

Little Women has been around for over 150 years and it is still being read today. When it was first published the popularity of the novel was exhausting and Alcott's personal life became public—Alcott became a “celebrity;” lucky for her the tabloids were not invented yet. Then twenty-five years after the novel was written it still got rave reviews and sold more copies than it did the first couple of years after it was published. In 1868 and 1929 Little Women was popular among both female and *male* readers and the message and themes in the book still connected with readers of the time period. Then came the 1960s, and even though Little Women was still being read and revered, its critics were beginning to come out of the woodwork and point out the problems in the story. Some critics complained that the book used too much “sentimentality” and stereotypical females that are bad role models. The four sisters were different in personality but still just stereotypical females with no depth. It does not seem just coincidental that this critic was experiencing the rise of the women rights movement. Then in 1979 the critics wondered why Alcott, who was known as a rebel and an independent female, would conform to what her publisher would want and write a story about females who ended up becoming proper little women by marrying and becoming compliant housewives. There must be more to what Alcott was writing and that is why Alcott made the men useless, boring, and minute. Alcott was secretly dishing out her beliefs and ideals. Little Women has withstood the test of time and is still being labeled a classic today, even though who reads it has changed (males may have read it when it first was published but currently they don't). However, during the 150 years since the Little Women was published the critics and reviews of the novel have changed significantly. Why does the opinion of Little Women, and other books labeled as classics change over time? What does this tell us about the nature of classics?

The reason a books scholarship changes across time is because people and the world change but the book, as it was originally written, stays the same. Therefore, it only makes sense that how the people view a book relies heavily on what is happening or had happened during the time period the book is being read during. Little Women was written during a time period when female roles were regulated to the household and the only reason women worked was not to make their life more meaningful but because they were old maids or widowers. Even though Alcott hinted at female independence, for she was an independent woman herself, she was still coerced into portraying the ideal female role of the time period. However, as time went on the female roles began to shift and change into something more than a homemaker. So, whereas at one point the importance of Jo getting married (as most readers wanted Alcott to make happen) was center stage among the readers that slowly began to change. One hundred years later it was more important

that Jo would say “NO!” to marriage and embrace her female independence and become a sensational writer and rejoice in her power over the dominating male species. Women’s right activists would not want their daughter’s to think like the March sisters. They would want them to want more out of life; they would want their daughters to keep the fabric for a dress and make their husbands go coatless—better yet they would want their daughters to work themselves so they could afford an already made dress. Why sew one? So, during the 1960s when women’s rights movement was just beginning to gather steam, of course the scholarship of Little Women would change and the way it was viewed would be different. Just like any classic or non-classic book when times change the way a book is understood changes with it.

Not only did the way females view Little Women change over time but the way males view the book also changed. Why would males’ opinion on the book change over time? Better yet, why would males even enjoy reading it when it first came out? The male role portrayed in the story did not alter. They were still insignificant and useless in the book. So, why would any male, in any time period, enjoy that book? It was about females and all the males were unimportant. But they did read it and enjoyed it, “Staid bankers and merchants would greet each other on the street with the query: ‘Have you read *Little Women*?’” Again, it is because the males’ role and outlook on life has changed overtime as well as the females. The early reviews and opinions on Little Women never even blinked an eye on Laurie’s wimpy character or the father’s lack of dialogue in the novel. Why would Mr. March have more time in the story? Women were in charge of the home and raising children. A Father’s role was providing money and maybe discipline. As for Laurie, the male role back then probably wasn’t as “manly” as it is viewed later. Maybe a boy like Laurie was the norm. Regardless, most males now have more of a role to play in the household. Today’s male usually is regarded “wimpy” if they are overly emotional. Therefore, since the image of the male has changed over time how they view Little Women has changed.

Overtime books that are labeled classics are viewed differently and written about differently. Therefore, the nature of classics can shift over time. What was once considered a classic and a “must-read” can become a book that gathers dust on the shelves of the local library. However, there are books, like Little Women, that even though the times have changed and the way individuals view the world has changed, they still are ranked high on the classic list. The time period Little Women was extremely different than the time period of the 1960s. But what kept Little Women alive, I feel, is the fact scholars still read it and debated on the content, themes, and, messages of the book. Alcott, either deliberately, like one scholar suggested, or accidentally put issues of women’s independence in the book. That kept the book alive during a time when women’s rights were on the front burner. Scholars wanted to continue to pick apart the book and talk about it. So, some classics,

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even though they are written from a time period unfamiliar, are still popular because scholars continue to read, debate, and dissect the story.

The nature of the classic also depends on the attention it gets years after it was written. In 1994 Little Women was made into a movie. The entertainment industry saw a possible money maker and decided to go for it. This movie then created a need to read the book again. People were reminded that Little Women was still out there and thought, “Oh yeah. That is a classic that I should have/or should read again.” A lot of classic books are converted to the big screen and kept alive because of big business. Publishers and movie makers see a market and want to capture it. Money is a big motivating factor that keeps those classics relatable to readers and popular among people. Then there are some classics that lost their magic because publishers or movie makers do not see it as marketable. The nature of classics and now they stay in demand depends highly on the publishers motivations.

The events in today’s world have a major impact on how scholars view classics. People’s ideals shift overtime and that impacts how they understand a book. Classics are kept alive and still read because scholars still find a need to debate and dissect a classic. Teachers want to open doors of discussion with their classes regarding the classics. Movie makes and publishers see an opportunity to make money. However, it is important to remember that a classic, before it can even be considered that, is a well-written book and deserves the attention it gets.