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**Contradictions Between Thought and
Action as a Source of Tension in Louisa
M. Alcott's *Little Women***

The plot of *Little Women* is not particularly memorable because it deals with day-to-day routines in the lives of five women.ⁱ The character, Jo March, on the other hand, is highly memorable because of the contradictions between her expressed wishes and ideas and her actual actions. This essay argues that these contradictions create a tension that stimulates the reader's interest. To demonstrate this, two categories will be investigated: gender and worldly interests. The main contradictions discussed here are Jo's initial refusal but ultimate acceptance of her female identity; her initial rejection of but ultimate yearning for love and marriage; the financial gain versus the artistic value of writing; her love of money and expressed admiration for poverty; her rejection of favors but ultimate acceptance of these.

Tension is here defined as "the conflict created by interplay of the constituent elements of a work of art" (Tate, 72). In addition, contradictions are generally regarded as signs of tension, i.e. "two elements, each of which defines the other and has logical connectives, are connected by the forces" (Empson, 235). In this essay, tension is discussed in terms of contradictions and their consequences.

Previous research on Jo has focused on her character,ⁱⁱ it argues that she is un-ladylike. Biographical Criticsⁱⁱⁱ argue that Jo reflects Alcott's attitude toward art and family. Besides, New Critics^{iv} have focused on how Jo confronts with her social inadequacies. For this essay, it focuses on the tension, which is produced by contradictions. With the aid of New Criticism, this essay demonstrates how contradictions between thought and actual action create tension in *Little Women*.

Jo March is the first character to appear in the novel; she is also the protagonist. It is Jo's characteristic that "most persuade[s] her fans that she, rather than any of her sisters, is the most compelling site of readerly identification" (Foote, 74). It is primarily Jo's unladylike tendencies that distinguish her from her sisters: she is a tomboy, she likes boys' games and

even dreams of being a boy. Jo's behaviour leads readers to expect that Jo does not want to be a girl but her actual action belies the expectation.

The first contradiction to be discussed here is that Jo's initial refusal but her ultimate acceptance of her female identity. Female identity in this essay refers to the qualities of a female, and incorporates five aspects: her attitude to married life, the conventions of women's behavior at the time, the ability to carry out household chores, dressmaking and concern with having a feminine appearance. Because of the inconsistency in Jo's speech and action produces tension, readers will keep close watch over her change in the reading process, then find out what kind of woman Jo will be.

Jo declares her dissatisfaction with her female identity by saying "I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, ...and look as prim as a China aster!" (Alcott, 5). In Jo's eyes, women at the time^v should be act as passive, meek and graceful as they could; and such conventional women are like statue, they live without their own pursuit, just like a sculpture that stands still. However, Jo does not want to be treated as an adornment, she wants to be a writer. She believes that conventional woman can only "stay at home" (Alcott, 5); and she says that "going abroad" is her most cherished castle in the air (Alcott, 317). She dreams of moving outside the home by means of writing, Jo refuses to become a conventional lady. The verb "hate" in the quotation above shows her negative attitude towards conforming to the social standards of the time. Her strong feeling is emphasized by the use of the exclamation mark.

When Jo's father returns home from the war, he comments that "I don't see the 'son Jo' ...I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug..." (Alcott, 205). Furthermore, her face has grown "gentler", and her voice is "lower"; she does not "bounce" (Alcott, 205). The two sentence quoted above demonstrate that she looks like a lady now. However, Jo is unwilling to change

her behaviour. She promises to change her boyish manners by saying “do [her] duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else” (Alcott, 10) when she receives her father’s letter before the Christmas Day in chapter two. She makes a promise to become a lady only due to the consideration of her “duty”. The noun “duty” indicates the reason of her change, that is, her obedience to her father. Despite her unwillingness, she finally keeps her promise. The two verbs “pins” and “laces” in the example above indicate that Jo dresses like a lady. Also, she no longer whistles, uses slang or lies on the rug. The noun “son” in the sentence quoted above, shows that her father believes that her previous behaviour is quite boyish, and even regards Jo as a boy; but now Jo has clearly become a lady, at least in the eyes of her father.

Jo’s positive attitude toward married life also indicates a desire to come to term with her female identity. When Meg returns home after she spends a fortnight in the Moffats’, Meg has a conversation with her mother and Jo. In this episode, the only sentence Jo says is that “ [t]hen we’ll be old maids’ stoutly” (Alcott, 92). Meg dresses to enjoy the benefits of married life, Meg is just afraid of having no chance to find a good husband. However, Jo only declares that she will not marry concisely; the adverb “stoutly” is an indication of the strength of Jo’s resolution. Jo even thinks that marriage is something belongs to another world “where she could not follow” (Alcott, 91). What Jo wants is to do something splendid (Alcott, 36), she wants to be a spinster. What Jo wants most at that time is to be a writer, to earn money to support herself and to be independent.

However, Jo even begins to look forward to being a wife. Beth’s death promotes Jo’s longing for marriage. After Beth’s death, she feels desperately lonely. Jo observes and is envious of Meg’s happiness as a wife. She discovers that “how much improved her sister Meg [is], how well she could talk, how much she [knows] about good...how happy she [is] in husband and children, and how much they [are] all doing for each other” (Alcott, 397). The four “how”s indicate the extent of Jo’s envy. She expresses a similar feeling in relation to

Amy and Laurie, declaring “How very, very happy they must be” (Alcott, 400). The final chapter of the novel confirms that not only has Jo changed her opinion about marriage, she embrace it to the extent that she is described as “a very happy woman”, whose dreams have come true and whose “greatest wish [has been] so beautifully gratified” (Alcott, 444-447). Jo does not become an adornment (Alcott, 5) as she thinks at the beginning of the novel. Jo’s dream is finally turned into reality through her marriage: she is loved by people around her, becomes a wife; and has her own career, she writes “a good book” as she wishes long time ago, and helps the Professor managing the school and teaches and nurses her boys.

Besides, when the Professor proposes to Jo, she is satisfied with the love the Professor gives her, moreover she thinks about the responsibility that she should take in the family. She says “for woman’s special mission is supposed to be drying tears and bearing burdens” (Alcott, 438). Here, Jo accepts her female identity by sharing responsibility; she is willing to shoulder the responsibility as a wife. “[D]rying tears” indicates that Jo wants to take care of her family. She says the sentence in the quotation above in a “resolute” (Alcott, 438) manner, “resolute” demonstrates that her decision on “giv[ing] up her own hopes, plans and desires, and cheerfully liv[ing] for others” (Alcott, 398) and being a good wife. “[S]pecial mission” emphasizes that she values the responsibility she will takes for family. In this episode, Jo does not mention one word about her previous ambition. She cares more about the devotion to and the family.

Another aspect demonstrating Jo’s acceptance of her female identity is that she learns household skills. Jo expresses that she hates to do housework at the beginning of the novel by saying “I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy...and can only stay at home and knit” (Alcott, 5). Jo shows her negative attitude toward her domestic role that she must stay at home and learns the household skills. Jo recognizes that knitting is a work which belongs to the women’s world, “can” indicates that Jo recognizes that doing housework is the

female's responsibility, such as seamstress. When she recognizes the responsibility she must take on, she "pull[s] off her net", "shak[es] down" her hair, and "[shake]" the sock till the "needles rattled" and "ball bounded" (Alcott, 5). All the verbs in the quotation indicate that Jo is quite unwilling to do her responsibility, and to do housework. "[O]nly" emphasizes her negative attitude toward the household skills. Therefore, Jo expresses her dissatisfaction with the fact that she should learn all kinds of houseskills. Nonetheless, her actual action is quite different from her expression, she learns a lot of houseskills.

Jo possesses several household skills, such as cooking, dressmaking and house cleaning. When their mother says that cooking is an acquired skill or expertise "which no woman should be without" (Alcott, 110), Jo makes up her mind to learn plain cooking during the holiday. She claims that "the next dinner party I have shall be a success" (Alcott, 111). This example demonstrates that Jo accepts her female role by learning some domestic skills. Besides, she is good at keeping house tidy, when she visits Mr. Laurence's for being neighbourly, she says "I'll right it up in two minutes, for it only...so—and...so—and...you're fixed" (Alcott, 46). Jo finishes her cleaning "as she laughed and talked" (Alcott, 46), and this indicates that she spends short time to finish her cleaning, and the short phrase "two minutes" in the quotation above demonstrates that Jo is skilled and proficient in house cleaning, she is quite familiar with the arrangement of all the things.

Except housecleaning, the narrator describes that Jo is "particularly absorbed in dressmaking, and [takes] especial credit to herself because she could use a needle as well as a pen" (Alcott, 266). Jo is good at dressmaking, "absorbed in" indicates that she enjoys dressmaking very much, moreover, she is proud of this household skill, "especial" emphasizes Jo's satisfaction with her dressmaking skill. Because housework is considered as the necessity of domestic rectitude toward female in nineteenth-century,^{vi} and "housework is an expression of the female nature" (Ramirez, 25), housework acquisition is one of qualities

of a female. The acquisition of those housework skills represents Jo has the quality as a female. The possession of household skills is one of the aspects that signals Jo's acceptance of female identity. Concerning with having a feminine appearance will be discussed as the last example to verify her acceptance of female identity.

Pursuing beauty is a female occupation. Because Jo recognizes the importance of appearance, she becomes caring about her beauty, and she makes effort on making herself looked more attractive. Jo's contradictory attitude towards the importance of appearance will be showed by her initial saying that she is indifferent to appearance and her actual action that she makes effort on improving her appearance. Jo's attitude toward appearance is mainly reflected by her attitude toward dress. The definition of dress will be introduced here in order to get a better understanding about what aspects of appearance will be discussed in the next part. "[A]ll the modifications made to the human body and supplements to the body. Using this definition, dress includes a long list of changes to the body which can be either permanent or temporary" (Johnson and Lennon, 1). According to the definition, the next part of this essay directly addresses many different aspects of dress including gloves, hair, clothes.

Jo expresses that she does not care about her appearance in an explicit manner. When Meg and Jo attend a party in Mrs. Gardiner's, Jo says "[t]hen I'll go without [gloves]. I don't care what people say!" (Alcott, 24). This sentence shows that she cares about neither her appearance, nor other people's comments on it. The use of the exclamation mark reinforces Jo's indifferent attitude toward appearance. However, what she does shows that Jo cares about appearance and she thinks that appearance is really an important thing, Jo actual does is completely different from what she says. Her positive attitude towards appearance is seen in her eagerness for a pair of neat gloves. When she sees the nice gloves Laurie is wearing, she "wish[es] she has two neat gloves" (Alcott, 29). Nonetheless, when Meg has a pair of neat gloves, Jo says she can go without. Jo's different reaction to the same situation indicates that

Jo “finds her sartorial model in the opposite sex and decides she can grow up to be a splendid woman with nearly laced boots and clean linen” (Elbert, 205). When Jo encounters with Laurie, she becomes caring about her appearance. Besides, Jo cares about her hair is another important example to demonstrate that she realizes the importance of appearance.

After they arrive at Mrs. Gardiner’s, Jo “give[s] her collar a twitch and her head a hasty brush” (Alcott, 26). Words “hasty” demonstrates Jo’s careless attitude toward her clothes and hair. Jo’s careless attitude toward her appearance testifies that she does not believe appearance is an important thing. Jo claims that she is “the man of the family” (Alcott, 6) and her careless way to treat her hair indicates that Jo’s lack of vanity about her hair and her appearance.

However, when Jo prepares to attend the party, she has “nineteen hairpins...which [is] not exactly comfortable” (Alcott, 25). The noun “nineteen hairpins” indicates that she really wants to make her hair more tidy and attractive, and “exactly” shows that Jo feels uncomfortable when she wears so many hairpins but she wears them. This example shows that she is concerned about whether she looks elegant or not. She even says that “[L]et us be elegant or die!” (Alcott, 25), “elegant” is related to the appearance, and “die” is associated with one’s life. She regards her appearance as important as her life. The exclamation mark implies that Jo’s strong desire of pursuing the appearance. Jo’s concerning with her hair is exemplified when she “hope[s] no one would pass by till she [is] tidy again” (Alcott, 142). “[T]ill” underlines that she does not want to people to see her untidy, topsy-turvy and unladylike appearance. Furthermore, when she cuts her hair for money, she “assume[s] an indifferent air”, but she “bursts out” in bed for her hair at night (Alcott, 152). She is eager to do something to help her father, so she sacrifices her hair. “[B]urst out” means she feels sad about her hair because she likes her hair very much; Jo actually cares about her hair and beauty, although she pretends that she does not care about her hair.

Jo realizes that beautiful clothes are important thing for women. This realization also can be considered as the example, which testifies her acceptance of female identity. When they go to Camp Laurence, Meg asks Jo not to wear the awful hat, but Jo replies “I just will...and I don’t mind...if I’m comfortable” (Alcott, 115). Although Jo knows it is ugly, she insists on wearing that hat. “[D]on’t mind” shows that Jo shows a total disregard for other people’s opinion. Compared with beautiful clothes, Jo likes comfortable clothes more. The example cited above shows that Jo does not think appearance is an important thing, which deserves much attention. A similar example is when Jo and Amy visit their neighbours (Alcott, 266), Jo claims that “[if] people care more for my clothes than they do for me, I don’t wish to see them” (Alcott, 266). Although Jo shows her disdain for those who judge people by appearance, she still dresses her best clothes. Jo thinks that “I’m perfectly miserable; but if you consider me presentable, I die happy” (Alcott, 267). It is Amy who tells Jo the fact that beautiful clothes will please other people. Of course, Jo is so proud that she does not really want to please other people, and that is why she destroys her every calling. Jo learns a lesson that appearance as well as pleasing other people is an important thing; so she says that “I’ll take a leaf out of [Amy’s] book” (Alcott, 285) when Aunt Carrol takes Amy, instead of Jo, to travel for company.

Jo learns that clothes is a useful tool for women also can be exemplified when Jo visits the editor of the *Weekly Volcano*, “she dress[es] herself in her best” (Alcott, 317). “[B]est” indicates that she dresses up in an effort to make a good impression. She learns the importance of appearance clearly when she goes to New York, moreover, she even “[has] a womanly instinct that clothes possess an influence more powerful over many than the worth of character...” (Alcott, 317). This example indicates that she thinks highly of appearance now because she understands that clothes are important if she is to be successful in her career. “[P]owerful” means that she considers clothes as a powerful tool, which can help her to sell

her stories. All the description cited above analyze the contradiction between her initial refusal but ultimate acceptance of her female identity.

As Jo's acceptance of her female identity, her attitude toward love and marriage also changes. Her acceptance of her female identity enables her to recognize that she does need love and marriage. In the next part of this essay, Jo's initial rejection of but ultimate yearning for love and marriage will be demonstrated by selected examples.

Jo regards love as something "ridiculous" (Alcott, 141), and thinks romantic love is "horrid" (Alcott, 141). Those two adjectives in the quotation indicate Jo's negative attitude to love. Jo expresses the same feeling when Jo's overdeveloped imagination leads her to think that Beth falls in love with Laurie, she says "I'm the only one that has sense enough to keep out of mischief" (Alcott, 298). Instead of feeling happy and blessed, she thinks that Meg's marriage and being a mother and Beth's love affair are the source of trouble and difficulty. As Jo labels herself as rational girl, "sense" indicates that Jo believes that she keeps herself out of love and marriage is a sensible and practical decision. Just like Laurie's comment on Jo that "[y]ou won't show the soft side of your character" (Alcott, 230). Jo neither shows her love to anybody, nor wants anybody to love her. She thinks that she has no time to waste on such "nonsense" (Alcott, 230), she wants to be a writer, and earns money. For Jo, she thinks that love and marriage is a waste of time, so she never thinks about marriage.

Jo is eager to be loved when Amy marries Laurie. "[T]he hungry longing for some one to 'love with heart and soul', and cling to while God let them be together" (Alcott, 401). She wants to love someone with her complete energy and enthusiasm, just as the narrator describes "love with heart and soul" (Alcott, 401). Jo's prolonged unfulfilled desire for wanting to love someone is revealed by the phrase "longing for", and her eager needing for love is emphasized by "hungry". She wants to "cling to" someone, this indicates she wants to love, depend on and stay close to someone all the time. What is more, "while God let them"

indicates that nobody can stop her resolution to do so, except God. Her determination is revealed, she now dreams to fall in love with someone.

Jo needs love and marriage to keep her out of loneliness. Beth's death evokes Jo's feeling of loneliness. Jo longs to be loved, so she says "...I *am* lonely... I might have said 'Yes,' not because I love him anymore, but because I care more to be loved than...(Alcott, 400)". The italicized word "am" emphasizes the situation she now lives, that is, she "care[s] more" to be loved. She yearns the love, which Laurie gives her in the past time, so she is willing to accept Laurie's proposal if Laurie would try again even if she knows clearly that Laurie's love is not suitable for her. Moreover, Jo envies Amy's love. "Truly, love does work miracles. How very, very happy they must be!" (Alcott, 400). She describes Amy's happiness by using "must be", which demonstrates that she is quite envious of Amy's happiness, she believes that Amy's happiness comes from Amy's married life. Jo thirsts for love and marriage, she is in need of happiness, and she needs a companion. Contrasted with her previous attitude toward love, i.e. love is a ridiculous thing; her present attitude is completely different.

Besides, Jo's ultimate attitude towards marriage also differentiates from her initial claim. At first, Jo is disapproving of marriage. In the chapter "Secrets", she cries that she does not want to grow up because she wants to keep her tomboy style, and does not want to get married, to be a conventional and submissive woman. "Jo March knew very well what she mourned: the intact family of her childhood and the freedom to behave according to her nature rather than to a prescribed code for her sex" (MacLeod, 26). Jo does not want Meg to get married, she wants to keep the family intact. Jo believes that marriage will take her sister away, and break up her family. Jo joins in her sister's wedding with "wistful eyes", because Jo does not approve of Meg's marriage, Jo believes that it is Meg's marriage that leads to their departure.

Nonetheless, Jo even exclaims that “[m]arriage is an excellent thing, after all” (Alcott, 397), she adopts a positive attitude toward the marriage. The adjective “excellent” in the quotation demonstrates her contradictory attitude, she believes that marriage is an exceptionally good and extremely meritorious thing now. “[H]ow much she [knows] about good, womanly impulses, thoughts, and feelings, how happy she was...”(Alcott, 397). Meg’s happiness evokes Jo’s eagerness of marriage. Jo even expresses her wish that she wants to experience married life. “I wonder if I should blossom out half as well as you have, if i tried it” (Alcott, 397). “[W]onder” indicates that she even has the idea of wanting to get married. Jo is full of praise for the marriage; in addition, she even begins to look forward to marriage.

When it comes to marriage, Jo declares that she will never get married in chapter “Heartache”. She says stoutly that she will be an “old maid” twice in the novel; this indicates that she makes up her mind to do so. Besides, Jo also thinks that “[n]obody will want me, and it’s a mercy” (Alcott, 230), she is grateful that nobody wants to marry her. When Laurie proposes to Jo, she shows her firm reject to Laurie by saying “[n]othing more, except that I don’t believe I shall ever marry” (Alcott, 334). She uses “nothing more” to reply to Laurie’s question, which shows she loses her patience with Laurie. Such tone indicates that she does not value Laurie’s love so that she refuses Laurie’s love without thinking of whether her words will hurt him or not. She declares her reject by using “except”. The adverb “ever” shows her determination of her disbelief in marriage, that she will never get marry. “Shall” emphasizes the fact that she is quite sure about her decision that she will never marry.

As Jo refuses Laurie’s propose, she also gives the reason, that is, she believes marriage is a restriction of her liberty. She claims that “I’m happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up for any mortal man” (Alcott, 334). The repetition of “I’m” indicates that she is a self-centred girl, she only considers about herself, she wants to live up to her own ideal—to be a writer, and will not give up her liberty for the sake of marriage.

“[T]oo well” leads readers to view her satisfaction of her spinsterhood. For her, spinsterhood means liberty, so Jo will never get married. She insists on believing that marriage is a restriction, “you’d hate my scribbling, and I couldn’t get on without it” (Alcott, 334). Jo thinks that marriage is an obstacle of her writing career, she can not go on writing when she gets married, however, being a writer is her favourite dream. Between career pursuit and marriage, Jo chooses her writer dream without thinking twice. Besides, the repetition of “any” in the quotation emphasizes Jo’s determination to pursue her liberty as equal as the refusal of marriage.

To everyone’s surprise, Jo, who declares that she will never get married, marries the Professor so rapidly that “[a]lmost before she [knows] where she [is], Jo [finds] herself married and settle[s] at Plumfield” (Alcott, 441). “[F]ind herself married” means that she even does not intend and expect to marry. However, she feels unusual delight from her marriage; “...how happy she would be to walk through life beside him” (Alcott, 433), and she finally chooses marriage and live with someone forever instead of being an “old maid”, a “literary spinster, with a pen for a spouse” (Alcott, 402). Jo finally finds someone who makes her love him in spite of herself. Not only Jo marries the Professor, but also goes on her writing, “I may write a good book...I’m sure [married life] will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these” (Alcott, 447). At this time, Jo gets married, and continues to make her dream reality. She even believes that marriage can be helpful to her writing, what she ultimately actual action is combining her married life with her career pursuit at the same time.

Jo finds a balance between her ambition and marriage because her wishes are perfectly gratified by her marriage. Except those contradiction discussed above, Jo also has contradictory attitude towards writing and wealth, which has a close relationship with her female identity and married life. Jo’s attitude towards writing and wealth is largely affected by her acceptance of female identity, love and marriage.

When Jo labels herself as the “man in the family” (Alcott, 6), she wants to earn enough money to support herself and family just like a man does. She begins “to feel herself a power in the house” (Alcott, 249) by writing. Jo uses her money to send Beth and her mother to the seaside, and Jo even says that “[t]hat’s what I tried for, and that’s why I succeeded” (Alcott, 249). She dreams of being a writer just because she makes up her mind to earn money, so she claims that “I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous” (Alcott, 133) and insists that writing book “suit” (Alcott, 133) her. The modal verb “shall” emphasizes her resolution to earn money by being a writer. Besides, “suit” indicates that she believes that she has the ability to make a good living out of writing; she has the confidence in herself because “I think” in the quotation above shows her decision is made on the basis of consideration. Being wealthy and famous are Jo’s aims when she starts her writing career.

Jo ignores the quality of her writing for the sake of money. Jo’s money-oriented writing also can be illustrated when she attends the literary lesson, she comes across a boy who loves reading sensational stories, she “amuse[s] at his admiration of the trash” (Alcott, 247). The noun “trash” indicates that she thinks the quality of the story is poor, and looks down on such story. Furthermore, “amuse” emphasizes her disdain for those stories. In this scene, Jo’s negative attitude toward sensational stories is clearly verified. Nonetheless, when Jo hears that Mrs. Northbury earns a lot of money by writing sensational stories, she looks “more respectfully” (Alcott, 248) at the story. Her inconsistent attitude toward the same story emphasizes that she values money. Moreover, she builds up her own sensational story by the time the lecture ends (Alcott, 248). Her prompt reaction in this scene indicates her eagerness to make money by writing. Just as Jo says “cash is more convenient” (Alcott, 250) in the house she sets her goal on earning money.

Beth’s death triggers Jo’s maturation, Jo’s ultimate action is in stark contrast to what she claims and behaves previously. Jo cares about artistic value of writing and no longer writes

for money, when one person offers enough money to buy her story on condition that she changes her story into the juvenile literature, the narrator describes that “she [can] not consent to depict all her naughty boys as being eaten by bears” (Alcott, 327). Jo refuses to sell her story, “cannot” means she does not agree to revise her stories, which aim at catering to the publisher, and she insists on her own thought that every story should have some sort of a moral. Jo has and insists on her own standard of writing.

In addition, there is another example to demonstrate Jo’s inconsistent idea and actual action. After Jo’s success in her first sensational story, she is encouraged by the fact that she can earn money and support herself and her family by writing, she hopes that she can earn “*more than enough money*” (Alcott, 317), so her monetary goals soon prevail over her pure literary ones. That is why when the publisher requires her to cut her novel by one third, she “chop[s] it up as ruthlessly as any ogre” (Alcott, 251). She is eager to make more money out of writing, “ruthlessly” emphasizes her determination to cut her novel so that cater to the publisher; “ogre” indicates her eagerness to make money. All the evidences above demonstrate that Jo writes for money.

Whereas Jo writes for comforting herself after Beth’s death. Jo thinks highly of artistic value of writing. Enthusiasm for literature is the source of Jo’s composition. The narrator describes that writing leads Jo “a blissful life, unconscious of want...[and] she [sit] safe and happy in an imaginary world...” (Alcott, 246). “[B]lissful” indicates that she thinks writing brings her extremely happy and enjoyable feeling, and such feeling is re-emphasized by the phrase “safe and happy”, so she knows that writing can comfort her. As Jo’s mother sees, Jo is overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and loneliness, Jo begins to compose so that she can get rid of her sadness and loneliness for a while. The most important, “unconscious of want” in the quotation above indicates that Jo does not write for money, she writes stories for its own sake. The narrator describes her composition from her father’s comment. “There is truth

in [your story]...humor and pathos make it alive...and [you] put your heart into it” (Alcott, 398). In Jo’s writing, “put your heart into” shows she is absorbed in her writing, full of enthusiasm.

Jo’s attitudes toward writing, female identity and love and marriage have effects on her attitude toward wealth; the most obvious evidence is that she makes money by writing. Jo thinks that she is the man in the family, so she wants to make money to support family; when she finds that she has the ability to make money by writing, she resolves to write for money. When Jo ultimately accepts her female identity, she recognizes the importance and necessity of love and marriage, so she gets married. After she gets married, she understands that love is far more important than money; she even appreciates poverty, so she cares more about the artistic value of her writing. In the next part of this essay, Jo’s contradictory attitude toward wealth will be demonstrated.

When the four sisters and Laurie talk about their castles in the air, Jo expresses that she wishes to have “a stable full of Arabian steeds” (Alcott, 133). “Arabian [steed]” shows that she dreams to live a luxurious life, only rich people are able to afford horses. “[F]ull” emphasizes her great ambition, that is, being a wealthy person who can afford lots of horses. Besides, she hopes to have “rooms piled with books” (Alcott, 133), this sentence re-emphasizes her dream of being a wealthy person. When Jo is young, she dreams of being wealthy just because she likes horses and books. When she goes to New York, she still yearns for a wealthy life, but she wants to use the money to do something for other people at the time, such as she wants Beth to have a better life. She dreams of going abroad someday, and having money to do charity work, those dreams “[have] been for years Jo’s most cherished castle in the air” (Alcott, 317). This sentence quoted above reveals that Jo has the ambition of living a luxurious life; and “for years” emphasizes her resolution of being a rich person.

Jo's eagerness for money leads Jo to give up her own opinion on writing for the sake of money. When one publisher asks her to delete the moral part in her story, she opposes the publisher by saying "[b]ut, sir, I [think]..." (Alcott, 319). This sentence indicates her insistence on adding the "morals plots" (Alcott, 319) in the story. However, when the publisher refuses her proposal, she just asks "[w]hat do you—that is, what compensation—" (Alcott, 319). The incoherent speech demonstrates that she drops her own opinion on writing for money; by using the dash the narrator emphasizes her hesitation and nervousness of dropping her own opinion for money. Finally, she chooses to "[hand] back the story with a satisfied air" (Alcott, 319). Jo gives up her insistence that stories should have some educational meaning. She agrees to cut the moral parts in her story in order to catering to the publisher. Furthermore, she even "wish[es] [she has not] any conscience, it so inconvenient" (Alcott, 327). "[H]as not" and "any" both show that she does not want to have conscience, "so" emphasizes her negative attitude toward conscience, because she thinks that conscience is the obstacle to earning money. "[W]ish" highlights her desire to drop her integrity for money, she knows that it is important for a story to have some moral parts, but she does not insist on her opinion.

However, Jo's ultimate action is in stark contrast to her previous action. After Jo realizes the fact that her sensational stories will hurt readers and herself, she writes no more, refusing to sacrifice her conscience for money again. When "one person offer[s] enough [money] to" buy her child's story if she can adjust her story to meet the publisher's requirement, she refuses to do so (Alcott, 327-328). The narrator describes that Jo refuses to change her story "in a fit of very wholesome humility" (Alcott, 328). Jo even feels delighted when she realizes that she earns no money by the time the winter passed. She recalls "with the happy thought" that "[she has] written no books, earned no fortune" (Alcott, 329). Jo's attitude changes now. "[H]appy" indicates that she gains satisfaction from the fact that she earns no money; at this

moment, she insists on her opinion about writing, she no longer write any stories which will hurt herself and readers just for the sake of money.

When Jo falls in love with Professor Bhaer, she even “[thinks] poverty [is] a beautiful thing” (Alcott, p.418). In this sentence, “poverty” indicates the negative economic condition, people often shows their negative attitude to poverty because poverty is often associated with the state, which is suffering, and miserable. However, “beautiful” represents something pleasure and delightful which one likes it very much; it demonstrates Jo is not afraid of being poor. The example above emphasizes that Jo’s ultimate action is different from her previous action. She demonstrates her admiration for poverty, and her eagerness to earn money and to be a wealthy person disappears. When she realizes that she “never shall be rich”, she still feels “never [is] so jolly in [her] life” (Alcott, 448). Her love of money and expressed admiration for poverty demonstrates her contradictory attitude toward wealth.

Jo is proud that she can make money out of her writing, because she can support herself, this encourages her desire for independence; and because she wants to be independent, she refuses to accept any favor. When Amy and Jo visit Aunt March’s house, Jo expresses her attitude toward favors, she says “I don’t like favors, they oppress and make me feel like a slave.” (Alcott, 275). Meanwhile, she expresses that she needs “perfect independence” (Alcott, 275). Amy defines Jo’s idea of independence as “go through the world with your elbows out...nose in the air” (Alcott, 241). Jo wants to be independent and do not need anybody’s help. She thinks that favors often bring “oppress”, and burden, she hates such stress which brought by favors. The word “slave” emphasizes her negative attitude toward favors. Because Jo needs perfect independence, she does not allow other people to force her to do anything; she thinks she will be forced to do things because she owes a favor to other people; so she rejects other people’s favors.

Although Jo expresses her refusal of favors, she actual action is opposite, she accepts and enjoys favors. Jo knows the life which she wants to turn her “[perfect] independen[ce]” (Alcott, 275) into reality is “selfish, lonely, and cold” (Alcott, 447), so she makes herself agreeable, and accepts other people’s help gratefully. When she accepts the favor which puts by Miss Norton. Jo’s comment on herself is “I’m as proud as Lucifer” (Alcott, 311), “but” Jo accepts the favor “gratefully”, because she thinks that Miss Norton “does the favor out of kindness” (Alcott, 311). “[P]roud” indicates her arrogance, Jo is self-satisfied. On the other hand, “gratefully” indicates that Jo shows thanks for what Miss Norton does. The inconsistent speech and actual action indicates the change of her attitude toward the favor, Jo does not refuse to accept other people’s favor although she is arrogant. “[K]indness” indicates that favors from other people do not burden her now, so she is willing to accept favors, and make herself agreeable. Except Jo accepts Miss Norton’s favors, there is another example which demonstrates Jo’s positive attitude toward favors.

Instead of bothering by favors, Jo really enjoys them and shows her gratitude toward them. When the novel comes to the end, Jo becomes mature, she marries the Professor, and understands the meaning of love, she knows love is farther more important than wealth, she finally accepts her female identity, besides, she believes she can write a good book after she experiences all those things. Jo accepts the estate from Aunt March gratefully although Jo tells Aunt March that she does not need any favor at all. “[T]hey ha[s] cause for rejoicing” because Aunt March leaves Plumfield to Jo, this is a favor for Jo, instead of feeling stressful, she inherits Aunt March’s estate, “rejoicing” indicates that Jo expresses great happiness about the estate. Jo’s inconsistent expression and actual action demonstrates her rejection of favors but ultimate acceptance of these. Jo’s acceptance of female identity changes her attitude toward many things. When the novel comes to the end, Jo’s actual actions are all different

from her previous expression and action. Her acceptance of female identity brings Jo to a new life.

This essay has discussed five main different contradictions. From those contradictions, readers “learn much about [Jo’s] personality by observing how and which experiences seep through [her] mind” (Chatman, 130). Jo is like “real” people, she has troubles, she has happiness and sorrow. Those contradictions let readers know better about Jo’s personality. Her inconsistent speech and action keeps readers’ interest to imagine how the plot will develop at the same time.

Tension makes a character both interesting and credible.^{vii} Contradictions between Jo’s expressed intentions and actual actions produce a tension. This tension keeps readers’ interest until the end of the novel. Contradictions are divided into two major categories: gender and worldly interests. The most important contradiction is Jo’s initial refusal but ultimate acceptance of her female identity. When she refuses to accept her female identity, she does not care about her appearance. She regards herself as a powerful “male” in the family, because she can make money out of her writing to support not only herself but the other family members. Jo also thinks that she can be independent, and does not accept other’s favors. When she finds that she can make a good living out of writing, she writes for money rather than for the pleasure of artistic creation. She loves money and dreams to live a luxurious life because she feels “herself a power in the house” (Alcott, 249). She begins to accept her female identity when she has a guilty conscience about making a living out of her sensational stories. When she falls in love with the Professor, she totally accepts her female identity, and becomes a happy woman at the end of the novel. To the reader’s great surprise and joy, Jo March manages to balance the contradictions in her life, she could not have anticipated earlier.

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^{iv} Foote, Stephanie. "Resentful Little Women: Gender and Class Feeling in Louisa May Alcott", *College Literature*, 32.1, Winter 2005, p.81.

^v The Angel in the House describes: The popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman came to be "the Angel in the House"; she was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. The Angel was passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all--pure.

Academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu: The Angel in the House. 2 October 2005.

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^{vi} Ann Chisholm, "Incarnations and Practices of Feminine Rectitude: Nineteenth-Century Gymnastics for U.S. Women", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 38, no. 3, Spring 2005, pp. 737-763

^{vii} Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Great Britain: Longman, 2009), p.65.