

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the general description of the paper. It consists of research background, statement of problem, research objective, research significance, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

One of English classic literary works is Louisa May Alcott's phenomenal fiction *Little Women* which has been translated into fifteen languages and adapted into various art namely silent films, feature films, Broadway, drama, TV-series and anime either with the same title or different title yet the characters and plot are still inspired by the novel. When first published this novel sold out two thousand copies in two weeks then the publisher suggested Alcott to write the sequel following the great selling of the first part. In 2018 Anne Boyd Rioux wrote a new book with the title *Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy*, in which she examines the cultural significance of Alcott's most popular work.

Rioux says she was surprised by “the incredibly widespread impact that the book has had on women writers, in particular.” The most flamboyant character in *Little Women*, the hot-tempered and ambitious Jo March, aspires to be a writer and is an autonomous spirit like Alcott (George, 2018). Acocella also states that the world Alcott had made has inspired the generation of female writers (Acocelle, 2018), Susan Sontag (in Acocelle, 2018) states she would never become a writer without the

example of Jo March. J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter's universe author, for her, Jo had inspired her in her writing career, she found herself in Jo March as she was a very plain-bookworm little girl and was ambitious to be a writer, same goes to Jo in the novel (John, 2011).

The previous review shows that Jo's character has a strong influence on the life of the novel so that it can influence the reader especially to be inspired to become a writer whose works are currently popular all over the world. Apart from being inspiring as a writer, Jo also has inspirational behavior. Simone de Beauvoir always took the role of Jo when she played "Little Women" games with her sister, for her she was too like Jo that she would be superior and find her place (Acocella, 2018). The character Jo is considered to have a strong and dominant personality so that the reader idolizes and imitates Jo March's behavior.

Actually this novel has four main characters who are all girls with different dreams for the future, Meg the first daughter always dream to have a wealthy life that she can live happily with her future family and wear beautiful dresses, Jo the second daughter was wishing to be a successful writer that in her teens she had wrote short stories and about to published a novel. The third daughter is Beth who is passionate about being a musician and she really likes to play piano. The last daughter is Amy who is talented in art and is dreaming to be a famous painter. Each character has a different character whose behavior can influence other characters in the novel. The reader also can take good moral lessons and be inspired by the characters in the novel as described in the previous paragraph.

The main issue in the *Little Women* novel is the woman's struggle between familial duty and personal growth. Alcott challenged society's definition of stereotypical gender roles and pushed the boundaries of expectations that were placed on both men and women to conform to society's standards (Bender, 2017). Parker (2017) depicts the difference of gender results in stereotypes of men and women, where men in society are expected to have masculine traits like bold, aggressive and strong, meanwhile women are expected to have feminine characteristics such as polite, nurturing, and empathetic. In terms of gender differences, especially differences in roles, there is often inequality or marginalization from men to women which places men over women so that men are superior and women are inferior. This inequality views women as subordinated to men because the stereotypes which see women as weak, need protection from men, spoiled, not independent, emotional and so on.

Various issues regarding gender are studied in various fields of knowledge including literature. Literary studies on gender also have their own place, namely criticism of feminism which generally talks about the struggle for women's rights, and the resistance they put forth so that they become tougher, respected and can get the same opportunities as men. Basically the feminist movement fights for women's rights which have always been positioned below men.

The feminist movement has always campaigned for women's domestic rights as a society, such as the right to education, the right to vote, the right to have a job

and decent wages equal to men. Feminists try to protect women from crimes and violence that might befall them, protect women from sexual harassment, oppression because they are considered weak, even domestic violence (Echols, 1989). In general, the feminist movement focuses on women only, but some feminists argue that men's liberation is included in the aims of feminism to liberate them from traditional gender roles that harm them (Hooks, 2000).

The issue of feminism often becomes a topic inserted in the genre of literary works, one of which is fiction. Fiction especially novels have various topics and issues raised in them, the fictional stories presented in the novel cannot be denied, there is inspiration from real life. Novels have various genres based on the types, one of the genres is an inspirational novel. An inspirational novel is a novel which is generally describing stories related to the journey of life and various things that can inspire the reader. Novels with inspirational genres usually contain moral values that influence the reader to reflect and wisely take every action in life. With meaningful stories, it can make the reader realize how valuable family, friendship, education and even the smallest effort that has been made in life. The inspiration can be taken from the intrinsic elements especially from the characters and their characterization.

Characters in novel have a greater variety as Abrams (2014) defined Characters are the people depicted in a dramatic or narrative work who the reader interprets as having specific moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities based on what they say and how they say it in the dialogue as well as what they do in the

action. The reader may infer anything from the characters' thoughts, habits, and personalities by interpreting the sentence to mean that the characters are people who participate in a story and have each other's personalities. Characters can be said as the important part of a story because it can influence how the reader sees the storyline. A character can also be considered as a role model that can influence the thoughts and even the lives of the readers, especially if a character has a strong influence in a story. The characters who are usually idolized by the reader are having unique and critical thinking, not easily surrendered, brave, intelligent, and have a strong personality.

The selected characters in this study are described as women who fight for their dreams and rights as fought by feminists at that time. The struggle of these feminists continues to this day. The rise of the feminist movement gave rise to the concept of the alpha female which gained momentum as feminism developed in the 1980s (Friedan in Sumra 2019). This alpha personality is related to leadership that uses dominant traits (Ward et al, 2009). Knowingly or not, an alpha will have dominance in her group and members obey her. This alpha trait cannot be self-claimed but must be confirmed by members of the group either implicitly or explicitly. This alpha category is also considered good for increasing self-development in dealing with social life as individuals as stated by Ward et al (2009) being an alpha female is related to self-confidence. By having good trust, life will be more enjoyable.

Sira Mas (2022) depicted the alpha female as confident, emotionally independent that has a strong life purpose and does not need anyone to complete their life, and it is closely referred to as a life partner (spouse). At the same time, when it comes to a romantic life they can act soft, warm and being a supportive feminine. The alpha female is also intelligent and an intellectual problem solver. Beyond that, they are minding their looks too because they think that dressing up will increase their power in society.

Historically, the term and concept of alpha female was used in the realm of animals' behavior study which distinguished the behavior of male and female wolves and concluded that male has the alpha (dominant) trait for the group. Through the time, this term moved out into the field of primatology which found that the females also have the dominant trait in their group, the female primate. The term then expanded and picked up by popular fictions and literature that twisted and morphed into the areas of feminist discourse and popular media (Sumra, 2019:8).

Discussing feminist discourse which is one of the stages where the term alpha female is used, this notion is mostly talking about the life of women. It is stating that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. The feminist movement was originally used to fight slavery and the liberation of women's right to vote in America. A century later, this movement became the inspiration for various countries to carry out similar movements, namely eliminating slavery and

colonialism. Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) as one of feminist theorists teaches that women should be educated and should be realistic in dealing with life.

From the explanation above about the concept and definition of alpha female that was delivered by various authors and also the brief explanation about feminism theory, it can be seen that there is a correlation between alpha female and feminist that these concepts have similar opinions about females. Where the feminist discourse and what they struggle corresponds to the characteristics of alpha female as Winoto states in Utama (2022) the characteristics of alpha female are intelligent, confident, independent, spirited leadership, inspiring, can influence people around them and bring change to society.

The description mentioned above encourages the researcher to conduct research on what are the factors making a woman an alpha female and how the female characters in *Little Women* represent the alpha female characters. In the novel indeed there are male characters, however, this research is focusing on female characters only for the reason the novel used is highlighting the life of the female characters. In conducting this research, the researcher is indeed inspired by previous studies that had been done before. The previous studies have their own differences yet still have similar discussion and relate to this research.

The first study entitles An Analysis of the Main Character through Feminism Approach in the novel Lucia, Lucia by Andriana Trigiani (By Nur Atiqah Anggawasita in 2010). The writer analyzed how Lucia Sartori, the main character,

struggled for equality and wanted to live independently by her own effort by applying feminist theory by Soenarjati Djajanegara, Sugihastuti, and Suharto. Then as the conclusion, the researcher concludes that Lucia Sartori is a character who represents feminism values by being an independent, educated, decisive and obstinate woman. This research was taken because the discussion is relatable with the research topic about a considered strong women as the main character.

The second study is *The Characterization and The Impact of Social Problems to the Characterization of Hero and Villain characters in Mulan (2020)* by Niki Caro, an undergraduate thesis by Nurkorida Aeni in 2022. This previous research applied the theory of social problem and characterization theory by Petrie and Boggs to analyze how the social problems that include social institutions and tradition can affect the characters characterization in the film. The main character lives in a society that is still patriarchy and sees women as weak and inferior. The result of this study shows that social problems have a significant impact for the formation of hero and villain characterization. This research seems relatable to the research topics in analyzing how society affects the characteristics of the character of *Little Women* novel.

The third study is *Feminism Analysis in Austen's Novel "Pride and Prejudice"* by Ni Made Diastuti in 2014. A journal that intends to find the feminism issues in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* and the effects of feminism issues that are experienced by the main character, the study applied feminism theory by Langerman and

Brantley. The results of this study are findings from issues of feminism due to gender inequality which can be seen from the inheritance rights system which is limited to male heirs and the issue of the lack of opportunities for women to actualize themselves. From the actions taken by the main character in dealing with gender inequality, the main character has succeeded in calling for Liberal Feminism that supports gender equality. This research journal is considered relatable to the research topics where it is analyzing the feminism value of the story that corresponds to the characteristic of alpha female, as the main discussion of this research.

Different from some previous studies, this research is intended to show what values can be taken and can be useful in life, especially in matters relating to social life. This research focuses on the characterization of female characters who represent alpha female characters. Based on what has been described, the author determines the title for this research is **Representation of Alpha Female In March Sisters in Louisa May Alcott's Novel *Little Women*** to find out how the characteristics of alpha female are shown in March Sisters characters.

1.2 Statement of Problem

According to the nature of the alpha female concept that was depicted in the research background above, the concept slightly showing the characters in *Little Women* have some characteristics of alpha female. Back to the background of the novel which was written in the 19th century, at that time women were judged to only

be able to work in taking care of household matters and did not get the same rights as men at that time. Due to the stereotypes that prevailed at that time, several groups of people, one of which was the March family where they were blessed with four daughters, tried to fight for the same rights as men, where a concrete example is that they prioritize education and improve their respective skills. Those factors, the object and the topic research, seems to have a correlation in portraying the characteristics of women. Hence, from the background of this research above, the researcher concluded that there are two questions that will be the main focuses on this research:

1. How do March Sisters in the *Little Women* novel represent the alpha female characters?
2. What factors of March Sisters have the alpha female characteristics?

1.3 Research Purposes

Based on the formulation of the research question above, the researcher is intended:

1. To find out how the March Sisters in the *Little Women* novel represent the alpha female characters.
2. To analyze what factors of March Sisters have the alpha female characteristics.

1.4 Research Significance

Theoretically this research can provide several benefits to the readers in analyzing literary works especially novels. This research is providing an analysis of characters using the concept of alpha female. To strengthen the arguments, the theory of feminism is applied in this research since the characters that are being analyzed are women who are psychologically strong and passionate. Thus, this research is able to be used as a reference in another research which analyzed novels either using one theory or combining several theories especially about feminism.

For the academic reader, this research is expected to be useful and the reader could have many insights. Not only insights but also the reader will find combined theory and concept that can be used to analyze a novel, not only focuses on the intrinsic elements of a literary work but also a literary work can be criticized by various theories that suit the problems in a literary work especially novel.

For the general reader, this research is expected to give insight and moral lessons about self-development, because there is a discussion about the characteristics of alpha females (that also can happen to men). Moreover, this research is also expected to be an inspiration for people to have a strong personality and to be independent.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

These definitions of key terms are made intent to avoid misperception from the terms used in this research.

Representation: According to the dictionary, representation is the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature. It is can be defined as something that reflect another similar thing

Alpha Female: Alpha female is a category of females that are considered dominant, independent, and have a strong personality.

Novel: Novel is one of a literary genre in the form of prose, it is generally fiction stories that can be both pure fiction or inspired by true events. The novel itself has several genres and types.

Little Women: Little Women is one of English classic novels, it was written by Louisa May Alcott in 1886. The novel tells a story about the life of girls in their teenage life until their early adulthood, it was set in the 1800s century after the American Civil War.

March Sisters: March sisters are girl characters in the novel *Little Women*, they are Margaret March (Meg), Josephine March (Jo), Elizabeth March (Beth) and Amy March (Amy). The term March Sisters used by the researcher to simplify the designations of the selected figures analyzed in this study