EBook-No. 37106

Anatomy of an American Classic: Little Women

A metadata-driven review of Louisa May Alcott's enduring masterpiece.

Author: Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888)
Illustrator: Frank T. Merrill (1848-1923)
Original Publication: 1868-1869

A 150-Year-Old Novel with Massive Modern Demand

1868–1869
Initial publication of the coming-of-age story.

Aug 16, 2011
Digital release into the Project Gutenberg archive.

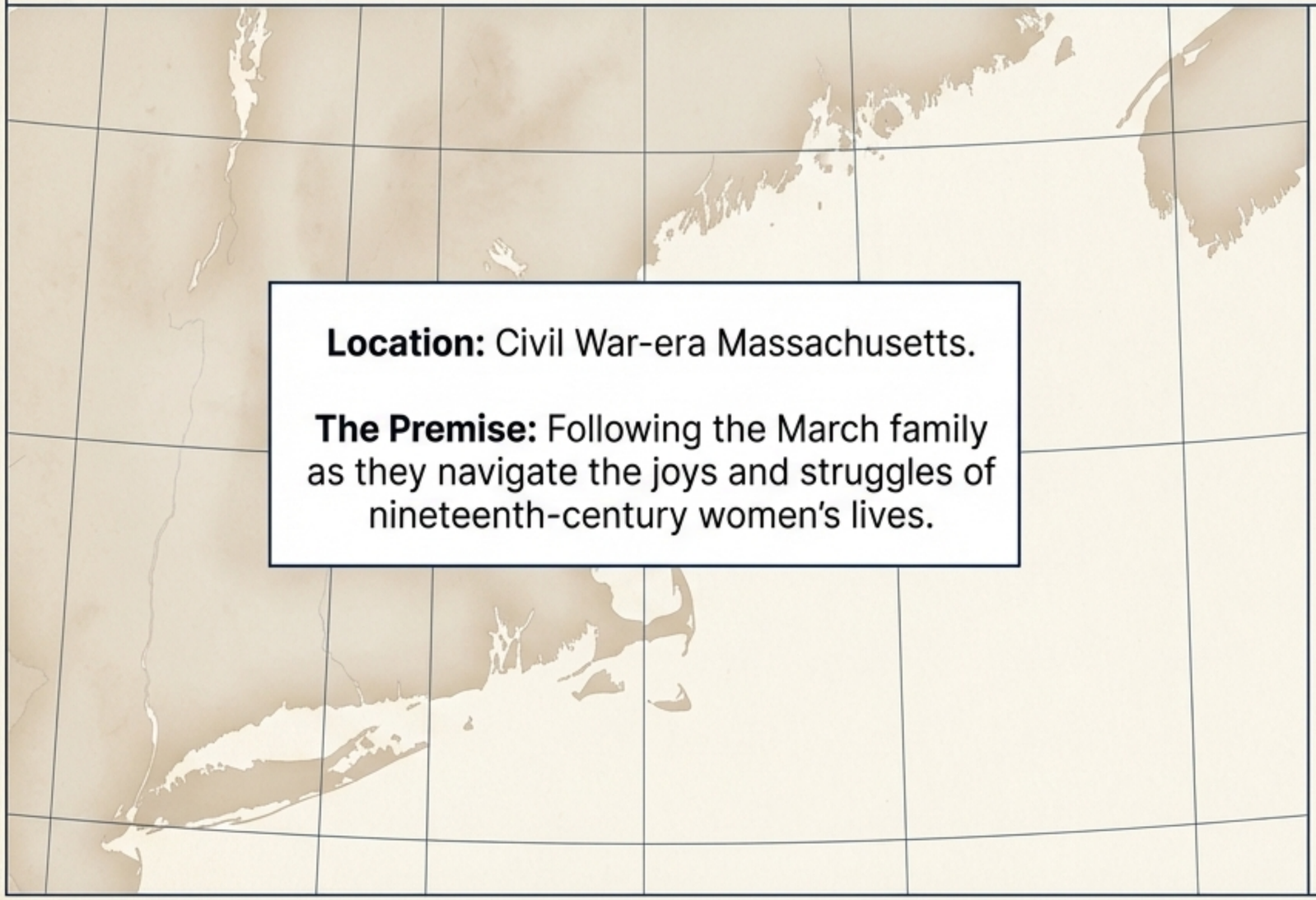
Sep 24, 2025
Most recent digital update.

47,927

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Despite being published over a century and a half ago, the novel maintains a remarkable velocity of readership, proving its status as an enduring pillar of American literature.

A Coming-of-Age Story Grounded in Reality



Location: Civil War-era Massachusetts.

The Premise: Following the March family as they navigate the joys and struggles of nineteenth-century women's lives.

LoC Subject: Autobiographical Fiction

The narrative framework is loosely based on Louisa May Alcott's own family, lending authentic weight to the domestic struggles and triumphs depicted in the text.

LoC Subject: Family life -- New England -- Fiction

Four Sisters, Four Aspects of American Womanhood

Meg

The traditionalist, representing societal expectations and the domestic ideal.

Jo

The ambitious writer, representing independence, intellect, and the pursuit of work.

Beth

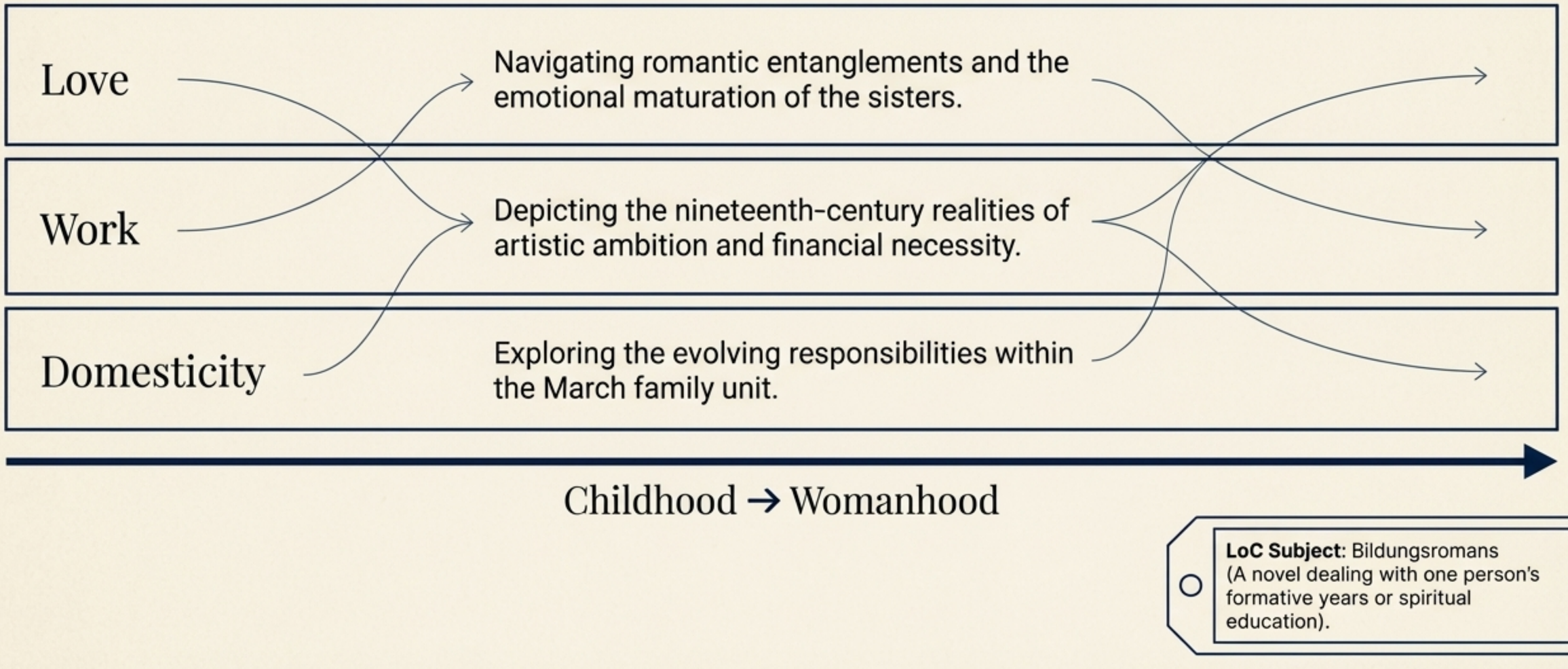
The peacemaker, representing quiet devotion, empathy, and family bonds.

Amy

The pragmatist, representing artistic sensibility and social navigation.

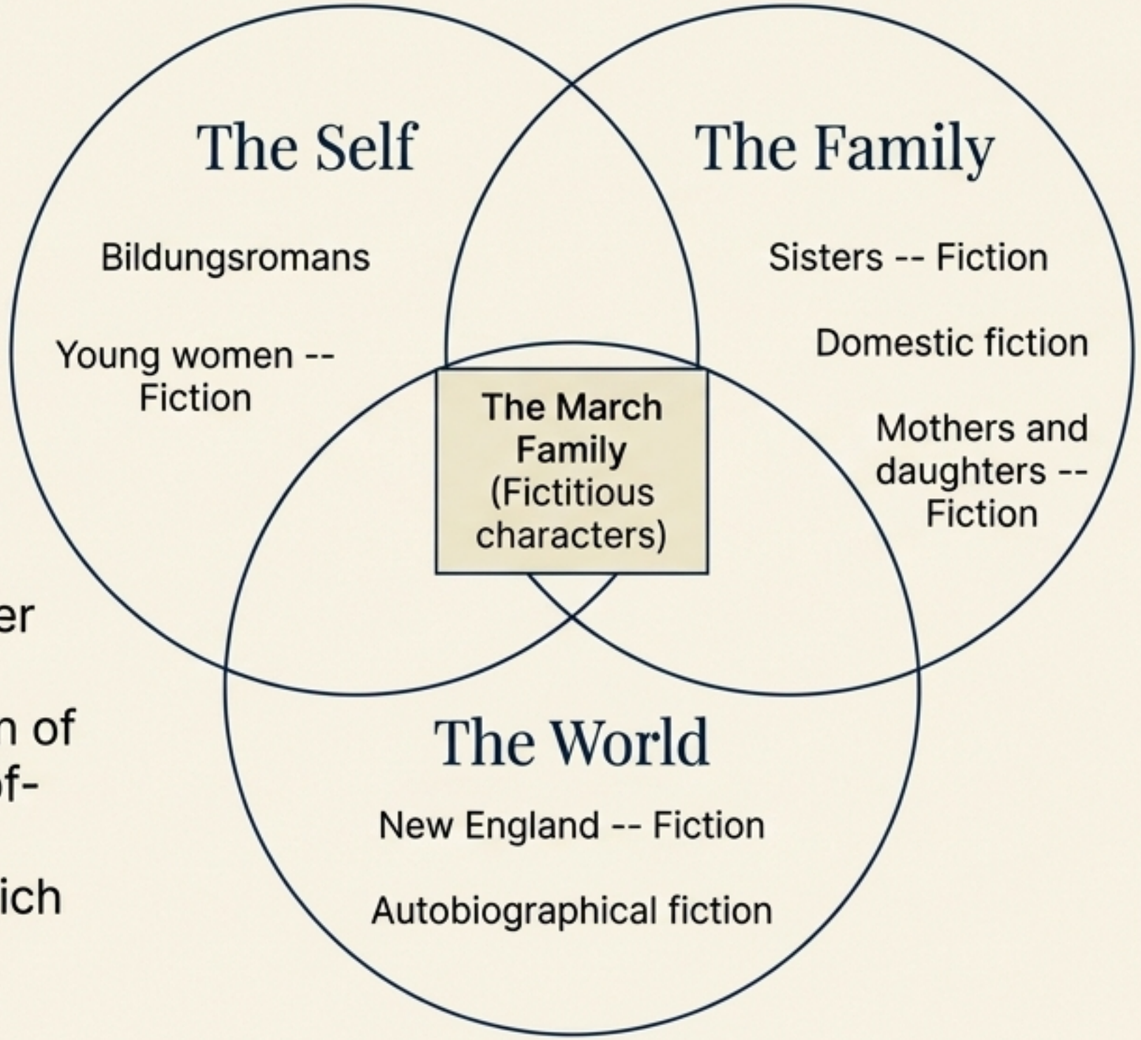
Together, the March sisters embody the diverse and shifting aspects of young American womanhood during a period of national upheaval.

The Architecture of a Bildungsroman



LoC Subject: Bildungsromans
(A novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education).

The Literary DNA: A Synthesis of Genres



The novel's enduring power stems from its unique position at the intersection of deeply personal coming-of-age narratives, detailed domestic spheres, and a rich regional backdrop.

LoC Classes PZ (Juvenile belles lettres) & PS (American literature).

The Verdict: Deep Themes, Approachable Text



Flesch Reading Ease Score

7th Grade Level: Fairly easy to read.

Digital Access Grid

Status: Public domain in the USA. Always free via Project Gutenberg.

EPUB (16.1 MB with images)	Kindle (14.2 MB)	Plain Text UTF-8 (1.1 MB)	HTML Zip (15.9 MB)

Little Women merges complex explorations of nineteenth-century life with a highly approachable reading level. Supported by meticulous digitization from the Online Distributed Proofreading Team, it remains an essential, zero-friction entry point into classic American literature.