

GROWING UP FEMALE IN THE HOME: FEMALE SOCIALIZATION  
AND ROMANTIC IDEALISM IN LITTLE WOMEN, WHAT KATY DID,  
REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM, AND ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

by

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\* The assertion that the concept of home is an important part of any domestic novel seems obvious. But in the mid-to-late Victorian era, when industrialization had produced a sizeable and well-established middle class, the home and nuclear family achieved new heights as a cultural ideal; and this elevation of home was reflected in the juvenile literature of the time. Home was a refuge and sanctuary from the social and economic pressures of the industrialized world; and though the man assumed authority there, the woman was primarily responsible for creating this refuge. Cultural socialization for females centered around the home; women were taught that they not only could find fulfillment there but also could achieve power in their roles as the center or heart of the house. In addition to this cultural ideal, the Romantic vision of the individual growing up to achieve maximum fulfillment of all potentialities had also by this time filtered down to the popular imagination and posed new complications for the standard view that home was woman's ideal sphere. For how could women achieve their maximum potential if, at a certain age, they were expected to disregard inclinations toward individuality and fit themselves into the mold of docile, repressed, and selfless domesticity then admired? In his survey of children's books John Rowe Townsend said that the purpose of girls' books was "to glamorize, to make more acceptable and less narrow, the circumscribed life of the virtuous girl and woman."<sup>1</sup> While Townsend's indictment was in many cases true, I would like to suggest that something more than this was going on in some of the best and most popular of these books: the best authors used their stories to explore the various options available for girls as they grew up and to dramatize, however gently, the conflict between the Romantic spirit and cultural expectations for females.

**THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS  
NUMEROUS  
PAGES WITH  
MULTIPLE  
PENCIL MARKS  
THROUGHOUT  
THE TEXT.**

**THIS IS THE  
BEST IMAGE  
AVAILABLE.**

I would like to examine how the idea of home functioned as these Romantic heroines--and their creators--confronted this conflict. Paradoxically, in these books the culturally real home which could stifle and entrap was also the idealized home which could sustain and uplift. Home was a predictable place to work out the implications of the Romantic legacy, a symbol strong enough not only to withstand all threats, but also to reconcile all differences, a symbol in fact strengthened by the Romantics themselves in their transferral of the green world of the ancient pastoral tradition to the pastoral oasis of home. Juvenile authors' attempts to combine the cultural ideal for women and the Romantic concept of the child within an idealized portrayal of the home can be seen in the four popular and influential books to be explored in this essay: Little Women (1868), by Louisa May Alcott; What Katy Did (1873), by Susan Coolidge; Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1903), by Kate Douglas Wiggin; and Anne of Green Gables (1908), by L. M. Montgomery.

Before the cultural ideal of home could attain a literary flowering in these juvenile domestic novels of the late nineteenth century, the stern, patriarchal home atmosphere of earlier didactic books, such as Mrs. Sherwood's The Fairchild Family series (1818-1847), had to be replaced with an atmosphere of warmth.<sup>2</sup> Louisa May Alcott led many writers in replacing the patriarchal with matriarchal families, although the writers sometimes retained nominal father figures in their books. In Little Women, for example, the father is absent as a Civil War chaplain during much of the story. He returns home a benevolent, scholarly, and retiring convalescent; while lip service is paid to his ultimate authority, it is "Marmee" who provides most of the strength, organization, and gentle moral guidance for the four March girls' lives.



Within the warmth of the idealized home and nuclear family, Alcott explores several cultural and literary ideals for women, and she embodies these ideals in the characters of the four March girls. Beth provides the model of the frail saintly child of the religious exemplum, a literary tradition which also had its counterpart in the contemporary cult of the invalid female, an exaggeration of the passivity often encouraged in females; Meg and Amy represent the cultural norms of domesticity for the wife of modest means and the wife of wealth; and Jo represents the newer concept of the Romantic child who grows up to embody many feminist as well as Romantic ideals. For all their individuality, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy do remain true to the literary or cultural myths they personify.

Shy, timid Beth, for example, clearly derives from the saintly child presented as a model of conduct for earlier Victorian child readers.<sup>3</sup> Like the literary and cultural myths on which she is based, Beth is the patient and pious sufferer and believer, the family member capable of elevating domestic life to a spiritual level. By her spirituality she sanctifies the daily domestic tasks which are her only ambition. Her words and example have a salutary effect on everyone around her, leading her sisters to greater efforts to be good, and helping to thaw out Mr. Laurence, the stern old gentleman next door. Also like her literary models, she dies an early death. Like Charles Dickens' Little Nell or George MacDonald's Little Diamond who came after her, she has a goodness which seems too fragile to exist within the rough texture of the common world. While playing Pilgrim's Progress with her sisters, she says, "It seems so long to wait, so hard to do; I want to fly away at once, as those swallows fly, and go in at that splendid gate."<sup>4</sup> She is destined for a higher plane, but before she dies she becomes the tranquil center of the home, drawing to herself all that

is most beautiful and good, "cherished like a household saint in its shrine" (p. 460). When she dies, she leaves behind a suggestion of the transcendent as a guide for others: "Beth still seemed among them, a peaceful presence, invisible, but dearer than ever, since death could not break the household league that love made indissoluble" (p. 503).

In addition to the familiar saintly child of literature, the cultural model of the contented married woman is also represented in the novel in the characters of Meg and Amy. Although Meg likes acting and has one brief uncomfortable fling in society, this eldest of the March sisters really wants to settle down and have babies. When she gets her prize--Laurie's tutor John, an honorable, hardworking, but poor man--she makes a few mistakes like any young wife: she lets the failed jelly boil over, disappoints her husband's idealistic image of the perfect spouse by not having his dinner ready, and falls prey to unnecessary little extravagances which put a strain on the couple's finances and relationship. But she learns quickly to manage a small home and to make a husband happy. Content in her role as wife and mother, she achieves the goal of complete and felicitous female socialization, the expected cultural norm for women in the 1860's.

Amy, the youngest sister, exhibits some traits of the Romantic child: she is spirited, impulsive, and ambitious. These traits are readily left behind, however, as she matures toward the desired domestic goal; and in adulthood she also embodies an acceptable version of socialization: she acquires the domestic virtues appropriate to the wife of a wealthy man. In marrying Laurie, the rich boy next door, she assumes the role of fashionable wife, dressing magnificently, entertaining graciously, supporting the arts

while pursuing her painting as a hobby, taking seriously the responsibility of helping those less fortunate than herself.<sup>5</sup>

Although Beth, Meg, and Amy never seriously question the domestic roles society and their inclinations lead them toward, Jo, with awkward elbows and unconventional ways, struggles mightily between her own impulses and the social norms. For Jo has inherited the legacy of the Romantic child--a literary concept which threatened established cultural expectations for girls growing up to womanhood. Though lively girls must certainly have always existed in real life and been as frustrated as Jo in contemplating the narrow choices available to them, by 1868 the Romantic vision (expounded by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others) of the child as real, natural, spontaneous, and imaginative, inspired popular literary portrayals of such children; and Jo became the prototype of many later Romantic child heroines in children's literature.

Romanticism was a force which called for the preservation and nurture of individuality rather than for its suppression beneath layers of socialization. Jo's dilemma--how to preserve her Romantic impulses in the face of powerful socializing processes as she matured--was the same dilemma the major Romantic writers pondered as they struggled with the central paradox of their theory: though the child was revered as closer than the adult to the harmonious state of his innocence, it was actually the mature adult--or the child transformed, the child no longer a child--who held the most promise of fulfilling the Romantic ideal. Judith Plotz, who explores that ideal in "The Perpetual Messiah: Romanticism, Childhood, and the Paradoxes of Human Development," has said that "transformation . . . conceived in terms of ideal growth or the utopian fulfillment of potentialities, may be said to be the central Romantic theme."<sup>6</sup>

Presumably, retaining qualities of imaginative childhood as one grew to integrated adulthood was as difficult for boys as it was for girls, even though boys had considerably more cultural freedom to express their individuality. It is ironic, therefore, that despite the fact that girls had to relinquish certain kinds of potential in order to embrace the restricted roles expected of them, girls' books like Little Women continued to emphasize the growing up process, while boys' books tended to adopt the Tom Sawyer syndrome of perpetual childhood or to focus on narrow materialistic male concerns as in the Horatio Alger stories.<sup>7</sup> While the Romantic boy could either remain a boy or grow up to be a commercial success, the Romantic girl could grow up and capitulate to expected female socialization or find some way to accommodate social norms to her own desires for individual power. But grow up she must. Perhaps the fact that females, unlike males, were educated in the home, for lives within homes, forced women writers to grapple with the complexities of the Romantic vision in a way that writers for boys rarely did.

In the case of Jo, Alcott flirts with the idea of perpetual childhood by having her tom-boy character resist for a time the changes which threaten to propel her into a compromised adulthood. Resisting the socializing process, Jo wishes she were a boy; she romps with Laurie, cuts her hair short to match her boyish name, longs to join her father in the war, postpones romantic notions and attachments. She also resists changes which threaten to break the family apart, such as Meg's marriage. Time and change cannot be stopped, however. Jo gradually reconciles herself to that reality and discovers as Wordsworth did that loss has its countering compensations. When she sees the happiness of Meg and John, she comes to

accept Meg's husband and to rejoice in Meg's babies. Gradually, if reluctantly, she grows up into a kind of graceful womanhood herself. "Buds will be roses, and kittens, cats--more's the pity!" she says (p. 226). In his survey John Rowe Townsend seems to regret this change even more than Jo does, lamenting the fact that by the end of Little Women, Jo has given up speaking slang, whistling, and lying on the rug. "Already," he says, "that is not the real Jo."<sup>8</sup> Supposedly, female socialization has tamed Jo at last.

However, this is not the whole picture of the adult Jo. Near the end of Little Women, after Beth dies, Jo encounters her greatest struggles with socializing forces as she heroically tries to deny her own self and live solely for her family. On her deathbed Beth had said, "You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to father and mother when I'm gone. They will turn to you, don't fail them; and if it's hard to work alone, remember that I don't forget you, and that you'll be happier in doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world" (p. 464). Jo does try to fulfill Beth's charge, but Alcott won't permit her to become another saintly Beth: "Jo wasn't a heroine; she was only a struggling human girl, like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross, listless, or energetic, as the mood suggested" (p. 484). Jo tries "in a blind, hopeless way to do her duty, secretly rebelling against it all the while, for it seemed unjust that her few joys should be lessened, her burdens made heavier, and life get harder and harder as she toiled along" (pp. 480-481). In despair she says, "I can't do it. I wasn't meant for a life like this, and I know I shall break away and do something desperate if somebody don't come and help me" (p. 481). Jo does find help from her mother's comfort,

from her father's counsel, from her sister Meg's companionship, from her dead sister's presence as she does the household tasks once performed by Beth. But the biggest help, the help which moves Jo beyond her "dark days," is a suggestion by her mother when Jo is depressed: "Why don't you write? That always used to make you happy" (p. 485). Jo does write successfully, having been "taught by love and sorrow" (p. 486), and her family urges her on in the renewed expression of her individuality. Her father says, "Do your best, and grow as happy as we are in your success" (p. 485). The twin myths of saintliness and domesticity do not succeed in overpowering Jo's individuality but rather serve to shape it in laudatory ways: Jo uses her family experiences as material for her Romantic imagination, thus achieving an honest and human artistic statement. Through loneliness and suffering, but always with the support of the home and family, Jo gradually achieves a mature balance of social responsibility and individual expression.

As the book concludes, Jo continues to find solutions to the dilemma of growing up while holding on to a Romantic sense of self by combining social norms and her own desires for individual power. She meets the social norm by marrying, thus continuing to affirm the centering force of the home and family; but her marriage to a poor German professor seems a comfortably equal partnership. She insists when they talk of marriage: "I'm to carry my share [of burdens], Friedrich, and help to earn the home. Make up your mind to that, or I'll never go" (p. 534). In her essay "Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy, and Louisa," Elizabeth Janeway argues that Jo gives up nothing as she grows up to a full participation in life as an independent matriarch.<sup>9</sup> As a child, Jo had seen herself as head of the family while her father was away, and she had relished her role as provider and protector. In adulthood, as

Janeway says, she continues to work and pay her way. It is her inherited house which provides the boys' school and home, a fact which gives her added power; and in the sequel Jo's Boys the reader learns she has become a famous writer, having taken up writing again to provide funds to keep the school going during a difficult time.

At the end of Little Women, Jo's domestic duties prevent her from writing, but she keeps in practice by telling stories to her boys. During this mature, temporary sacrifice of her own interests to the welfare of others, she is able to acknowledge the shaping power of the home on the imagination: she admits, looking at her family, "I haven't given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I'm sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these" (pp. 544-545). Indeed, Jo's family experiences are the energizers of her creative expression as well as of her life. Memories of her own lively childhood and loving home establish continuities with the new generation and enable her to be a sympathetic mother who allows her children even more freedom to grow into individual adults.<sup>10</sup>

It is apparent that in chronicling Jo's struggle and the subsequent juggling act between social norms and her Romantic and feminist impulses, Alcott does not reject traditional notions of female socialization. Socialized Meg is admired and loved as much as unconventional Jo: in the next generation, domestic Daisy and rebel Nan are equally accepted. And in Jo's Boys, even while discussing feminist issues, the college girls are taught to dress tastefully and to sew as a valid part of their educations. Alcott seems to acknowledge the claims of all these cultural and intellectual forces in the air of the late 1800's: romanticism and feminism as necessary

for the full development of human potential, the religious exemplum as an expression of faith and of the desire to live a worthy life, and domestic socialization as a cultural idea necessary for the preservation of the all-important home and family. To have these disparate forces co-exist so happily in the almost claustrophobically close March family is perhaps too serene an idealization, but the book, I think, represents Alcott's efforts to integrate these potentially adversarial ideas, to avoid their implications of violent and dramatic change. To achieve the integration of child and adult which Wordsworth had sought in The Prelude, Alcott collects the disparate ideas under the symbolic roof of one house, signifying that integration can only be achieved through love, best felt and expressed within the home and family, which ideally accepts and reconciles all. In his search for unity with the world, a search often called his longing for Eden, Wordsworth had also used the symbol of home, toward which he is always traveling.<sup>11</sup>

The affirmation of home remains a powerful theme in What Katy Did (1873), a book roughly contemporary with Little Women (1868). The first of a series of five books about the Carr family, this story, like Little Women, could be called matriarchal. A country doctor, Mr. Carr, though benevolent, is busy and absent much of the time. The mother is dead, and the six children are left in the care of several female servants. The book tells the story of how Katy, the oldest daughter, grows up to become the domestic surrogate mother, the "centre and the sun" of the house. As in Little Women, home and the nuclear family are glorified.

What Katy Did, however, demonstrates the strong and tenacious hold female socialization had in the Victorian era. Heroine Katy begins as a



lively, headstrong girl who especially likes to buck adult authority. Though she seems rather wooden to today's reader, one can imagine that she was a delight to Victorian child readers bored with saintly examples. Here is another Jo March, an interesting girl who truly wants to be good but whose independent nature is always getting her into scrapes. But unlike Jo, whose creator generously allows her to retain her individuality, poor Katy has to suffer mightily for her unruly desires to grow up to a non-domestic role; though she wants to do something grand, like "rowing out in boats, and saving peoples' lives,"<sup>12</sup> her disobedience results in a fall from a swing which leaves her paralyzed. As Elizabeth Janeway says in the preface to a 1976 reprint of the book, ". . . Katy must 'grow up,' and to grow up properly she must be chastened until she is ready, even eager, to fit herself into the pattern of womanhood then admired. It is not a pattern that upholds frivolity, silliness, or incapacity" (pp. v-vi). For four years Katy is confined to her room, and there she slowly and painfully learns the cultural lessons: make yourself attractive and pleasing to others. Don't complain. Put others' desires and wishes before your own. Be useful. Learn to manage the household cheerfully and efficiently. Become a surrogate mother to your siblings.

During this process Katy is helped by Cousin Helen, an extreme version of the religious exemplum saint. Cousin Helen is herself an invalid, and like Beth in Little Women, is beautiful, kind, sweet, and patient. She has learned not only to endure pain, but, as she says, to "keep my forehead smooth with my fingers, and try not to let my face show what I was enduring" (p. 181). She is capable of such sacrificial acts as happily living next door to the man she was to have married before her disabling accident.

When she had been injured, she had nobly sent him away to marry someone else, and she now dotes on his daughter, who is considerately named Helen. While this kind of endurance seems masochistic to today's reader, Dr. Carr explains to Katy that Cousin Helen is capable of such heroism because she "is half an angel already, and loves other people better than herself. . . . She's an example to us all, Katy, and I couldn't ask anything better than to have my little girls take pattern after her" (pp. 137-138).

Cousin Helen and the Supreme Teacher help with Katy's maturation and transformation to sacrificial adult, and gradually Katy's room becomes the sunny center of the home. By the end of the book, Katy is an idealized mother figure who firmly holds the domestic reins of the house. By putting the welfare of the home and family before her own, she achieves substantial power, but it is the kind of power which must be hidden to be effective: a visiting Cousin Helen sees "the change in Katy's own face: the gentle expression of her eyes, the womanly look, the pleasant voice, the politeness, the tact in advising the others, without seeming to advise" (pp. 272-273). When Katy has achieved these qualities, as Janeway points out, "she is permitted to get well" (p. vi).

In case anyone misses the point, the social message is reinforced by the author Susan Coolidge in her preface to the story: "As I walked home I fell to thinking about . . . a Katy I once knew, who planned to do a great many wonderful things, and in the end did none of them, but something quite different,--something she didn't like at all at first, but which, on the whole, was a great deal better than any of the doings she had dreamed about" (p. 9). Except for this heavy emphasis on female socialization, it would be possible to read the book as a story of learning and growing

through pain and suffering, of the often agonizing but laudatory process of putting aside childish egocentrism and learning to think of others, as Jo does in caring for dying Beth and in trying to make her parents happy after Beth's death. What seems objectionable is that when Katy is well, she does not recover any of her old spirit and ambition. There are many ways of living for others besides "rowing out in boats, and saving peoples' lives"; but Katy has no thoughts beyond the narrow confines of her home or the needs of her brothers, sisters, and father. Unlike Alcott in Little Women, Coolidge does not care to struggle with the implications of the Romantic vision. Transformation has indeed occurred, but not the Romantic transformation of "ideal growth or the utopian fulfillment of potentialities" described by Plotz. Instead, the Romantic child has been successfully domesticated by an overpowering socialization process aided by the religious exemplum. The purpose of this book does seem to be that which Townsend identified: "to glamorize, to make more acceptable and less narrow, the circumscribed life of the virtuous girl and woman."<sup>13</sup> How unlike Little Women, where many of the same socializing forces are exerted on Jo with quite different results.

With the publication of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm in 1903 and Anne of Green Gables in 1908, the cultural glorification of home continues but is now emphasized by connecting the idea of home to the ancient pastoral tradition. In earlier pastoral literature, such as Shakespeare's romances As You Like It, A Winter's Tale, and The Tempest, heroes and heroines often journey to the pastoral world to solve their problems or become renewed in some way. By the Romantic period the child (and often the woman) has assumed the place of the shepherd or farmer of traditional pastoral literature; and

the home is often a substitute for the shrinking pastoral landscape: it is the pastoral oasis necessary for the satisfactory resolution of problems.

While both Little Women and What Katy Did portray home as the place for human sustenance and renewal, it is in Rebecca and Anne that the pastoral tradition is most fully utilized. Both Rebecca and Anne share the vision of the farmer in Virgil's Georgics: they live in unity with nature in a rural home while working hard to modify and improve their surroundings.<sup>14</sup> This georgic pastoral tradition emphasizes the hero or heroine's relationship to the family or community, and in rhythm with the seasons there is often an occurrence of rebirth. The primary agent of this rebirth is often the child, who, as Phyllis Bixler notes in essays on Heidi and Little Lord Fauntleroy, has absorbed aspects of the saintly child of the religious exemplum as well as of the pastoral healer.<sup>15</sup> By the time Rebecca and Anne arrive, this exemplum has undergone a Romantic secularization, so that both heroines are paragons not of saintliness but of imagination, sensitivity, and intelligence; they are noticeable in their rural environments because they somehow look and act differently from the general run of people there; yet they have the love, goodness, and adaptability needed to win acceptance and approval. They use their many gifts not only to work out their own destinies in ways acceptable to them, but also to serve as agents of rebirth to others.

Just as Rebecca and Anne fuse the religious exemplum and the pastoral figure to the Romantic ideal, they also join the cyclical georgic pastoral rhythm to the Romantic view of growth as a journey culminating in the integration of the imaginative child with the experienced and knowledgeable adult. In spite of the occasional backward glance or brief pause to reflect

on the stage they are entering, the impulse in both books is always progressive; the backward glances are always associated with times of change, such as the death of Rebecca's sister or her graduation, and are swiftly followed by a new surge toward the future, such as Anne's joyful return to studies after her "golden summer." Like the major Romantic writers, these authors emphasize a progressive "ideal of perpetual growth and improvement."<sup>16</sup> And as if to emphasize their Romantic debt, these books, especially Rebecca, are full of Wordsworthian phrases and echoes. Like the child in Wordsworth's Prelude, both girls live in rural settings and delight in nature; and like their Romantic predecessor Jo in Little Women and Romantic disciples everywhere, both embark on the journey to maturity intent on preserving childhood feelings in the face of strong leveling cultural forces. Like Jo they strive to do this without violence or alienation: individuality must somehow be maintained while certain cultural institutions are accommodated, especially the now even more glorified home.

Both Rebecca and Anne are preoccupied with the finding or the making or preserving of a home, and like Jo and Katy, both live in homes that are essentially matriarchal. Rebecca is sent to live with her two spinster aunts and to get an education so she can pay off the mortgage on Sunnybrook Farm where her mother lives a subsistence life with numerous children. Rebecca's father, a charming but ineffectual and weak man, had died some years earlier. Though the aunts' brick house is physically adequate, it is emotionally inadequate--not a home. Therefore, the whole book has the unifying theme of Rebecca's search for a real, a secure home. She makes various attempts to turn the aunts' brick house into a home: she lights

the fires and learns the domestic chores. But always she is haunted by the mortgaged farm where her mother and siblings live. She draws a sketch of the mortgage:

There was a tiny house on the right, and a weeping family gathered in front of it. The mortgage was depicted as a cross between a fiend and an ogre, and held an axe uplifted in his red right hand. A figure with streaming black locks was staying the blow, and this, Rebecca explained complacently, was intended as a likeness of herself. . . .<sup>17</sup>

It is a heavy burden for a child, but Rebecca proves strong and heroic; and when she inherits the brick house at the end of the book, it is a satisfying resolution. She plans to bring her mother back to the home of her girlhood, thus reuniting her with a sister and old friends; the mortgaged farm home, which never was sufficient physically or emotionally, is sold to the new railroad. Rebecca has both found and made a real home, for herself and for her family.

Anne's search for home is somewhat different from Rebecca's. The elderly bachelor brother and spinster sister who live at Green Gables are expecting a boy from the orphanage to help with the farm work. When Anne shows up by mistake, they are reluctant to keep her--at least Marilla, the no-nonsense sister, does not want her; but Matthew, the non-verbal and shy brother, does. Though Matthew is a "kindred spirit," he rarely "puts his oar in" when it comes to running the house or bringing up Anne. Anne stays, of course, thereby finding her home early in the book: "'It's lovely to be

going home and know it's home,' [Anne] says. 'I love Green Gables already, and I never loved any place before. No place ever seemed like home.'"<sup>18</sup> The rest of the book depicts the dynamics between Anne's Romantic nature and the cultural expectations of the narrow world of Green Gables and the surrounding community.

Like the georgic heroine she is, Anne gradually brings new life to this narrow world. In earning the love of her guardians, Anne gives new meaning to their sterile lives. Marilla's sense of humor gets ample exercise in spite of her efforts to remain grim, and by the end of the book, the neighborhood busybody Mrs. Lynde can say, "Marilla Cuthbert has got mellow" (p. 394). Matthew Cuthbert, proud of Anne's physical and spiritual beauty, can say, "She's been a blessing to us, and there never was a luckier mistake than what Mrs. Spencer made--if it was luck. I don't believe it was any such thing. It was Providence, because the Almighty saw we needed her, I reckon" (p. 354). When Anne provides the solution needed to save Green Gables from being sold, an action fittingly done in the spring, Marilla says to her, "You blessed girl! I feel as if you'd given me new life" (p. 391).

Likewise, Rebecca as georgic heroine serves as the wedge which opens her dull spinster aunts' lives to new purpose and pleasure. Aunt Jane, vulnerable because of a youthful love affair, softens at once and begins to assert her opinions in Rebecca's favor to the sterner Aunt Miranda. Aunt Jane becomes happier: "Her narrow, humdrum existence bloomed under the dews that fell from this fresh spirit; her dullness brightened under the kindling touch of the younger mind, took fire from the 'vital spark of heavenly flame' that seemed always to radiate from Rebecca's presence"



(p. 168). Aunt Miranda, at first hostile and unsympathetic to Rebecca, takes longer to convert, but in this Rebecca also unconsciously succeeds through the goodness of her actions:

A certain gateway in Miranda Sawyer's soul had been closed for years; not all at once had it been done, but gradually, and without her full knowledge. If Rebecca had plotted for days, and with the utmost cunning, she could not have effected an entrance into that forbidden country, and now, unknown to both of them, the gate swung on its stiff and rusty hinges, and the favoring wind of opportunity opened it wider and wider as time went on. All things had worked together amazingly for good (pp. 193-194).

Never able openly to express the love she gradually comes to feel for Rebecca, Aunt Miranda is nevertheless occasionally moved to pronounce, "She is the beatin'est child! I declare she's all Sawyer" (p. 205). And it is she who wills the brick house to Rebecca.

Both Rebecca and Anne's influence as georgic heroines extends beyond the sphere of family. Both excel in school and provide the imaginative leadership and talent which make them popular in school functions and childhood play. Adults normally inclined to be severe, like busybody Mrs. Lynde, or to have high standards, like the minister's wife Mrs. Allen in Anne of Green Gables, recognize and appreciate Anne's superior gifts. In one dramatic episode Anne saves the life of a neighborhood baby by knowing how to treat the baby's croup. And when she wins the prestigious Avery



Scholarship, she brings credit to the whole community. In Rebecca, rustic neighbor Mr. Cobb is admiring in extreme. At Rebecca's high school graduation, which culminates a series of such triumphs as winning the essay prize, being appointed the first girl assistant editor of the school paper, and being elected senior class president, Mr. Cobb exclaims, "Land! it made me sick, thinkin' o' them parents travelin' miles to see their young ones graduate, and then when they got here hevin' to compare 'em with Rebecky" (p. 295). For the good simple Cobbs, Rebecca has replaced their own child commemorated for thirty years by "a little gravestun."

It must be conceded that part of the reason both Rebecca and Anne win such ardent approval from all quarters is that both do try hard to please. Both gradually learn to be steady and reliable, and to do the domestic chores expected of them. They adopt the customs which make life smoother for family and associates, and to that extent can be said to be socialized (although their participation in the georgic pastoral tradition, which had a social orientation, also facilitates this adaptability). But they retain the imagination which makes them stand out from others in the community. Both Anne and Rebecca's bosom friends also have exemplary qualities of character and domesticity, but they lack imagination and therefore seem ordinary beside their brighter Romantic counterparts. In spite of conservative forces in the community which pulls lesser characters toward conformity to narrow lives, neither Rebecca nor Anne deviate from their Romantic quest of integrating imaginative impulses with adult responsibilities, and the community honors them for their uniqueness. Rebecca's teacher observes that Rebecca will always "follow her saint," and Marilla confides to Anne, "You look so tall and stylish and so--so--different altogether in that dress--as if you didn't belong in Avonlea at all. . . ." (p. 353).

Though both Rebecca and Anne seem destined for bigger worlds and greater achievements than is customary in their sleepy domestic villages, in both books Romantic idealism does eventually seriously collide with cultural reality. Both have to sacrifice plans for their futures to take care of their families. When the bank with their savings fails, causing a fatal shock to Matthew's bad heart, and when Marilla, aging and threatened with blindness, thinks she must sell Green Gables, Anne gives up her college scholarship to help at home. Similarly, Rebecca relinquishes a good teaching position to go home to Sunnybrook Farm when her mother is injured and bedridden.

While these sacrifices can be seen as models of virtue for Victorian girls to emulate, and while they can be taken as evidence that a domestic life at home is the proper role for every woman regardless of her inclinations, these concluding episodes can also be seen as the ideal for a Romantic exemplary heroine: the sacrifices and tests of character are necessary ingredients in the process of growing up and breaking through the egocentrism of childhood--part of the heroic journey toward achieving the Romantic integration of imaginative childhood with experienced adulthood. It is significant in these books that, unlike in What Katy Did, there is no concerted effort by the authors to show that these home roles are Rebecca and Anne's ideal spheres (though conventional Aunt Jane does say of Rebecca, "Her first duty's to her mother" [p. 303]). In fact, in both cases women--

\* Rebecca's mother and Anne's guardian Marilla--rail against the girls' sacrificial decisions as wastes of talent and opportunity. Instead of serving the purpose of putting girls into their proper places as women, these episodes near the end of both books seem more designed to illustrate

the difficulty of maintaining freedom in the face of "the inevitable yoke" of adulthood.

\* And there is no meek bowing of the head to traditional and expected roles. On the contrary, when Rebecca goes home to care for her mother, her rebellion, however silent, is recorded by her author in Wordsworth's phrases: "How brief, how fleeting, had been those splendid visions when the universe seemed open. . . . How soon they had faded into the light of common day" (p. 307)! Rebecca accepts this test of her character, but not without a struggle: "It is easy, for the moment, to tread the narrow way, looking neither to the right nor left, upborne by the sense of right doing; but that first joy of self-denial, the joy that is like fire in the blood, dies away; the path seems drearier and the footsteps falter" (p. 307). When Rebecca's teaching position is filled by someone else, "There was a mutinous leap of the heart then, a beating of wings against the door of the cage, a longing for the freedom of the big world outside" (pp. 307-308).

Anne of Green Gables makes her sacrifice somewhat more cheerfully; perhaps remembering her life as an orphan gives her a greater need to preserve the all-important home. Significantly, however, she does not stay home to be domestic; she rents the farm to a neighbor and teaches school, using her spare time to study Latin and Greek rather than to hone domestic skills, which don't interest her. She sees her sacrifice as only a temporary delay of her college plans.<sup>19</sup>

In both books these concluding episodes reveal the integrity and power of the heroine formed by the Romantic pastoral vision. For though both Rebecca and Anne have to change and sacrifice, both manage to preserve their love of nature and imaginative power and continue to use this power, like the georgic heroines they are, to sustain themselves as well as others.

When Rebecca feels the confinement of home, she retreats into a world of dreams and emerges refreshed; and she responds to the changing seasons with her innate sense of beauty and harmony. These inner resources offer freedom and hope, so that Rebecca can concede to her mother, who laments her hard lot, "There ought to be fears in my heart, but there aren't; something stronger sweeps them out, something like a wind" (p. 314). For the reader expecting a happy ending, there is a feeling, too, that this test is an interlude, that better days do lie ahead for Rebecca--a sense, as Rebecca tells her mother, of "becoming."<sup>20</sup> When at the end Rebecca takes possession of her inherited brick home, she is not only liberated, but she also assumes the role of head of her family. Her future is shrouded in "beautiful mists," and the reader is left with the impression that anything is possible for this exemplary woman. The final invocation, however, is for the pastoral oasis: "God bless the brick house that was; God bless the brick house that is to be" (p. 327)!

Similarly, when Anne makes her sacrifice, she recognizes that her world is temporarily made narrower by her decision. She acknowledges the compensatory joys, significantly that "nothing could rob her of her birthright of fancy or her ideal world of dreams" (p. 396). Significantly, too, her role is that of savior of home and head of the family. Like Jo March, both Rebecca and Anne have achieved financial independence and preserved their imaginations without rejecting the traditional value of home. And though the reader must wait for the sequel to find out for sure that Anne's world opens up again, the "bend in the road" which she speaks of is provocative and promising: "I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does. It has a fascination of its own, that bend,

Marilla. I wonder how the road beyond it goes--what there is of green glory and soft, checkered light and shadows--what new landscapes--what new beauties--what curves and hills and valleys further on" (p. 390).

For both Rebecca and Anne, the impulse at the end of the books is still a forward one, a sense of things uncompleted, of standing on thresholds. There is a sense of the "progressive, unfinished, evolutionary, searching, infinite quality" which Judith Plotz says the Romantic writers emphasized "again and again."<sup>21</sup> And though linear like a road, the georgic pastoral cycle is also suggested: there is a time and a season for happiness and for sorrow, for living for others and for oneself. Anne hints at new beginnings in her friendship with Gilbert Blythe at the spring conclusion of Anne of Green Gables; and just as Marmee symbolically gathers in her children and grandchildren while predicting a good harvest for Jo at the apple picking which concludes Little Women, Rebecca symbolically harvests a home in the autumn conclusion of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.

While Katy participates in the pastoral cycle to a certain extent (she learns to walk again in the spring), only her creator fails to struggle with the problems of the Romantic dream, preferring instead to annihilate the vision as a childish aberration which has to be suppressed in favor of a self-denying socialization. The other three authors, in showing that it is possible to preserve and even strengthen home without denying one's essential self, present a far more optimistic, if more difficult, solution to the problem of growing up female.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Townsend, pp. 79-80. Townsend succinctly characterizes the patriarchal air of The Fairchild Family series by quoting from one of the books: "'Henry,' said Mr. Fairchild to his son, 'I stand in place of God to you, whilst you are a child.'"

<sup>3</sup> The difference between the portrayal of Beth and the saintly child of earlier religious exempla, however, is that readers of Little Women identify with main character Jo, whose flaws more closely match their own.

<sup>4</sup> Louisa May Alcott, Little Women (1868; rpt. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Publishers, 1947), p. 158. Hereafter page references will be given in the text.

<sup>5</sup> As she grows up to lovely womanhood, Amy also leaves behind certain character flaws she had exhibited as a child. She had been rather spoiled, conventionally materialistic, and socially snobbish, attributes which make her determined to marry a rich man. Though the gentle teaching of Marmee prevails as she matures, she still craves the lifestyle Jo abhors, and that is the reason she makes a better wife for Laurie than Jo would have done, readers' sentiments on the subject notwithstanding.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Plotz, "The Perpetual Messiah: Romanticism, Childhood, and the Paradoxes of Human Development," in Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective, ed. Barbara Finkelstein (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Hunter discusses the boy-book tradition in his article "Mark Twain and the Boy-Book in 19th Century America" in College English, 24 (March 1963), 430-438.

<sup>8</sup> Townsend, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Janeway, "Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy, and Louisa," in Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature, ed. Sheila Egoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 253-257.

<sup>10</sup> In the sequels Little Men and Jo's Boys, Jo analyzes each child's strengths and interests and offers support for their full flowering. By the end of Jo's Boys (1886), Jo's children, adopted children, nieces, and nephews have grown to young adulthood. Interestingly, there are four girls among them, and they create four parallels to the original four sisters, a pleasing structural pattern and an interesting comment on cultural change in the eighteen years since Little Women had been published. Domestic Daisy, like her mother Meg, is content to marry; and in choosing Jo's adopted boy Nat, she strengthens the cherished family ties. Amy's daughter Bess is a copy of her mother: beautiful, fashionable, artistic. She pursues a successful career as an artist but eventually marries. The religious exemplum embodied by the original Beth has been diffused into the conventional precepts Jo teaches her charges, although there is a suggestion that (as Beth's namesake) Bess represents a somewhat secularized exemplum: frail as a child, she has a purity and presence that cause all the others to call her "Princess" and treat her with deference. Most like Jo are Nan, brought to the school to be a companion and balance for Daisy, and Jo's fiery niece and namesake Josie. Nan becomes a doctor and pursues a dedicated career without marrying, and Josie becomes a gifted and famous actress. Both are ardent feminists, and



there is much overt feminism in the later books, from spirited arguments about women's suffrage to lengthy discussions on the shortcomings of men.

<sup>11</sup> In The Prelude the search for home is a central theme. In Book First Wordsworth says, "So, like a home-bound laborer I pursued/My way beneath the mellowing sun" (1850 version, ll. 101-102). And later: "and through the meadows homeward went, in grave/And serious mood" (ll. 389-390). The entire Book Fourth is unified by a search for home, Wordsworth's own and the soldier's return to his native land. Unable to attain the female identification with home, by Book Sixth Wordsworth has poignantly decided home is essentially unattainable:

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be (ll. 604-608).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Coolidge, What Katy Did (1872; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), p. 32. Hereafter page references will be given in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Townsend, p. 76. The four sequels of the Katy books continue to affirm home as woman's ideal place. Midway in the series the author's aim seems to become getting the entire family safely married off, and interest shifts to Katy's siblings. Domestic, sacrificial Katy is barely mentioned in the final book. Though lip service homage is paid her by the other characters, for the reader she remains shadowy and unimportant. Coolidge has apparently lost interest in her, and one wonders whether a negative result of excessive female socialization is inadvertently suggested: when



a character capitulates so totally to cultural expectations, is anything of interest left to say about her?

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Bixler, in "The Child in Pastoral Myth: A Study in Rousseau and Wordsworth, Children's Literature and Literary Fantasy," Diss. Univ. of Kansas 1976, describes how early pastoral traditions were modified in children's literature in the nineteenth century, with the home becoming the pastoral oasis and the child replacing either Virgil's easy-going, bucolic shepherd or his social, hardworking farmer. Bixler proposes a subclassification of the pastoral into "bucolic" and "georgic" traditions and describes various children's books which fit these categories. Unlike the georgic tradition described in the text, of which Rebecca and Anne are clear examples, the bucolic tradition portrays the child at home in nature, unimpressed by work, time, change, and social responsibility. In the bucolic tradition of children's literature the childhood experience is nostalgically idealized. An example of a bucolic children's book would be Tom Sawyer.

<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Bixler, "Spyri's Mountain Miracles: Exemplum and Romance in Heidi," The Lion and the Unicorn, 3, No. 1 (Spring 1979), and "Idealization of the Child and Childhood in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Little Lord Fauntleroy and Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer," in Research about 19th Century Children: Portrait Studies, ed. Selma Richardson (University of Illinois Graduate Library School, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Plotz, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Kate Douglas Wiggin, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1903; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 249. Hereafter page references will be given in the text.

<sup>18</sup> L. M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables (Boston: L. C. Page and Company Publishers, 1908), p. 98. Hereafter page references will be given in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Anne does go to college in one of the sequels and excels there before marrying Gilbert Blythe. The cultural expectations of a country doctor's wife claim her at last, and by the end of the sequels she is a thoroughly conventional and uninteresting character.

<sup>20</sup> In a penetrating study called All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in America, the Women Who Wrote It, the Women Who Read It, in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), Helen Waite Papashvily says that many of the events in domestic novels were actually subversive in depicting the frustrating subservience of women: that female readers, in identifying with the heroines, would respond by quiet rebellion against woman's ordained place in the world, and that in fact all the tears shed by readers over the trials of their favorite heroines were actually the tears of accumulated grievances against an unjust society which prevented them from developing their potential.

<sup>21</sup> Plotz, p. 69.

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GROWING UP FEMALE IN THE HOME: FEMALE SOCIALIZATION  
AND ROMANTIC IDEALISM IN LITTLE WOMEN, WHAT KATY DID,  
REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM, AND ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

by

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B. A., Berea College, 1965

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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This report examines how females growing up are portrayed in four late nineteenth and early twentieth century juvenile domestic novels: Little Women (1868), by Louisa May Alcott; What Katy Did (1873), by Susan Coolidge; Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1903), by Kate Douglas Wiggin; and Anne of Green Gables (1908), by L. M. Montgomery. In all these books the ideas of home and the nuclear family are glorified, reflecting the cultural ideals of the time. While Victorian-era books for girls often served to indoctrinate females into accepting narrow lives within the home, these four books show that the optimistic Romantic vision of the imaginative child growing up to achieve maximum human potential created complications for juvenile domestic fiction writers, who were forced to dramatize the conflict between the Romantic spirit and cultural expectations. In the case of What Katy Did, indoctrination into the accepted female role does seem to be the author's primary intent. The other three books, however, have strong Romantic child heroines who embark on the journey to maturity intent on preserving childhood feelings in the face of leveling cultural forces. These three heroines--Jo March, Rebecca, and Anne--solve their dilemmas by juggling accepted social norms with their own desires for individuality; they all eventually assume roles of heads of their homes in addition to achieving goals outside the home. In Rebecca and Anne particularly, the Romantic child is a paragon and agent of rebirth, having combined secularized attributes of the saintly child of the religious exemplum with characteristics from the pastoral tradition, which emphasizes cyclical growth and social harmony.