



Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott

Charles Strickland

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The subject of *Victorian Domesticity* is family life in America. The life and works of Louisa May Alcott served as the vehicle for exploring and analyzing this subject. Although Alcott was deeply influenced by popular currents of sentimentality, her own experience exposed her to the confusions and contradictions generated when sentiment confronted the reality of life in 19th-century America.

In the first chapter Strickland outlines the ways in which sentimentality colored the perception of 19th-century Americans about such issues as courtship, marriage, the relationship between the sexes, generational relationships, and the relationship between the nuclear family and the community outside the family. Chapters two and three trace Alcott's childhood and adolescent experiences, exploring the tensions that developed between Louisa and her father, and detailing the ways in which she carried the double burden of being both poor and female as she sought her identity as a writer.

The following six chapters treat the varieties of family life that appear in Alcott's stories, the impact of feminism on her life, and her emphasis on the importance of child nurture. In the final two chapters the author treats the relationships that Alcott perceived between the family and the world around it and assesses the legacy of the Victorian family idea.

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