

⁶⁸.Ibid.,175.

⁶⁹.Wain, John.”The Oxford Library of Short Novels”P.326.

⁷⁰.Ibid.,328.

⁷¹.Ibid.,332.

⁷².Ibid.,335.

⁷³.Ibid.,813.

⁷⁴.Bender,”Clare. Gender stereotyping in Little Women:let Us Be Elegant or Die!”
Diss.University of Northenwestern-st.Paul, 2017, p141.

⁷⁵.Ibid.,141.

⁷⁶.Alcott, Louisa.*Little Women*1992.Great Britain :Penguin popular Classics, 1994, p 27.

⁷⁷. Bender,Clare.”Gender stereotyping in Little Women:let Us Be Elegant orDie!” p143.

⁷⁸.De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *The Second Sex*, New York :Random House, Inc.2009, P401.

⁷⁹. Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p 45.

⁸⁰. Bender,Clare.”Gender stereotyping in Little Women :let Us Be Elegant orDie!” p141.

⁸¹.Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p 45.

⁸². Bender, Clare.”Gender stereotyping in Little Women”let Us Be Elegant or Die!”p144.

⁸³. De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, p330.

⁸⁴.Marguire,Laura.”SimonedeBeauvoir.”StanfordUniversity,29,feb2016Https :Philosophy.or

⁸⁵. Bender, Clare.”Gender stereotyping in Little Womenlet Us Be Elegant or Die!” p147.

⁸⁶.Uhlig, Louise el. »The Institution of Marriage. »Thesis , Roskilde University, 2014, p1

⁸⁷. Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p 133.

- ^{88.} Ibid., 5.
- ^{89.} De Beauvoir, Simon, *The Second Sex*, p818.
- ^{90.} Mattisson, Jane."The Path to Jo's Self-Realization in Little Women and Good Wives ".Diss.Kristianstad University, 2010, 'Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p151.
- ^{91.} Alcott, Louisa, *Little Women*, p 133.
- ^{92.} Mattisson, Jane.The Path to Jo's Self-Realization in Little Women and Good Wives, p8.
- ^{93.} Ibid., p9.
- ^{94.} Ibid., p9.
- ^{95.} Anne,Kelly."Beyond The Independent Woman: A Reading of Simone de Beauvoir's when Things of The spirit Come First With The Second Sex."Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2018, p14.
- ^{96.} Mattisson, Jane.The Path to Jo's Self-Realization in Little Women and Good Wives .Diss.Kristianstad University, 2010, p9.
- ^{97.} De Beauvoir, Simon, *The Second Sex*, p68.
- ^{98.} Mattisson, Jane.The Path to Jo's Self-Realization in Little Women and Good Wives .Diss.Kristianstad University, 2010, p10.
- ^{99.} Ibid., 10.
- ^{100.} De Beauvoir, Simon, *The Second Sex*, p813.
- ^{101.} Delphine, Laire."Little Women, a Feminist Study".Diss.Ghent University, 2008-2009, p24 .
- ^{102.} Goodreads.

Chapter Three: Feminine Myths and Mothering as Hindrances in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott's *Little women*

This chapter aims at shedding light on two important factors, which are seen as hindrances, and are responsible for underestimating women's power and their opportunities to be equal to men. These factors are: the feminine myths and mothering that represent a huge threat to every woman. First of all, feminine myths are the set of thoughts and beliefs that man has created about woman in the purpose of giving a bad image or reputation to her. Indeed, he considers her as being inferior to man, passive, weak, domestic, occupying the second role. Mothering is also regarded as a curse since woman feels herself imprisoned and lives in a routine that does not enable her to achieve all what she desires as going to work or taking care of herself, simply because she is busy with her children.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir examines why and how women are treated as inferior and subordinate to men. That is why, she studies history, biology, psychology, but she does not succeed to find any logical reasons which can prove this inferiority and subordination. As a result, she deduces that it is the myths or false stories that man has constructed that are used to justify treating women as second class people and be defined as the absolute other.

As far as the novella of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* is concerned, there is a variety of myths on which Simone de Beauvoir has spoken in her book, including the myth of "Feminine Mystery". She argues that women are shrouded in mystery and portrayed as the other. They are regarded as being strange or mysterious; therefore, this allows men not to understand women, since mystery often belongs to the colonized, or to the slave. In this sense, de Beauvoir asserts that, "To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that

she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances.”¹⁰³

This is the case with Miss Tomkinson who believes that Mr. Harrison has been paying attention to her sister Miss Caroline, while he himself denies what Miss Tomkinson has understood and what she has thought about him by saying,

“I have never had any feeling warmer than respect for Miss Caroline, and I have never shown any different feeling. I never for an instant thought of making her my wife, and she has had no cause in my behavior to imagine I entertained any such intention.”¹⁰⁴

It is clear from the quotation above that Mr. Harrison has no feelings toward Miss Caroline, and that only her sister Miss Tomkinson has been mistaken in supposing that he is engaged to her. This is explained through the following passage,

The most unfortunate misunderstanding has taken place. Miss Tomkinson thinks that I have been paying attentions to Miss Caroline; when, in fact may I tell you, Mrs. Rose? My affections are placed elsewhere. Perhaps you have found it out already?” Indeed I thought I had been too much in love to conceal my attachment to Sophy from anyone who knew my movements as well as Mrs. Rose.¹⁰⁵

Another important myth that has relegated women to the second class position is the myth of “Otherness”, which means that women are only defined in relation to, and more particularly in opposition to men. According to this myth, man is the original. Man is the subject who possesses self-whereas woman is the object, who is other. In this regard, de Beauvoir says that, “She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute. She is the other.”¹⁰⁶

For his part, Mr. Harrison seems as he does not enjoy the presence of the ladies around him, also he considers them as others, but instead he prefers the companionship of Mr. Bullock as he says in this passage,

-Don’t be so selfish; Mr. B. Think of the pleasure Jemima and I shall have in Mr. Harrison’s society.”

-I put a stop to the discussion by saying I would come in the evenings occasionally,
-And give Mr. Bullock a lesson, but that my professional duties occupied me invariably Until that time
-I liked Mr. Bullock. He was simple, and shrewd; and to be with a man was a relief, after
All the feminine society I went through every day.¹⁰⁷

But for her part, Miss Tomkinson tries always to despise Mr. Harrison, and sees him as not a good doctor since he is young and inexperienced. The passage below will show all this,

Miss Tyrrell's throat does not seem to make much progress. Do you understand the case, Mr. Harrison, or should we have further advice? I think Mr. Morgan would probably know more about it."

I assured her it was the simplest thing in the world; that it always implied a little torpor in the constitution, and that we preferred working through the system, which of course was a slow process, and that the medicine the young lady was taking (iodide of iron) was sure to be successful, although the progress would not be rapid. She bent her head and said, "It might be so; but she confessed she had more confidence in medicines which had some effect."

She seemed to expect me to tell her something; but I had nothing to say, and accordingly I bade goodbye. Somehow, Miss Tomkinson always managed to make me feel very small, by a succession of snubbing; and whenever I left her I had always to comfort myself under her contradictions by saying to myself, "Her saying it is so, does not make it so."¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, as it is said in the beginning, 'Mothering' is another obstacle that has relegated women to the position of the other, and here in the novella, we have the case of Sophy. Sophy is the elder sister who lives with her father and her siblings who are Helen, Lizzie and Walter. She acts as a mother since her mother is dead. Thus, as a daughter she embodies mother's role by taking care of her siblings. The passage below is an illustration of what has been said,

And last, there were the vicar and his children. These, with Mr. Morgan and myself, made up the party. I was very much pleased to see something more of the vicar's family. He had come in occasionally to the evening parties, it is true; and spoken kindly to us all; but it was not his habit to stay very long at them. And his daughter was, he said, too young to visit. She had had the charge of her little sisters and brother since her mother's death, which took up a good deal of her time, and she was glad of the evenings to pursue her own studies. But to-day the case was different; and Sophy; and Helen, and Lizzie, and even little Walter, were all there, standing at Mrs. Bullock's door.¹⁰⁹

Sophy is always present with her family, and she supports them, so she represents the tender mother who fears about her children like the way she behaves here in the passage with her brother Walter,

And now Sophy offered to go in the cart; only she seemed anxious, and so was I, that Walter should be secured from the effects of the white wreaths of fog rolling up from the valley; but the little violent affectionate fellow would not be separated from Sophy. She made a nest for him on her knee in one corner of the cart, and covered him with her own shawl; and I hoped that he would take no harm.¹¹⁰

The vicar's daughter Sophy is portrayed as a very strong woman, who is always ready to help whenever something bad happens to her family members, and as an example from the novella, little Walter has got the croup, that is an infectious illness. Therefore, she makes every effort to render him feel comfortable by being very closer to him. The following passage asserts that, "Don't tremble, Watty, said Sophy, in a soothing tone; it's Mr. Harrison, darling, who let you ride on his horse." I could detect the quivering in the voice, which she tried to make so calm and soft to quiet the little fellow's fears. We took him out of the bath, and I went for leeches."¹¹¹ But for de Beauvoir, in relation to this matter of motherhood, de Beauvoir argues that," Motherhood relegates women to a secondary existence."¹¹² Indeed it prevents them from defending themselves. In addition, motherhood takes away their independence."

For his part, Mr. Morgan is so proud of Sophy, after all what she has done for her brother, when he is sick, so, he sees her as a brave woman who really symbolises the mother's role.

The tears were in Mr. Morgan's eyes. I do not think either he or I could have spoken in
Our natural tones; but the brave girl went on, clear though low. She stopped at last, and
Looked up.
"He is better, is he not, Mr. Morgan?"
"No, my dear. He is –ahem" –he could not speak all at once.
Then he said – "My dear! He will be better soon. Think of your mamma, my dear Miss

Sophy. She will be very thankful to have one of her darling's safe with her, where she is."
"Still she did not cry. But she bent her head down on the little face, and kissed it long and Tenderly."¹¹³

According to Simone de Beauvoir's view point, fertility and reproduction are a curse, because it links women to the reproductive nature and gives them the image of weak creatures that men can exploit easily. Consequently, women remain the slaves within the duties imposed by maternal and reproductive functions. De Beauvoir adds that, "Pregnancy, giving birth, and menstruation diminished their work capacity and condemned them to long periods of impotence."¹¹⁴

From the beginning of the story *Little Women*, the figure of Marmee March, as a mother can be seen as the most notable character in her daughter's lives especially in the period of the absence of father March. She is the one who controls, gives instruction, and advice for her daughters; she is the guide to the March family. Marmee makes her best to protect and direct her daughters away from any negative, external influence. At the same time, however, it is noticeable that Marmee loves her daughters enough not to prevent them from possessing or acquiring knowledge and experience. One specific example in the story is when Meg has attended her first adult party. "Although Marmee has a feeling of distress that the event will make her eldest daughter resent the family's modest circumstance, she still allows her to go while the instance does prove disappointing and disastrous."¹¹⁵ Here we can notice that as a mother, Marmee gives them freedom in order to help and support her daughters to become much stronger, courageous, and capable.

Marmee can be considered as a "Moderately feminist character" such can be viewed in the manner that she comforts her daughters to follow their artistic talent and mainly for Jo's ambition to be a writer. To de Beauvoir's view, Marmee can be considered as an ideal woman

due to her sacrifice and hardworking; Marmee rejects the idea of being engaged in a marriage for reasons of money and comfort,

Money is a needful and precious thing. And, when well used, a noble thing but I never want you to think it is the first or only prize to strive for. I would rather see you poor men's wives. If you were happy, beloved, contended, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace.¹¹⁶

Thanks to Marmee's advice and instructions, Jo develops knowledge and learns how to control her temper, attaining virtuous value, pursuing on her career as a writer and finally appreciating and becoming conscious of her womanhood aspiration. But this does not mean that Jo is going to give up her girlhood dream to become a career woman. She asserts that she "can wait and be sure"¹¹⁷. Jo shows perfectly that she has plenty of inspiration, creativity, and imagination; she intends to follow her writing career and being a mother is not an obstacle to her. Jo is pleased, active, responsible woman, a wife and mother; Jo eventually reaches her aspiration to be a woman as well as her life goal to work hand in hand with her husband.

Contrary to Beth, Jo and Amy attempt to have the best of both worlds and, by the end of the novel, they seem to have constituted a way of life that might enable and permit women to develop their natural inspiration and productivity without renouncing to their femininity. In this sense, Alcott wrote, "I like to help women help themselves, as that is, in my opinion, the best way to settle the woman question. Whatever we can do well we have a right."¹¹⁸ Alcott affirms that a woman's knowledge, awareness and capacity give her the ability and power to secure a better position in a particular society. In Alcott's view, women's self-reliance would create a balance of power in the home, which would, in its turn, create a balance of power between the sexes in society. For Alcott, young women should determine their own talents, career paths, and social roles, and consider domesticity as a necessary precondition to success. Jo shows that domesticity should not necessarily be a young woman's only goal but one of her many options.

From what is said above, we may come to conclude that through Jo's character, Alcott succeeded to present the ideal woman from de Beauvoir's perspective. Jo then is the ideal woman. Because both Mr. Bhaer and Joe are willing to wait and work in order to marry and support themselves together, side by side. They both have an interest in literature, which not just becomes their common topic, but increase favourable impression of each other. Additionally, both of them are sincere, frank generous and charitable, and also compatible and complementary in each other's personalities. Professor Bhaer is modest and patient for she is economically free and chooses her destiny to be a good mother without giving up her artistic talent; she also shares everything with her husband. Their marriage sets on the foundation of mutual understanding and trust. In this respect, De Beauvoir says, "If the man is scrupulously well-intentioned, lovers and spouses can attain perfect equality in undemanding generosity. Sometimes the man himself plays the role of devoted servant."¹¹⁹

Alcott's novel *little women* mirrors the fight of the March sisters and their struggle. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy must either choose between their artistic aspiration and domesticity or come to a way to balance and adjust the two at the same time. Meg and Beth choose the role of homemaker; Beth believes in the domesticity of women and housekeeping. She sacrifices for domesticity and works hard and takes care of everything and everyone. She admits, "I couldn't seem to imagine myself anything but stupid little Beth, trotting about at home, of no use anywhere but there. Stay at home safe with father and mother, and help take care of the family."¹²⁰ women like Beth find great satisfaction, happiness and comfort in the household, for it is an important gender role that makes her happy and proud. de Beauvoir asserts that, "She must have hold an important place in the household and enjoyed some authority."¹²¹ The pride of Beth is seen in her working in kitchen, trying to satisfy every member of the family. Beth can be considered as among those women who might believe in the truthfulness of the values that are imposed at her time. For de Beauvoir's view it is the

myths and false story that consigned women to a secondary role, at which they are made to accept and to be certain of the benefits and advantages they may come from marriage and not working outside. De Beauvoir hopes that these myths will disappear someday. “Those women who are not threatened by their fellow men are far more likely to recognize woman as a reasons, they can hardly be blamed for not wanting to sacrifice all the benefits they derive from myth; Counterpart, but even for them the myth of women, of the other, remains precious for many.”¹²²

Another character who believes in the domesticity of woman is Meg March, Marmee advises Meg and Jo to “Better be happy old maids than unhappy wives.”¹⁰⁰ Marmee offers marriage as an option to her daughter, but in her mind, it should never be the only option. As Meg chooses to marry, Marmee advises her to seek a balance between herself and her husband. She encourages Meg to include John in domestic responsibilities, especially when it has relation with their twins, yet she also asks Meg to involve herself in John’s sphere. She advises her, “Don’t shut yourself up in a bandbox because you are a woman, but understand what is going on, and educate yourself to take your part in the world’s work, for it all affects you and yours.”¹²³

For “Meg, domestic balance is easier said than done. When she attempts to apply Marmee’s advice, she loses interest, to ask intelligent questions, and keep her thoughts from wandering from the state of the nation to the state of her bonnet. In her secret soul, however, she decided that politics were as bad as mathematics... but she kept these feminine ideas to herself”¹²⁴

Meg embodies the passive women. She chooses the domestic life. Her husband tells Meg that he will earn the money and that she must only sit and wait. In this sense, de Beauvoir asserts that false stories or myths have been constructed to justify treating women as second. For her, many mythical legends and stories have been created by man to dominate woman in very subtle ways. She writes, “Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse. Men need not to

bother themselves with alleviating the pains and the burdens that physiologically are women's lot."¹²⁵

Marmee's reformist instruction has prepared her domestic experience, even if Meg chooses to maintain traditional gender roles in her home. Contrary to Meg, Jo defies traditional gender roles that are imposed by the social norms. For instance, when Laurie proposes that they escape to Washington together, Jo craves to take him up on his offer but quickly realises the unsuitability of a young unmarried woman to have a long walk with a young man. Jo complains, "If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capital time, but as am a miserable girl, I must be proper, and stop at home."¹²⁶

Here, she nearly appears to renounce herself to a domestic destiny, but as she begins her writing career. Jo takes great comfort in the knowledge that she could provide and afford her own desire. Jo even tries to advise and convinces her sister Meg to assume her feminist position. For the first part of *Little Women*, Jo strongly opposes marriage for herself and her sisters and insists on having her independence, but by the second part of the novel, Jo's perspective begins to change.

To conclude, we can say that Sophy's character in Mr. Harrison's Confessions can be seen as an ideal woman, for her sacrifice and hard working to support her family. As far as Alcott novel is concerned we can say that Joe March has shown her rejection to the patriarchal cultural values of her society. She has succeeded to make a balance in pursuing her career and sharing the house tasks with her husband, therefore she presents the ideal woman for de Beauvoir's view.

End-notes

- ¹⁰³. Addad, Lamia. From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O'Neill's *Morning Becomes Electra* (1931), *Desire under The Elms* (1924) and Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl* (1912), p16.
- ¹⁰⁴. Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" Oxford University Press 1990. P. 340.
- ¹⁰⁵. Ibid., p. 341.
- ¹⁰⁶. De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *The Second Sex*, p.
- ¹⁰⁷. Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" P322.
- ¹⁰⁸. Ibid., p324.
- ¹⁰⁹. Ibid., p301-302.
- ¹¹⁰. Ibid., p308.
- ¹¹¹. Ibid., 310.
- ¹¹². De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *The Second Sex*, P64.
- ¹¹³. Wain, John. "The Oxford Library of Short Novels" P311.
- ¹¹⁴. De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *The Second Sex*, P97.
- ¹¹⁵. Brieske, Victoria. "The Golden Heroine: An Analysis of The Domestic Heroine in Golden Age Children's literature." Thesis, Texas State University, 2017, p25.
- ¹¹⁶. Alcott, Louisa. *Little Women* 1992. Great Britain : Penguin popular Classics, 1994, p 92.
- ¹¹⁷. Laire, Delphine. "Little Women, a Feminist Study". Diss. Ghent University, 2008-2009, p20.
- ¹¹⁸. Wester, Bethany. "At Home We Work Together: Domestic Feminism And Patriarchy in *Little Women*." Thesis, Florida State University, 2005, p34.
- ¹¹⁹. Addad, Lamia. "From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O'Neill's *Morning Becomes Electra* (1931), *Desire under The Elms* (1924) and Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl* (1912)". Diss. University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou, 2018, p37.
- ¹²⁰. Alcott, Louisa. *Little Women*, London, 1872. p 354.
- ¹²¹. De Beauvoir, Simone (1949), *The Second Sex*, New York : Random House, Inc. 2009, P127.
- ¹²². Ibid., 34.
- ¹²³. Wester, Bethany. "At Home We Work Together: Domestic Feminism And Patriarchy in *Little Women*", p38.
- ¹²⁴. Ibid., 39.
- ¹²⁵. Ibid., 39.
- ¹²⁶. Ibid., 39.

General Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation that whose title is “Gender and Feminist Issues in Elisabeth Gaskell’s *Mr. Harrison’s Confessions* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, is to highlight the author’s point of view on how women are portrayed in the two novels during that time by focusing on their status in society, their roles and the issues that concerns them as: the household, marriage; motherhood and so on. Our dissertation has dealt with gender and how the female characters reacted to the patriarchal dominance and oppression.

We have relied on de Beauvoir’s theory as developed in ‘*The Second Sex*’. The theory helped us deepen up our knowledge on gender roles. After analysing the two works, we have come to conclude that the difficulty women faced when they tried to assert themselves as individual and their struggling against the patriarchal society is a notable and a dominant theme in literature.

The discussion of this dissertation has dealt with three chapters for both novels, thus, the first chapter that is; *Masculine Manifold Oppression*, which is concerned with women’s oppression , as a result, It has been deduced that women are holding the second position, oppressed by patriarchal society then, we have a second chapter which is *Economic independence toward Transcendence*, where we have spoken about some female characters who have made efforts in order to regain and acquire their position similar to that of man. Lastly, we have also a third chapter which is *Myths and Mothering*. It has been concluded that Jo as a female protagonist has regained and acquired her position similar to that of man; being free and equal to man after defying society’s norms and values that are imposed to women restricting them to house confinement. She is then a good example of hard working and perseverance .As far as Mr.Harrison’s novella is concerned some of female character have reached the goal of being equal to men .

Bibliography

Primary sources

- Alcott, Louisa. *Little Women*1992.Great Britain :Penguin popular Classics, 1994.

Secondary sources

Theory

- De Beauvoir, Simone(1949), *The Second Sex*, New York :Random House, Inc.2009.

Journal Articles and Dissertation

-Addad, Lamia".From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O'Neill's Morning Electra(1931), Desire under The Elms (1924)and Willa Cather's The Bohemian Girl(1912)".Diss.Univeversity of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-Ouzou.

- Anne,Kelly."Beyond The Independent Woman: A Reading of Simone de Beauvoir's when Things of The spirit Come First With The Second Sex."Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2018.

- Bedrani, *GHalia*.*The Representation of The Other (The Poor and Women)in Elisabeth Gaskell's North and South*.Diss.Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi- Ouzou, 2010-2011.

- Bender,"Clare. Gender stereotyping in Little Women:let Us Be Elegant or Die!"Diss.University of Northenwestern-st.Paul.

- Brook , Jessica Green."A Woman's Legacy:An Analysis of Feminist Themes in the Work of Louisa May Alcott".Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2000.

- Brieske, Victoria." The Golden Heroine:An Analysis of The Domestic Heroine in Golden Age Children's literature."Thesis, Texas State University, 2017.

- Day, Jennifer."Simone de Beauvoir's Transcendence and Immanence in the Twenty First Century: The Tension between Career and Motherhood". Simon Frazer University, British Columbia.

- Drucker, Michel. « Qui était Simone de Beauvoir3 ?1975.YouTube Video , 27 :45.Posted [January 2018] .

- Khelifa Arezki Katia Mahmoudi, "American Women of The Colonial Period and the nineteenth Century city :In Judith Sargent Murray's On the Equality of sexes, Edith Wharton's Roman Fever and Hamlin Garland's Mrs.Ripley's Trip", 2:2013.

- Laire, Delphine."Little Women, a Feminist Study".Diss.Ghent University ,2008-2009.
- Lamara, Samiha .*A Portrayal of Women during The Nineteenth Century in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*.Diss.University of Biskra, 2015.
- Marguire,Laura."SimonedeBeauvoir."StanfordUniversity,29,feb2016.
- Mattisson, Jane.The Path to Jo's Self-Realization in Little Women and Good Wives .Diss.Kristianstad University, 2010.
- Ramteke, Megha."An interaction between Gender and Class in Elisabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton: Asocialist Feminist Study".An International journal in English vol2, Issue4.
- Sanders, Valerie."Harriet Martineau and Elisabeth Gaskell."The Gaskell Society journal 16(2002):64-75.Accessed February7 , 2020.
- Uhlig, Louise el. »The Institution of Marriage. »Thesis , Roskilde University, 2014.
- Wester, Bethany."At Home We Work Together: Domestic Feminism And Patriarchy in Little Women", p39.