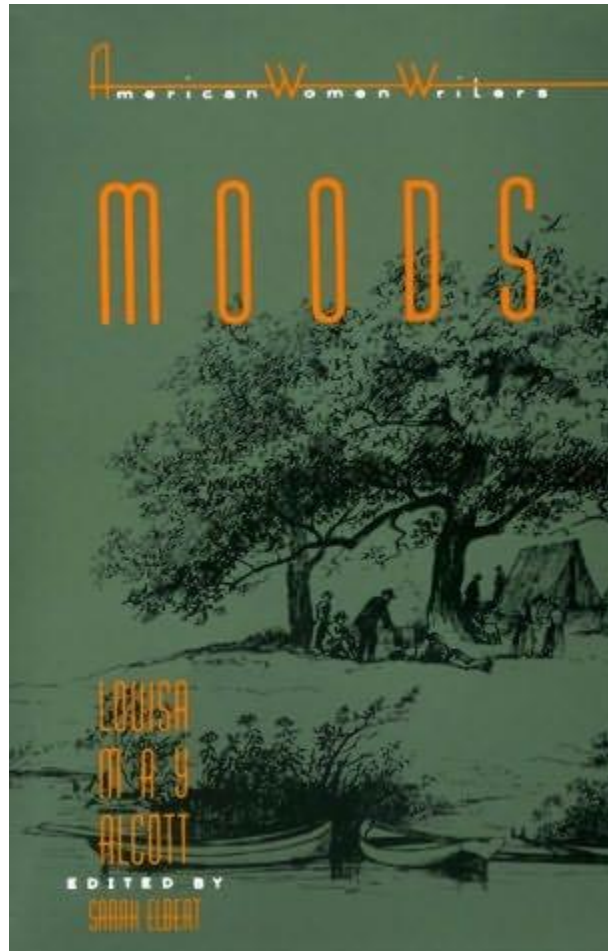


Class, Gender and Marriage in Louisa May Alcott's *Moods*

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to explore the Categories of class, gender, and marriage in the writings of Louisa May Alcott. Alcott sharp portrayal of gender equality is discussed in the general ideas of the historical and literary backgrounds of America of Alcott's period.

Key Words: Gender, Class, Marriage, Literary Backgrounds, American society.

Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1832. She moved to Boston when she was five years old. *Little women* created a great fame for Alcott, which solidified her name in history. Alcott's *Moods* is similar to Hawthorne's *The scarlet letter*, *Moods* speaks about Sylvia who is the protagonist of the novel, who lives in the shadow of a household grief, she finds various phases of her own experiences through others. Sylvia is not only the victim of her own circumstances but also an immature and unconscious looser who had led to her own downfall.

Moods

Moods begins with the story of Warwick's and his fiancé Ottila. Warwick then becomes involved with Sylvia and it is his relationship with Ottila leads Sylvia to believe that Warwick is engaged and so she marries Moor. Sylvia chooses Moor to Warwick, which creates desperate measures to resolve this conflict. Conflict for Sylvia was death. If she has chosen Warwick she would have lived long and happy life.

During the 19th century, class structures were impenetrable. Marrying across class line was really very complex practice in America. Most of the women of this period felt to get marry early, it was said that if the opportunity for marriage is being aroused they must accept the proposal without any hesitation. Alcott's *Moods* is based on this idea.

Sylvia

Instead of waiting for a good man Sylvia marries the man who approaches her and so, ends up in unhappy marriage which eventually lead to the death of Sylvia. Only after her marriage with Moor, she understands that she should have taken the risk of waiting for Warwick, she regrets for her of marrying Moor. She tries to love Moor, but all she gets were frustration and disappointment which leads to her separation from Moor. This distress creates illness resulting in Sylvia's premature death. She was given an opportunity for marriage and when she accepts it, it turns out to be her fatal decision. Alcott's *Moods* shows how Sylvia failed to understand herself, respect her feelings and never became an independent human being. Alcott demonstrates that independence is important for a woman to attain her success.

According to Alcott, a woman should not be defined by roles as a mother and wife. Instead, she requests women community to develop themselves and their character to become successful women. If Sylvia had been determined to wait and marry Warwick she would have lived happily instead of facing a premature end. She becomes the victim of patriarchal society in which men have choices in marriage where as women do not have any. Women are left to select from the option given to them and men are independent to select from the whole population of women. In *Moods* men and women are playing equal roles but men are given more preferences and options.

Place of Marriage in *Moods*

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In *Moods*, marriage has been given a greater focus. Sylvia was doomed because of the society she grew up. She kept her desires away and tries to make justice to the marriage stereotypes and ends up in failure. She has been brought up in a society which made her weak. She was unable to live up to her expectations or was able to take rational decisions. She was caught up in an ideology that is destructive. She follows her moods not her heart and falls prey to her fatal decision. She gets lost because her decision was not rational. The stupidity of the society in making mandatory for women to marry early most certainly plays a large role in Sylvia's unhappiness and demise. If she would have had the courage or if she would have not felt as a weaker sex or if she would have decided to live without a man in her life, she would have not committed this fatal mistake.

For the Sake of Marrying

Sylvia marries for the sake of marrying as she was caught up in her brother's engagement and future wedding. It is also the factor that the lack of paternal guidance was also a major reason for the poor decisions Sylvia mistakes. As Alcott says,

From her father she received pride, intellect, and will; from her mother passion, imagination, and fateful melancholy of a woman defrauded of her dearest hope. These conflicting temperaments, with all their aspirations, attributes, and inconsistencies, were woven into a nature fair and faulty; ambitious, yet not self-reliant, sensitive, yet not keen-sighted. These two masters ruled soul and body, warring against each other, making Sylvia an enigma to herself and her life a train of moods. (*Moods* 84)

Alcott believed that couples should be equal and only when they understand this they can live happily their married life which is evident through her description of Sylvia's characterization.

Powerless to Act

Although Sylvia has the capacity to choose her options, she is powerless to act without the guidance and support of others. She later understands that her thoughts lie only with sympathy and compassion, not action. Sylvia did not get a true love or live life alone; she acts according to the motherly advice of Faith.

'If there be a strong attachment on the husband's part, and he a man worthy of affection and respect, who has given himself confidingly believing himself beloved by the woman he so loves, she should leave on effort unmade, no self-denial unexact, till she has proved beyond all doubt that it is impossible to be a true wife. Then, and not till then, has she the right to dissolve the tie that has become a sin, because where no love lives inevitable suffering and sorrow enter in, falling not only upon guilty parents, but the innocent children who may be given them. (*Moods* 147)

Dependent on Motherly Guidance

Sylvia suffers as she does not have motherly guidance and affection. Alcott significantly reworked and republished her earlier novel *Moods*. In the 1864 version of the novel, Sylvia dies

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because of her guilty, in 1882 version Sylvia is a stronger woman who copes her mistakes and return to her husband, she was able to survive in her decision. Alcott relied heavily on the concepts of class, gender, and marriage; she has implemented revolutionary ideas into her novel that helped the readers of her period to civilize their thoughts and lives.

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