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Salem Press Announces *Critical Insights:* *Louisa May Alcott*

Critical Insights: Louisa May Alcott, edited by Gregory Eiselein, professor of English and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar at Kansas State University and Anne K. Phillips, an associate professor of English at Kansas State University, explores the works by Louisa May Alcott. Some focus on indisputably famous books but offer fresh insights about them, while others offer fresh and tantalizing perspectives on lesser-known aspects of Alcott's career. Whatever reader's familiarity with Alcott's life and works, the essays offer diverse and original approaches to literary study, breadth and depth of literary and cultural history, and an invitation to take part in the ongoing conversation. These essays aim to illuminate not only the specific Alcott texts addressed here but also her entire body of work.

This title is divided into four main sections, starting with **Career, Life, and Influence**. This section discusses Alcott's career and certain themes of her writings in fairly broad terms. The rest of the text examines the writings of Louisa May Alcott and their growing legacy.

Critical Contexts offers top-notch scholarship on an impressive range of Alcott's works. Beginning with John Matteson's essay, "'When Rude Hands Shake the Hive': Louisa May Alcott and the Transformation of America," he aligns Alcott's life with America's history, suggesting that the two grew up together: "Just around the time when, as a young adult, Alcott felt as if her world were starting to fall apart, the country almost fell apart as well—and Alcott nearly sacrificed her life to keep it together." A pair of essays in this collection examine the need for complex critical approaches to Alcott and her original critical and cultural contexts. In "Feminist Alcott?," Katherine Adams begins with her students' conversations about Alcott's support for women's rights. In "Looking for Louisa: Authors, Audiences, and Literatures in Alcott's Critical Reception," Amy M. Thomas provides another way of appreciating Alcott's complexity and the significance of her work within its original historical and critical context. Thomas emphasizes that Alcott was a professional writer who worked in a wide variety of genres, additionally attitudes about the kinds of texts she produced have been in flux for decades, resulting in her fluid status within the American literary canon. Kristen B. Proehl argues in "Poverty and Social Critique in Postbellum America: *Little Women* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" that both Twain and Alcott depict scenes of poverty "in order to meditate upon cultural memory of the Civil War and examine the social issues of the Reconstruction era."

Starting the section of **Critical Readings**, Christopher Fahy focuses on how Hawthorne's and Alcott's ideas and works overlap, particularly regarding the concept of genius. Emily Waples

argues in “Alcott and the Work of Nursing” that on the one hand, nursing in the Civil War era was perceived to be “an exercise in feminine sentiment and sympathy.” On the other hand, it was “prosaic and drudging labor: an extension of the often-taxing domestic duties typically assigned to the nineteenth-century women.” A. Waller Hastings also takes on the Civil War as setting in *Little Women* in “Louisa’s Civil War.” While critics have generally suggested that the war is merely the backdrop to the March sisters’ lives, Hastings wonders, “Is it possible that the presence of the Civil War in this novel in fact includes biography in a broader sense?” Monika Elbert positions Alcott’s work within the context of authors from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charlotte Brontë to Harriet Spofford and others whose works exemplify the Gothic. Elbert acknowledges the “bad’ girls attracted [Alcott], whether they were governesses, adulteresses, or actresses.” Katie Kornacki focuses in “A Loving League of Sisters’: The Legacy of Margaret Fuller’s Boston Conventions in Alcott’s *Work*” on the ways that protagonist Christie Devon and her associates embody the ideals of education, self-reliance, vocation, and sorority emphasized by Margaret Fuller in the Conversations Series that she conducted in Boston and at Sing-Sing prison. Other essays include:

- “Polly, Pygmalion, and the (Im)practicalities of an Independent Womanhood,” by Marilyn Bloss Koester
- “Violence and Confinement in *Little Men*” by Antoinette M. Tadolini
- “A Faith Truly Lived: Alcott’s Use of Biblical Allusion in *Eight Cousins* and *Rose in Bloom*” by Mo Li
- “American Girls and American Literature: Louisa May Alcott “Talks Back” to Henry James” by Christine Doyle
- “Louisa May Alcott, Patti Smith, and Punk Aesthetics” by Gregory Eiselein

Each essay in *Critical Insights: Louisa May Alcott* is 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of Works Cited and detailed endnotes. Also included in this volume are **Appendixes** to provide readers with additional information and opportunities for further research, including a **Chronology of Louisa May Alcott’s Life**, a list of **Works by Louisa May Alcott**, an annotated **Bibliography**, biographies of the **Editors** and **Contributors**, and an alphabetical **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current literary criticism of the world’s most studied literature. Edited and written by some of academia’s most distinguished literary scholars, *Critical Insights: Louisa May Alcott* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

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