

A Portrayal of the Main Characters' Change of Persistence in *Little Women* and *Little Men* by Louisa May Alcott**Indah Amanda Maharani¹ ✉, Sri Sumaryani²**^{1,2} English Department, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia**Article Info****Abstract***Article History:*

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The Victorian era had a profound impact on the lives of women during that period. However, with the persistence in achieving dreams, the norm was slightly broken. Persistence is a characteristic that shows one's behavior to maintain perseverance and enthusiasm in achieving goals. The character of persistence is marked by a strong and tireless consistency in the effort to achieve something. *Little Women* portrays the persistence of the main character, who lives in the Victorian era. This study aims to describe the persistence of the main character in the novel *Little Women*, who finally broke her word and chose a new path in life in the novel *Little Men*. The method used is qualitative research using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory. In this study, Jo shows persistence in achieving her dreams and succeeding, but the environment and ego continue to develop so that Jo begins to break her own words.

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INTRODUCTION

The era led by Queen Victoria, commonly referred to as the Victorian era, occurred from 1837 to 1901. This era is characterized by prosperity both in economic and social terms. Many things happened in this era, such as the Industrial Revolution, which was able to drastically change the economy. Gadhvi (2020) mentioned that during this industrial revolution in the Victorian era, many new inventions were known to be advanced and highly useful, such as the invention of electricity and the electric telegraph. The development that occurred triggered

a social gap that resulted in differences in the living conditions of the people at that time.

Zulkifli et al. (2023) said that in the Victorian era, society was divided into three castes: upper class, middle class, and lower class. Education, lifestyle, and social life in the upper class are highly obtainable. Especially for women in the Victorian era, the clothes used by the upper class were very glamorous; they even used hats to complete their way of dressing. The education obtained by the upper class was also great; boys were enrolled in elite schools, and girls were home-schooled by hiring tutors. Yuliawati (2023) said that middle life is found in the middle class, whose economic situation can be

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up-and-down. Regarding education, middle-class boys attend boarding schools or grammar schools in the area where they live, while girls attend school at home or local schools. The simplest life is that of the lower class. School uniforms were simple coats made of wool with straw hats. Often, upper-class children could not even go to school because they did not have enough money. Some of the lower class worked as domestic servants, nannies, factory workers, and garment workers.

Norouzi (2024) said women are required to obey their husbands under any circumstances. The role of women during this era is to take responsibility for household life, such as taking care of children, cleaning the house, and performing other household roles. During the 19th century, women had limitations, including owning their property, not being allowed to work, not being able to vote, everything they did had to be controlled by their husbands, and they did not even have legal rights over their children. Meanwhile, men could do anything, such as becoming a politician and working outside the home. But as time went by, this understanding began to fade as women began to study and work, but it was not immediately accepted in society. Some people still think that women should and do stay at home to take care of the family's needs.

In the 19th century, women began to emerge who were active in seeking social rights for women. Manasia (2023) said that literary works written by women during the Victorian Era had several significant functions and impacts, although at that time, women were often faced with obstacles in expressing themselves and getting recognition for their work. Some of the main functions of literary works written by women in the Victorian era: liberation of women's voices, literary works written by women provide a platform to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Literature becomes a powerful channel for women to fight for their rights, explore their identity and social standing, and highlight the gender inequalities they face. Disclosure of women's conditions Victorian Era women's literature often portrayed the conditions and experiences of women at the time, including the social, economic, and political limitations they faced. Through novels, poetry, and other writings, women were able to fight for issues such as forced marriage and inequality in education. Through their literary works, women could question and challenge gender stereotypes.

Styk et al. (2023) said that persistence is a characteristic that shows one's behavior to maintain perseverance and enthusiasm in achieving goals. A person who has a spirit of persistence in achieving

their goals cannot be easily stopped because they have a very high spirit in achieving something they want to achieve. The character of persistence has effort and continues to strive to achieve things with strong and tireless consistency. People who have this kind of character usually have clear goals and are optimistic in everything, despite failures. Having resilience and courage is also inherent in the soul of a person who has a persistent character that makes her continue to try and stay on the path to her dreams.

This persistence can be seen in one of the works of literature authored by Alcott. The depiction of Jo's persistence is found in *Little Women*, where her determination and passion in pursuing her dreams inspire the reader. Despite having to go against the prevailing norms, Jo tries to value herself by following her dreams without hearing or seeing what society thinks of her. Not separated from *Little Women*, Alcott finally released a book entitled *Little Men* to continue Jo's life as the main character in her novel. Although Jo's struggle was broken by her own words, Alcott succeeded in bringing a picture of the struggle of women at that time nicely.

There are several studies that both make Jo the object of research. A study by Smith (2021) explained Jo's attraction to masculine traits that make her an independent woman. The end of this research shows that the Victorian era was still an era that required women to be married. Nevertheless, through this research, readers are reminded that one must find a way to be happy despite the pressures around them. Another study was conducted by Kanimozhi et al. (2023). The study explained that the research was conducted to explain the struggles faced by women in the Victorian era by exploring the interaction between gender, class, and the author's point of view. The author also concluded that the novel *Little Women* has a side of struggle that can be depicted with literature.

Based on previous studies, no one has examined Jo's persistence in maintaining her dreams in the Victorian era, even though she ended up breaking her own words. Therefore, this study will examine the persistence of a main character in portraying a resilient character who slowly achieves her dreams and slowly decays with her words, and chooses a life that is contrary to her wishes. This study uses the theory of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. The objective of this study is to answer the question of how the persistence picture that succeeds in achieving dreams slowly decays to change to a different life. This study aims to provide an overview of the persistence of a person who is

opposite to the stigma that exists in society, which eventually decays with the existing stigma.

METHODS

This study uses qualitative research techniques. To conduct the research, researchers applied psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. Zhang (2020) said that the psychological theory of personality produces concepts of various human behaviors, such as the dynamics of regulation of behavior, models of behavior, and the development of a repertoire of behaviors. A person's personality also has differences depending on the environment and way of thinking. This can also affect the behavior performed by a person. A person's behavior depends on the thoughts and awareness of each individual. This research uses Freud's psychoanalysis theory. This theory emerged in the 19th century and focuses on the unconscious and dream analysis in person. According to Freud, people behave according to their desires and feelings with conscious and unconscious thoughts. According to Freud, psychologically, everyone has a basic id, ego, and superego.

Through Sigmund Freud's theory, the researcher shows that women's lives are filled with stigmas that arose in the Victorian era, but with persistence in a person, the stigma can be broken by continuous effort, even though in the end, the main character still chooses to stay married. The data that have been obtained and analyzed in this research are sentences and characters' utterances that describe the persistence of the main character in achieving her dreams in the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. The data were collected by reading, identifying, inventorying, and classifying.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Portrayal of the Id of the Main Character

Id is the part of the personality structure that is below consciousness, and id is a personality component that exists from birth. Id represents basic human instincts and drives, such as sexual and aggressive drives. Fitria (2020) said id works on the principle of pleasure, which means it seeks to fulfill desires without regard to consequences or external reality. When id achieves its demands, a person will feel happy and vice versa. If the desire cannot be implemented, a person will feel unpleasant and experience tension. In the larger personality structure, the id is often in conflict with the ego and superego. Internal conflicts between the id, ego, and superego can cause anxiety and psychological

tension. In ego persistence, the id often shows resistance to anything done by the ego itself. This can lead to internal conflicts between different aspects of the personality due to persistence, which is often unrealistic.

In *Little Women*, Jo is represented as a woman who is persistent in holding herself firm, including regarding her persistence in not getting married. It is described in the novel that Jo is actually so close to Laurie that one day Laurie confesses his love and invites her to get married, but Jo strongly rejects it.

"No, I can't. I've tried and failed, and I won't risk our happiness by such a serious experiment. We don't agree and we never shall, so we'll be good friends all our lives, but we won't go and do anything rash." (Alcott, 1868, p. 507).

The quote above shows Jo expressing her subconscious thoughts that might be acceptable in public life. *"I won't risk our happiness by such a serious experiment,"* the sentence describes the instinctive drive created to pursue the intended pleasure. Nurlatifah et al. (2025) said that this impulsive instinctive urge is an urge issued by the id to get satisfaction from something that can make it feel happy. The emotional impulse released illustrates how much persistence Jo has in maintaining her opinion about marriage. The quote above also illustrates how impulsive the words spoken are, just to fulfill instant satisfaction.

"Such a serious experiment," the sentence spoken by Jo refers to marriage, which she thinks is a troublesome thing. If later she decides to be with Laurie and get married, there are many dreams that Jo must hold back. Because the truth is that women in the Victorian era were not easy. Shafiq (2023) explained that after marriage, women are under the 'power' of men. Only being at home, not getting a respectable job, and it is seemingly more difficult to get a job after marriage. This is what makes Jo say that she does not want to risk her happiness with a serious experiment, which means marriage.

According to Jo, marriage is not a good thing. Jo was afraid of the failure that would happen if she got married. Jo wants freedom, to live happily on her own. Just like she said in her argument with Laurie.

"Nothing more, except that I don't believe I shall ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man." (Alcott, 1868, p. 509).

The quote above describes if Jo shows a very passionate urge to get instant gratification and happiness. *"I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well"* is a portrayal of a life full of id urges that do not think about the morals and values that exist in society for the sake of a comfortable life. *"love to liberty too well"* is also a sentence she uttered, not feeling the marriage that made her depressed. In the Victorian era, women who married had to obey their families. Shafiq (2023) said the main task of women before marriage is to learn how to be a good housewife, through various activities such as washing, cleaning, cooking, and so on. Again, if women in the Victorian era did not get married, they would be dubbed "old maids". From what Jo said, she wants to be a woman who has freedom in life and does not want to 'give' herself to men.

Instead of getting married, Jo would rather be a writer. Jo would rather enjoy a life filled with reading and writing than getting married and having to do all the household chores that would be a hassle for her.

"I never enjoyed housekeeping, and I'm going to take a vacation today, and read, write, go visiting, and amuse myself." (Alcott, 1868, p. 160).

The sentence above strongly suggests that the instinctive urge that arises from her subconscious to fill her lust and desire for happiness. The sentence spoken by Jo works on the principle of pleasure without paying attention to the consequences that will be faced in social life. Nurlatifah et al., (2025). This is the same as Freud's theory of the id, which says that the human personality works in the realm of consciousness, which functions to satisfy human desires without thinking about the consequences obtained in the environment.

"I never enjoyed housekeeping" in the context of the sentence that Jo uttered, she did not want to be supported in a marriage where her life would continue to be obedient to her husband and family. Shafiq (2023) said that the ideology of society in the Victorian era for women was to consider home and family as the perfect place for women. The statement is also connected to Jo's sentence, *"I'm going to take a vacation today, and read, write, go visiting, and amuse myself"* which means that she wants to be free from the ideological constraints and stigmas that existed in society at that time. Jo wants a free life where she can do anything and go anywhere.

Her persistence is also nicely described in this novel. Evidenced by her days in October she sat

busy writing; the many papers scattered around proved that Jo wanted to be a writer. In the same month, Jo also tried to continue sending drafts of her writing to the book publisher. With optimism to realize her desire to become a writer, Jo is very confident.

"There, I've done my best! If this won't suit I shall have to wait till I can do better." (Alcott, 1868, p. 209).

The quote above shows an optimistic trait that appears to support Jo's impulsive traits. Humans are born with these characteristics from birth. The optimistic sentence that Jo said is a representation of the persistence of an effort that she created to achieve the pleasure and satisfaction she wanted. Fitria (2020) said that if a person's id feels very satisfied if someone wins in their life, on the other hand, if someone does not get what they want, there will be tension. In this case, Jo is optimistic in achieving happiness in her life as a writer who continues to realize her dreams.

The portrayal of Jo's persistence in becoming a writer is strongly evident in the sentence expressed by Jo above, *"If this won't suit I shall have to wait till I can do better"*. This persistence is evidenced by Jo, who continues to want to try even if her experiment has failed. Styk et al. (2023) said that someone who has a high persistence trait will find it difficult to stop because they have a clear dream, and of course, that dream must be achieved.

The optimistic sentences that kept being said and the efforts that kept being made slowly led to success. Jo's script was successfully published in the newspaper with the title "The Rival Painters". The persistence in reaching her desires illustrates Jo's resilience in maintaining the id that instinctively exists within her. By the theory, the id is based on pleasure, which means that the desire to get pleasure is extremely high. With the achievement that Jo has achieved as a scriptwriter, it has become a source of satisfaction.

The Portrayal of the Superego of the Main Character

Cherry (2022) explains that the superego is the last component of a developing personality. The superego is the moral aspect of a person's personality that is based on the norms that exist in society, obtained from parental care and the surrounding environment. With the superego, humans can distinguish between good and bad things. The superego is formed through a process of identification, where the child imitates and adopts

behaviors and values from parents and the surrounding environment. Involves social and moral rules applied by the family and society, which aim to control individual behavior and direct them to behave according to accepted norms. The depiction of a person's persistence in the superego is through defensive efforts made by a person to avoid or refrain from fulfilling or acknowledging urges that are contrary to the moral or social values that have been internalized by the superego.

Jo's character continues to experience development, namely regarding the marriage that she is very concerned about in her life. The norms and realities that exist in social life begin to become apparent in Jo's life. A loneliness and a desire for company appear in Jo's mind. In this case, Jo begins to break down her words and persistence in terms of marriage by talking to her mother. In the novel, Jo says she feels lonely and regrets having rejected Laurie, who asked her to marry him.

"No, mother, it is better as it is, and I'm glad Amy has learned to love him. But you are right in one thing. I am lonely, and perhaps if teddy had tried again, I might have said 'yes', not because I love him anymore, but because I care more to be loved than when he went away." (Alcott, 1868, p. 609).

Nurlatifah et al. (2025) said the superego rejects impulsive things that violate norms in social life. This can include honesty of conscience that arises because there is a connection with the norms that are applied. In the quote above, Jo says that she feels lonely, which arises because she used to continuously reject marriage proposals, where the rejection is still under the control of the id. This superego theory is seen in the form of regret felt by Jo.

In addition, Jo also felt interested in marriage because she went into the bedroom of Demi, Meg's daughter. Jo also thinks that marriage is an interesting thing, and whether she can do it too.

"Marriage is an excellent thing, after all. I wonder if should blossom out half as well as you have, if I tried it?" (Alcott, 1868, p. 604).

Superego works with the help of social life, including the family. Based on the quote above, Jo began to realize the mistake of thinking about marriage. By Freud's theory of the superego. Cherry (2022) said the superego is the moral aspect of a person's personality that is based on the norms that exist in society, obtained from parental care and the

surrounding environment. With the superego, humans can distinguish between good and bad things.

The impact of the family environment strongly suggests the norms that operate in Jo's thinking about marriage. By Freud's theory of the superego, social and moral values direct one's behavior to conform to the standards in the surrounding environment and those accepted by society. The development of the superego in Jo plays an important role in controlling her instincts and her future. Jo decides to marry someone she loves.

The Portrayal of the Ego of the Main Character

Freud (1989) said the ego functions as an intermediary between the id, which is driven by uninhibited instinctual drives, and the superego, which represents internalized moral rules and ideals. The ego is responsible for mediating between the demands of external reality and the unfulfilled drives of the id. This means that the ego tries to satisfy the id's desires realistically, without compromising moral principles and without causing significant negative consequences.

Unlike the id, which operates on the pleasure principle, the ego operates on the reality and experience principle. Freud (1989) said this principle recognizes that not all desires can be fulfilled immediately. The ego works to delay gratification when necessary, assess the situation rationally, and seek solutions that are sufficient to fulfill the id's desires. The ego also develops the ability to think and plan when deciding things in a conscious state. In a person's persistence, the ego may have difficulty in maintaining balanced thinking. The ego may feel pressured by the strong urges of the id. This can result in various forms of psychological denial, such as refusal to face or acknowledge certain aspects of oneself or certain situations.

After a life filled with reading and writing, Jo felt lonely and became interested in married life. From there, her life began to change. She decided to break her word and even managed an orphanage called Plumfield, which contained street children and her sister Meg's children. Jo's heart is full of happiness because the children that she and her husband take care of grow up well and love each other. As it happened on Thanksgiving, Jo saw the show with a face that couldn't hide a smile and always looked around her with joy. During the show, she met Laurie and had a conversation about her happiness and plans. With great ease, Jo answered that she was imagining the future of the Plumfield children.

"My summer's work, Teddy, and amusing myself by imagining the future of my boys," she answered, smiling, as she made room for him. (Alcott, 1871, p. 374).

The above sentence shows that Jo's id has dissolved, and another happiness has come into her life. Freud (1989) said that the ego in a person appears to try to satisfy one's desires without causing negative reactions and in harmony with the morals of society. In the sentence *"amusing myself by imagining the future of my boys,"* In this context, the ego succeeds in winning a very high desire, and another desire arises to continue to arrange a life that should be normal in social life.

Not only that Jo is also proud that she likes the Plumfield children. Jo's love for Plumfield's children is so great that her care is evenly spread and she does not choose which children should be given more attention.

"I only loved them, and let them see it. Fritz did the rest." (Alcott, 1871, p. 348).

Jo feels that the life she has chosen is the right one. In addition to having children with her husband, her life now feels very complete with the presence of the bustling Plumfield children. Mentioned in the novel, she feels she is a faded old woman, but has a happy life.

In this case, Jo's ego has developed the ability to think, act, and plan things in a conscious condition. Jo feels that her life choices are right, and the desires that exist in her are very realistic in social life. This is by Freud's (1989) explanation, which says that the function of the ego in a person is to satisfy one's desires with consideration of the values that exist in society so as not to cause negative thoughts. And Jo's affection for her children is a form of good ego development that can be validated both in social life.

"I'm a faded old woman, but I'm a very happy one; so don't pity me, Teddy; " (Alcott, 1871, p. 348).

In the context above, Jo feels happiness that arises after the natural conflict between the id and the superego. The ego in Jo really shows that happiness cannot only come from one side, but also from things that she does not realize. She is happy enough to love her children. Freud (1989) said that the ego mediates between the id and the superego. In this case, the ego tries to satisfy the id's desires realistically without causing negative things.

As for her dreams, they have changed. When she was single, Jo's strongest desire was to be a writer, but now her only desire is to have a happy family with the Plumfield children.

"So I'll tell you that one of my favorite fancies is to look at my family as a small world, to watch the progress of my little men, and, lately, to see how well the influence of my little women works upon them." (Alcott, 1871, p. 348-349).

The ego portrayed in Jo's character is in sharp contrast to that in the two novels as they are compared. Jo's life is very different from her previous life. Like Freud (1989) said, the development of the ego in a person becomes an intermediary between the id and the superego. The ego is highly realistic and feels real in the world around it. The change in Jo's id is strongly supported by the existence of the superego, which produces a new happiness that is very realistic, and by the life of society in general. Despite having a high persistence, due to the environment and life experiences that continue to grow slowly, the desire for the required pleasure is changing.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it can be concluded that the persistence portrayed by the main character is good. The main character, Jo, is very persistent in pursuing her desire to become a writer and strongly shows her desire to become an independent woman who can live with herself without getting married.

At the beginning of the novel, the depiction of women's lives in Little Women is strongly related to the Victorian era. At that time, women were limited in terms of achieving dreams, because at that time, women were described as someone who had to get married and obey the family. Rebellions certainly arise because of this norm. This rebellion is portrayed by Jo, who starts with someone who has a dream but is hindered by the norms of society. In the process of achieving her dreams, the main character in Little Women and Little Men is persistent. Effort continues to be made until finally she succeeds in reaching her dreams. But another conflict arises and happens from inside Jo, and she struggles with the fact. The conflict ends with the main character's id breaking down and choosing to live according to the norm.

This is included in the development of traits in someone's character, where the environment has a strong influence on the decisions made in

someone's life. During the process of character development, the desires within oneself will also change because, as time goes by, human desires and sense of satisfaction can change.

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