

Romantic Elements in the March Family in the film Little Woman (2019): Philosophy Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the indicators of romantic love, describe how romantic love is reflected, and explain why these elements are exposed in the film Little Women (2019) from a philosophical perspective. The research focuses on the emotional relationships within the March family, encompassing love, togetherness, sacrifice, and freedom among the sisters in various relationship dynamics. The study identifies six key elements of romanticism: love as an expression of deep emotion, freedom in love, the sublimity of love through nature, love as a process of self-discovery, tragic and unrequited love, and sacrifice in love. These elements are elaborated through the analysis of the main characters' interactions, such as Jo, Laurie, Meg, and Amy, which reflect the complexity of human emotions. The findings reveal that love in this film is a transformational experience, involving not only happiness but also sacrifice, freedom, and emotional journeys in self-discovery. This study provides new insights into how elements of romanticism enrich family dynamics and emotional values, making the film a significant subject for further exploration within the context of romanticism philosophy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in society (Ogan et al., 2021). Beyond providing amusement and an escape from daily life, films have a unique potential to serve as powerful educational media (Abidin et al., 2024). Through the combination of engaging narratives, visual storytelling, sound design, and cinematic techniques, films can effectively convey specific messages, stimulate critical thinking, and offer new perspectives on various social, cultural, and philosophical issues (Wahas & Ahmed, 2024). With their immersive storytelling, films can impact viewers' understanding and awareness, inspiring reflection and even influencing attitudes and behaviors in meaningful ways.

According to Pratista in Hajar et al (2021), a film is an audio-visual medium that combines two main elements: the narrative and cinematic elements. The narrative element relates to the theme and storyline, while the cinematic element focuses on visual presentation to support the story (Shah et al., 2020). These two elements enable films to serve as educational media for conveying particular meanings and intentions to the audience. Additionally, Palls and Shamsudin in (Nurul & Ratna, 2021) state that films are an entertainment medium that mixes storyline, moving images, and sound. The combination of these three elements not only makes films engaging media but also allows them to be used as a learning tool.

The 2019 film Little Women, directed by Greta Gerwig, is a modern adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel that centers on the lives of the March family in post-Civil War America. The story follows four sisters Jo, Meg, Amy, and Beth as they navigate different stages of life, facing challenges, dreams, and the exploration of love and ambition. Gerwig brings depth to each character,

emphasizing the powerful sibling bond and the various forms of love they experience, not only in romantic relationships but also in family ties. Romantic elements like affection, togetherness, and sacrifice are woven throughout, highlighting the strength of family bonds alongside personal growth. This portrayal gives *Little Women* philosophical and romantic depth, making it a rich subject for further exploration, particularly in examining emotional connections within the March family. The film's emphasis on love and unity aligns with broader themes of romanticism, presenting it as an ideal subject for analysis from philosophical and literary perspectives.

The film *Little Women* (2019) portrays the dynamics of the March family, rich with elements of romanticism, which are not only evident in romantic love relationships but also in the close bonds of sisterhood. In the study of romanticism, elements such as affection, trust, togetherness, and sharing time and activities are essential in building deep emotional connections. Research by Nisa dan Dewi (2024) on the film *Twilight* shows that these elements create intimate bonds between characters through meaningful moments of interaction. Similarly, in *Little Women*, the closeness among the March family members reflects relationships that are mutually supportive and strengthening, adding depth to their characters. From a philosophical perspective, these romantic elements also demonstrate how values of affection, trust, and togetherness can strengthen inner bonds within family relationships, making it a theme worth exploring further in the film's context.

Romance is a term used to describe a tendency toward conservative thinking (Andi, 2019; Guan, 2021). The view emerged because the early writers worked throughout the French revolution (Ahsani & Azizun, 2022). Traces of romanticism remain today, although critics still debate the terminology, since the style of romanticism is romantic in the works of post-strukturalisme, the new pitus, the gender day perspective in Agusman (2021). Romance is a style of writing that expresses the assessment of the individual's emotional experience in the form of extreme statements on its nature and socially is a progressive form of struggle with a prominent style (Li & Phelan, 2021; Wartenberg, 2022).

In the film *Little Women* (2019), the phenomenon of romanticism is clearly evident in the relationships between characters, reflecting aspects such as affection, trust, and togetherness, which create deep emotional bonds. Based on Wittusen's view of romantic film-philosophy, films not only depict events but also invite the audience to experience a philosophical emotional engagement. Wittusen (2016) emphasizes that in the romantic approach to film, aesthetic aspects and emotional experiences hold philosophical value, leading to a deeper interpretation of humanity and relationships.

In a journal entitled "elderly feminist romanticism in the notebook and love in the time of cholera" written by Agusman (2021), and the journal "youth audience reception analysis of 1990s film romance" by Agusta (2021). Both journals dealt with the romance of the film. But the two above journals had differences and a focus of analysis. Agusman's journal focuses a feminist romance on the elderly in the movie. Agusta's second journal focuses analysis on romance in the movie and audience response to the romance in the movie.

The reason for choosing the title "Romantic Elements in the March Family in the Film *Little Women* (2019): A Philosophy Perspective" is to delve deeper into the application of romantic elements in the relationships among the March family members in the film *Little Women* (2019), particularly from a philosophical perspective. This film not only highlights romanticism in the context of romantic relationships but also in the emotional closeness between sisters who support, trust, and spend time together. Elements such as affection, trust, and togetherness are key in building deep emotional bonds.

This research is relevant because it combines romantic theory with a philosophical approach to understand how these elements enrich family relationships in the film. Through a philosophical lens, this study seeks to explore how these emotional aspects contribute to the depth of the characters and the dynamics of the March family, offering new insights into family values and the meaning of

romanticism in a broader context. Furthermore, no previous research has specifically addressed this topic, so this study aims to provide a new contribution to the analysis of Little Women (2019) from a philosophical romanticism perspective.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the Romantic Elements in the March Family in the film Little Woman (2019): A Philosophical Perspective

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a type of qualitative research with analytical descriptive research. Qualitative research is research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities naturally (Sutama, 2019). This research uses primary data and secondary data (Sugiyono, 2019). Primary data, in the form of relevant elements of the Little Woman film, such as prologue, dialogue, monologue, acting of the players, character behavior, and comments or reactions to the character Jo March. Secondary data, which includes philosophical theory, critical reviews from film reviewers, and expert opinions in the fields of film, literature, and art appreciation.

There are two data sources in this study, including Primary data source, namely the Little Woman film which is the main research material. Secondary data source, comes from various related literature, such as ebooks, ejournals, and theory books that discuss Romantic philosophy, film criticism, and studies from experts in the fields of literature, film, and art appreciation. Data Collection and Data Analysis Techniques in this study are, Watching the Little Woman film repeatedly. Capturing the Little Woman film screen at important points that are in accordance with the theory of romanticism. Reading books that are relevant to the theory of Romanticism in the Little Woman film. Writing or noting the main ideas from books and films that are relevant to the theory of Romanticism. Identifying scenes, prologues, monologues, and dialogues in the Little Woman film that reflect romanticism. Connecting data from books, films, and the theory of romanticism to find relevant patterns or relationships. Interpreting data by giving meaning to the relationship between the theory of romanticism and the Little Woman film.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The indicator of romanticism elements there are six indicator that were reflected in film Little Woman:

Love as an Expression of Deep Emotion

In Romanticism, love is seen as a very intense and deep emotional experience. Love is not only about happiness, but also involves various feelings such as sadness, longing and suffering. This strong feeling is considered to be the essence of true love. The Love as an Expression of Deep Emotion represents in film Little Woman as follows



(Picture 1, Scene 01:36:34)

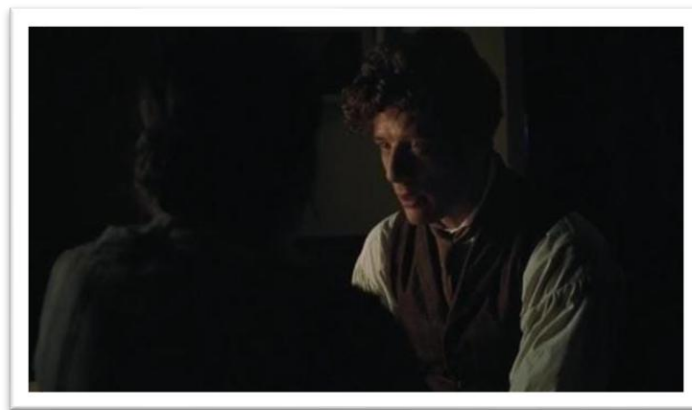
Laurie proposes to Jo, but she rejects him, revealing their emotional conflict. Jo loves him as a friend but can't return his romantic feelings. Her rejection reflects her struggle between preserving their friendship and exploring new emotions.

Laurie : We have to talk about it. I've loved you since I knew you, Jo. I'm powerless. I tried to show it but you wouldn't let me, and that's okay. But you have to listen now and give an answer, because I can't go on like this.

Jo : Don't.

Laurie : I stopped playing pool. I leave everything you don't like. I'm happy to do it. I waited and I'm not complaining because I... I thought you would love me, Jo. Guess I'm not as good as you expect and I'm not an important person...

Jo : You are very important, and I am proud of you.
I don't know why I can't love the way you want me to.
(Script on scene 01:36:34- 01:37:00)



(Picture 2, Scene 01:02:23)

John and Meg express their fears, with John feeling not good enough and Meg feeling guilty. Despite their doubts, they support each other, showing that love involves honesty and deep emotions.

Jhon : This is what I was afraid of, I did my best, Meg.

Meg : Oh John, my good and hardworking lover. I'm ungrateful and selfish.

John : Maybe you mean it

Meg : No! Let's think of a way for you to buy a coat. Then we'll both look awesome.
(Script on scene 01:02:23- 01:02:58)

Freedom in Love

Love in Romanticism emphasizes the freedom to love without being bound by social rules or applicable norms. Romanticism sees true love as something that requires following one's heart, even if it goes against societal expectations or conventions. The Freedom in Love represents in film Little Woman as follows

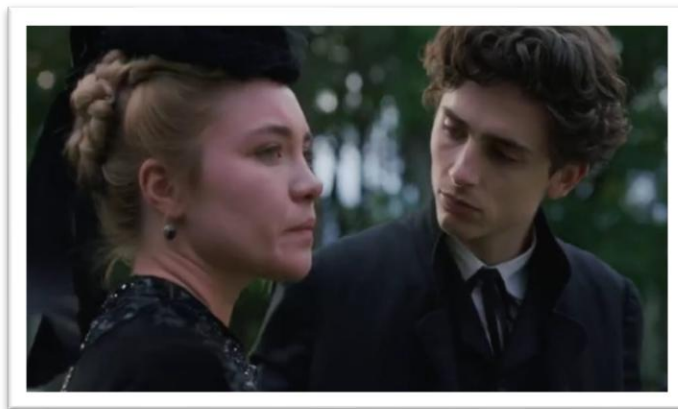


(Picture 3, Scene 01:42:18)

In the scene, Jo expresses her desire for freedom and love for Marmee, revealing her struggle to find her own path. Despite loving her family, Jo feels pressured by societal expectations of women. Marmee offers support while reminding Jo of the reality that dreams may conflict with traditional roles.

Jo : Maybe I rejected Laurie too quickly.
 Marmee : You love him?.
 Jo : The important thing is that I am loved, I want to be loved.
 Marmee : That's not the same as loving.
 Jo : I just feel, I feel that women have minds, souls and hearts. They also have ambition, talent and beauty. I'm sick of hearing people say women are only to be loved.
 (Script on scene 01:42:14 – 01:42:52)

As Jo said at the end of her statement, women have the right to choose the freedom of their own love and life.



(Picture 4, Scene 01:44:07 – 01:45:01)

Amy's decision to choose Laurie over Fred reflects her emotional growth. Initially materialistic, she learns that true love isn't about wealth or status. Confidently following her heart, Amy risks altering her relationship with Laurie, despite their past tension.

Amy : I'm not marrying Fred.
 Laurie : I've heard.

Amy : You don't have to say anything or do anything. I just don't love him as much as I should. So we don't need to talk about it. We don't need to say...(Laurie kisses Amy).

Love and the Sublimity of Nature

Nature is often used as a symbol in depicting love in Romanticism. Vast, wild and beautiful natural views are thought to reflect the depth and power of love. This relationship shows that love is part of a greater harmony and force of nature. The Love and the Sublimity of Nature represents in film *Little Woman* as follows



(Picture 5, Scene 00:49:18)

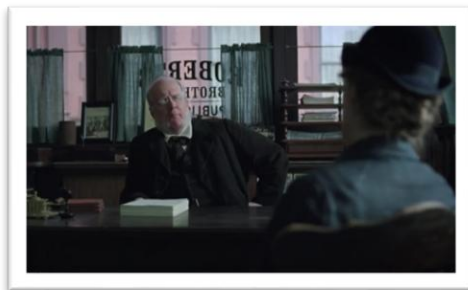
A conversation by the river shows how nature strengthens Laurie and Jo's bond. Laurie expresses concern for Jo's safety, and she listens with understanding, reflecting their closeness and trust. The serene surroundings deepen their connection, highlighting how love and nature complement each other.

Laurie : Morning, ladies. Today is sunny.
 Jo : Last day on the river, grab your shoes.
 Laurie : Stay on the edge. It's not safe in the middle.
 Joe : OK.

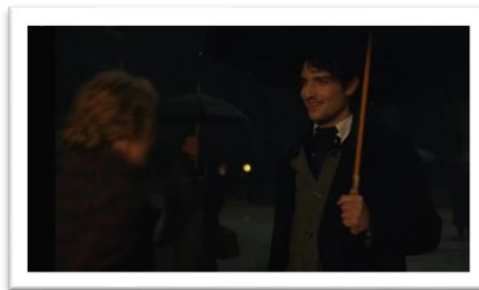
(Script on scene 00:49:18– 00:50:02)

Love as Self-Discovery and Enlightenment

Love is not only seen as a relationship between individuals, but also as a process of discovering one's identity. In Romanticism, through love, one can experience enlightenment and understand the purpose of one's life, making love a transformational experience. The Love as Self-Discovery and Enlightenment represents in film *Little Woman* as follows



(Picture 6, Scene 02:03:29)



(Picture 7, Scene 02:04:12)

Jo realizes that emotional experiences, including love, can enrich her writing and deepen her identity. Her relationship with Friedrich Bhaer teaches her that love is based on personality and inner qualities, not just physical attraction. Ultimately, Jo accepts a mature love with Fred, balancing her freedom and dreams with a supportive partnership.

Picture 6

Mr. Dashwood : Then who did he marry?.

Jo : No, he didn't marry either of them. Throughout the book he is not married.

Mr. Dashwood : No, not accepted.

Jo : I think marriage has always been an economic strategy. Even in fiction.

Mr. Dashwood: That's romantic. Just end it like that?.

Joe : Ok.

Picture 7

Jo : I don't want you to go, I want you to stay!.

Fredrich : Really? I'm not leaving if you want me to stay. I don't have anything jo!.

Jo : no problem.

Fredrich : My hands are empty!.

Jo : Not empty...(Jo hugs Fred).



(Picture 8, Scene 01:04:38)

Amy, initially focused on ambition and social stability, learns that true happiness comes from love, not wealth or status. Her relationship with Laurie helps her discover that inner peace comes from emotional connection and self-acceptance. Through Laurie, Amy learns to value relationships and find balance in life.

Laurie : After leaving your stupid dreams. What are you doing?.

Amy : Enhance my other talents and become an ornament in society.

Laurie : But you'll get engaged if he proposes?.

Amy : No!.

(Script on scene 01:04:28 – 01:05:00)

Tragic and Unrequited Love

Romanticism often depicts love stories that end tragically or are unrequited. This love full of suffering is seen as the purest form of love, because it persists even without hope or happiness. Suffering in

love is thought to deepen the meaning of love itself. The Tragic and Unrequited Love represents in film Little Woman as follows



(Picture 9, Scene 01:37:03)

Jo rejects Laurie's love because she cannot return his feelings romantically. While she values him deeply as a friend, she believes love cannot be forced and accepting him out of obligation would not lead to a genuine relationship.

Laurie : I love you Jo.
 Jo : I don't know why I can't love you the way you want.
 Laurie : You can't?.
 Jo : I can't. I can't change my feelings and I'd be lying if I said yes. I'm sorry Teddy.
 Laurie : I can't love anyone else, Jo. I only love you.
 Jo : I can't. It will end badly if we get married.
 (Script on scene 01:37:03 - 01:38:58)



(Picture 10, Scene 01:15:21)

Amy faces an emotional dilemma as she feels Laurie's love for her is influenced by Jo's rejection. She understands that true love is about acceptance, but struggles with the feeling that she is a second choice for Laurie.

Laurie : Don't marry him.
 Amy : You're mean.
 Laurie : Why?
 Amy : I've always been second to Jo in everything my whole life. I don't want you with me because you can't have him.
 Laurie : What?

Amy : I won't, because I've always loved you.
(Script on scene 01:15:21- 01:16:02)

Sacrifice in Love

Sacrifice is an important aspect of love in the Romantic view. Someone who loves sincerely is often willing to sacrifice their happiness or personal interests for the sake of the person they love. This is considered a true proof of the power and sincerity of love. The Sacrifice in Love represents in film Little Woman as follows



(Picture 11, Scene 01:25:10)

Meg sacrifices her dream of a luxurious life for love and family, choosing a simple life with John. She realizes true happiness comes from love and togetherness, not wealth. This decision reflects her belief that genuine relationships bring happiness.

John Brooke : I want you to have that nice dress
Meg : John... I'm done. I sold the clothes to Sallie.
John Brooke : Really? I want you to be happy.
Meg : I'm happy. John Brooke is my husband and I am his wife.
(Script on scene 01:25:10- 01:25:50)



(Picture 12, Scene 01:12:10)

Jo sells her hair to pay for her father's treatment, showing her deep love and willingness to sacrifice for her family. Despite the personal loss, she values her family's happiness above all else. This decision reflects Jo's commitment to always prioritize her family's needs.

Jo : Is this enough for the train?
Marmee : Where does the money come from?

Jo : I'm selling what I have, this doesn't affect the fate of the country so don't cry.
 Marmee : I am very proud of you my daughter.
 Jo : I really want to do something for dad.
 (*Script on scene 01:12:10- 01:13:02*)

3.1. Research Results

The reason romantic love reflected in film *Little Woman* :

Romantic love is central to *Little Women*, shown through the emotional journeys and relationships of the characters. Jo's rejection of Laurie highlights her belief that love cannot be forced, while Amy learns that true love is about emotional connection rather than social status. Meg chooses love and family over wealth, reflecting the idea that love brings deeper fulfillment than material success. These relationships reflect the key elements of romanticism, such as passion, individuality, and the rejection of societal expectations.

The reason romantic love exposed in film *Little Woman*:

Romantic love is exposed in *Little Women* through the characters' internal struggles and how they navigate relationships. The film shows how love challenges societal norms, with Jo seeking independence, Amy accepting Laurie despite feeling second choice, and Meg choosing love over status. Through these experiences, the film reveals how love shapes identity, drives personal growth, and leads to sacrifice, offering a deeper understanding of self and others.

3.2. Discussion

After the researchers collected all the data and analyzed it, the researcher found 6 finding, namely the Love as an Expression of Deep Emotion, Freedom in Love, Love and the Sublimity of Nature, Love as Self-Discovery and Enlightenment, Tragic and Unrequited Love, Sacrifice in Love. Romanticism focuses more on feelings than logic. In this research, various elements of romance were found which were reflected in the relationship between a pair of characters in the film "*Little Women*" (2019). All of this creates a strong romantic feel to the story.

Researchers found that in *Little Women*, love is depicted as an expression of very deep feelings, as seen in the relationships between Jo and Laurie, and Meg and John. In the scene when Laurie confesses his love to Jo, we see the deep emotional conflict between the two. Despite strong feelings of affection, Jo feels that Laurie's love does not match her feelings, and she must choose between maintaining the friendship or following romantic feelings that she does not yet fully understand. Love in this case is not only about happiness, but also about Jo's confusion in choosing between friendship and love. Likewise in Meg and John's relationship, where they express their feelings and fears to each other. John feels like he hasn't done enough for Meg, while Meg feels guilty and worried about being seen as ungrateful for her efforts. Even in difficulties, the two of them still support each other, showing that love is a deep feeling, full of sacrifice and honesty, which is more than just happiness. Romantic love in *Little Women* is reflected through the emotional depth seen in the relationships between Jo and Laurie, and Meg and John. The film showcases love as a complex, sometimes painful experience, where love involves not just happiness, but also sacrifice, guilt, and inner conflict. It reveals romantic love to show that true love is not always straightforward, but deeply intertwined with personal struggles and emotional growth.

Second, Researchers found that in "*Little Women*" the theme of freedom in love is strongly emphasized through the characters' struggle to follow their hearts even though it goes against social norms. Jo, in her conversation with Marmee, expressed her desire to be free to choose her own path in life, including in matters of love. Jo feels that women should have the freedom to choose their path in life, not just be objects of love. Likewise with Amy, who chose

to follow her feelings and choose Laurie even though their relationship had previously been tense. Amy's decision to follow her heart, even though it goes against existing social plans, shows her emotional maturity and desire to be free to love without being limited by social status or expectations. Romantic love in "Little Women" is reflected through the characters' struggles to follow their hearts, showcasing the importance of personal freedom in love. The film exposes romantic love as an act of defying societal expectations and choosing one's true desires, exemplifying how love in its truest form requires freedom to follow one's heart, as seen in Jo and Amy's decisions to prioritize their own feelings over societal pressures.

Third, Researchers found that in "Little Women", romantic love is depicted through the relationship between nature and the characters' feelings, especially between Laurie and Jo. The beautiful nature creates the perfect backdrop for their relationship, such as in the scene where they talk by the river. The serene beauty of nature strengthens their closeness and mutual trust, reflecting how love and nature complement each other. Nature provides a peace that deepens feelings of love, showing that love, like nature, is a vast and beautiful force. Romantic love in "Little Women" is reflected in the way the beauty of nature enhances the bond between Laurie and Jo, making their love feel deeper and more meaningful. The connection between love and nature emphasizes that love, like nature, is vast and powerful, offering peace and harmony. The film exposes romantic love in this way to show that love is part of a greater, natural force.

Fourth, Researchers found that in "Little Women" love is not only a relationship between individuals, but also a process of self-discovery and enlightenment. Jo, through her relationship with Friedrich, learns that love can give depth to her identity without sacrificing her dreams. At first, Jo felt that love was not the most important thing in her life, but over time, she realized that true love should not be based on physical attraction or ideal compatibility, but rather on respect for a person's personality and inner qualities. Likewise, Amy, who initially prioritized personal ambition and social status, eventually discovered that true happiness came from sincere love and deep emotional connections. Their love teaches Amy to accept herself and find inner peace, as well as the value of human relationships beyond worldly accomplishments. Romantic love in "Little Women" is reflected through the characters' journeys of self-discovery, where love becomes a transformative experience. The film exposes romantic love as a path to enlightenment, showing that love can deepen one's understanding of self and life, as seen in Jo's evolving relationship with Friedrich and Amy's realization of the value of true emotional connection with Laurie. Romantic love is presented as a balance between personal growth and emotional connection, highlighting how love can complement one's identity and journey.

Fifth, Researcher found that in "Little Women" tragic and unrequited love is depicted through the relationship between Laurie and Jo, as well as the emotional dilemma experienced by Amy. Jo rejects Laurie's love because she cannot reciprocate those feelings in the same way. Although Jo loves Laurie as a friend, she feels that accepting Laurie's love only to return those feelings would damage their relationship. Forced love will never be true love, and Jo knows that, even though she feels so much pain from rejecting Laurie. On the other hand, Amy feels love that is not completely reciprocated when she finds out that Laurie chose her after rejecting Jo. Even though Laurie is finally with Amy, she still feels like Jo's shadow is between them, making Amy feel like a second choice. Amy's love for Laurie is a sacrificial one, which, although sincere, is burdened by the fact that she is a runaway after Jo's rejection. Romantic love in "Little Women" is reflected in the tragic and unrequited love experienced by Laurie and Jo, where love persists despite rejection and suffering. The film exposes romantic love as a complex emotional journey, where love cannot always be forced or reciprocated, and sometimes love endures in painful silence, as shown by Jo's refusal and Amy's complicated acceptance of Laurie. This tragic love highlights the depth and authenticity of love in the film, showing that true love does not always lead to happiness, but can still hold meaning through its trials.

Sixth, Researcher found that in “Little Women”, sacrifice in love is clearly seen through the actions of Meg and Jo who are willing to sacrifice personal happiness for the sake of the people they love. Meg, who initially wanted a luxurious life, chose a simple life with her husband, John Brooke. Even though she sacrifices her social dreams, Meg finds true happiness in love and togetherness. Likewise with Jo, who sold her long hair to raise money for treatment costs for her sick father. Even though the hair meant a lot to her, Jo sacrificed it for the sake of her family. This action shows that sincere love can overcome personal desires for the happiness of those we love. Romantic love in “Little Women” is reflected through the sacrifices that characters like Meg and Jo make for the people they love. Meg sacrifices her desire for wealth to build a life of love and simplicity with John, while Jo sacrifices her beloved hair to help her father, showing the depth of love she has for her family. This emphasizes that true love in the film is depicted not in grand gestures, but in the personal sacrifices made for the well-being of loved ones. The exposure of romantic love in this way highlights the power of love as a selfless act, deepening the emotional resonance of the relationships in the film.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion obtained that Love is depicted as a deep and sacrificial emotional experience. These romantic values are realized through the struggles of the main characters, such as Jo, who challenges social rules and prefers personal freedom over traditional expectations of marriage. Jo's rejection of Laurie's love reflects the romantic view that love is a journey full of emotions, not always happy, and sometimes involving self-sacrifice. Likewise, the sacrifices made by Meg who chose to live a simple life with John Brooke even though she initially wanted a luxurious life, which emphasizes that true love is not only about happiness, but also about sacrifices for the people we love.

Apart from that, Little Women (2019) also illustrates that love is a process of self-discovery and enlightenment. Jo's relationship with Friedrich shows that love does not hinder personal achievement, instead providing space for personal growth and development. In Amy's emotional journey, ultimately choosing Laurie, we see how love brings a new understanding of true happiness, beyond material interests or social status. Overall, this film shows that love in a romantic view does not only focus on personal happiness, but also on freedom, sacrifice, and a deep emotional journey in finding one's true self.

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