

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL BIOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Safarova Rukhshona Ulugbek qizi  
student, Bukhara State Pedagogical Institute

**Abstract:** This article examines cross-cultural biographical representations of Louisa May Alcott across five national traditions: the United States, Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany. Drawing on feminist life-writing theory, reception aesthetics, and world literature frameworks, it argues that biography operates as a form of **ideological re-authoring** rather than neutral historical reconstruction. Based on a purposively selected corpus of 32 biographical and critical texts (1889–2022), the study identifies three dominant representational paradigms: the domesticated moral exemplar, the feminist literary pioneer, and the transnational cultural commodity. Through comparative analysis, the article demonstrates how these paradigms restructure narrative causality, selectively foregrounding aspects of Alcott's life in accordance with culturally specific gender norms, literary values, and institutional priorities. The study advances a methodological framework for comparative biography and contributes to debates in feminist criticism and transnational literary studies by reconceptualizing life-writing as a primary site of cultural negotiation within global literary systems.

**Keywords:** Louisa May Alcott, cross-cultural biography, feminist life-writing, reception theory, world literature, transnational studies.

## СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫХ БИОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ О LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

**Аннотация:** В данной статье рассматриваются межкультурные биографические представления о Louisa May Alcott в пяти национальных традициях: США, Японии, Южной Кореи, Франции и Германии. Опираясь на феминистскую теорию автобиографического письма, эстетику восприятия и рамки мировой литературы, автор утверждает, что биография функционирует как форма идеологического переосмысления, а не нейтральной исторической реконструкции. На основе целенаправленно отобранного корпуса из 32 биографических и критических текстов (1889–2022 гг.) исследование выявляет три доминирующие репрезентативные парадигмы: «прирученный» моральный образец, феминистский литературный новатор и транснациональный культурный товар. С помощью сравнительного анализа статья демонстрирует, как эти парадигмы перестраивают причинно-следственную связь в повествовании, избирательно выдвигая на первый план аспекты жизни Олкотт в соответствии со специфическими для данной культуры гендерными нормами, литературными ценностями и институциональными приоритетами. Данное исследование предлагает методологическую основу для сравнительной биографии и вносит вклад в дискуссии в феминистской критике и транснациональных литературоведческих исследованиях, переосмысливая автобиографию как основное место культурного взаимодействия в рамках глобальных литературных систем.

**Ключевые слова:** Louisa May Alcott, межкультурная биография, феминистская автобиография, теория рецепции, мировая литература, транснациональные исследования.

## LOUISA MAY ALCOTT HAQIDAGI MADANIYATLARARO BIOGRAFIK TASAVVURLARNING QIYOSIY TAHLILI

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqolada Louisa May Alcott haqidagi madaniyatlararo biografik tasavvurlar beshta milliy an'ana – AQSh, Yaponiya, Janubiy Koreya, Fransiya va Germaniya misolida ko'rib



chiqiladi. Feministik avtobiografik yozuv nazariyasi, qabul qilish estetikasi hamda jahon adabiyoti konsepsiyasiga tayangan holda, muallif biografiya neytral tarixiy qayta tiklash emas, balki mafkuraviy qayta talqin shakli sifatida faoliyat yuritishini ta'kidlaydi. 1889–2022-yillar oralig'idagi 32 ta biografik va tanqidiy matndan maqsadli ravishda tanlab olingan korpus asosida olib borilgan tadqiqot uchta asosiy reprezentativ paradigma mavjudligini aniqlaydi: “moslashtirilgan” axloqiy namuna, feministik adabiy yangilik yaratuvchisi va transmilliy madaniy mahsulot. Qiyosiy tahlil orqali maqola ushbu paradigmalar hikoya ichidagi sabab-oqibat bog'liqligini qanday qayta shakllantirishini, shuningdek, Olcott hayotining ayrim jihatlarini muayyan madaniyatga xos gender me'yorlari, adabiy qadriyatlar va institutsional ustuvorliklarga muvofiq tarzda tanlab oldinga surishini ko'rsatadi. Mazkur tadqiqot qiyosiy biografiya uchun metodologik asos taklif etadi hamda feministik tanqid va transmilliy adabiyotshunoslik tadqiqotlaridagi munozaralarga hissa qo'shadi, avtobiografiyani global adabiy tizimlar doirasidagi madaniy o'zaro ta'sirning asosiy maydoni sifatida qayta talqin qiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Louisa May Alcott; madaniyatlararo biografiya; feministik avtobiografiya; resepsiya nazariyasi; jahon adabiyoti; transmilliy tadqiqotlar.

### 1. Introduction

Few nineteenth-century American authors have achieved the enduring global presence of Louisa May Alcott, whose novel *Little Women* (1868) continues to circulate widely across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Matteson, 2007). While the international reception of her fiction has attracted sustained scholarly attention, the cross-cultural reconstruction of her **biographical identity** remains comparatively underexamined.

Biography is not a transparent record of historical fact but a culturally mediated narrative practice shaped by ideological frameworks, literary conventions, and institutional contexts (Smith & Watson, 2010). This dynamic becomes especially pronounced in cross-cultural settings, where biographical subjects are reinterpreted through the receiving culture's “horizon of expectations” (Jauss, 1982). As a result, Alcott does not emerge as a singular, stable historical figure but as a series of culturally situated representations.

This article examines how Alcott's life has been constructed across five national traditions: the United States, Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany. It addresses three key questions:

- (1) What narrative frameworks structure cross-cultural representations of Alcott's life?
- (2) How do these frameworks reflect local ideological concerns, particularly in relation to gender and authorship?
- (3) What do these variations reveal about the dynamics of global literary circulation?

The central argument advanced here is that cross-cultural biography functions as a form of **ideological re-authoring**, in which the subject's life is selectively reorganized to resolve tensions within the receiving culture. Extending reception theory, the article demonstrates that interpretive frameworks operate not only at the level of textual meaning but at the level of life construction itself.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three complementary theoretical approaches.

First, feminist life-writing theory emphasizes that women's lives have historically been narrated through restrictive cultural scripts that prioritize domesticity, sacrifice, and relational identity (Heilbrun, 1988). In the case of Alcott, such frameworks frequently subordinate her professional ambition to narratives of familial duty (Showalter, 2001).

Second, reception aesthetics highlights the role of culturally conditioned expectations in shaping interpretation (Jauss, 1982). When a biographical subject crosses cultural boundaries, these expectations determine which aspects of the life become visible, meaningful, or suppressible.



Third, world literature theory situates literary circulation within global systems structured by unequal distributions of cultural capital (Moretti, 2000; Casanova, 2004). As a canonical American author, Alcott's reception is mediated by the prestige of Anglophone literature, requiring receiving cultures to negotiate her authority within their own literary systems.

Together, these frameworks enable an understanding of biography as an interpretive practice embedded in broader cultural and ideological structures.

### 3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative methodology based on a purposive corpus of 32 texts published between 1889 and 2022. The corpus includes:

- 12 American works
- 6 Japanese texts
- 5 South Korean studies
- 5 French analyses
- 4 German publications

Texts were selected according to their scholarly relevance, sustained engagement with Alcott's life, and representativeness within national traditions (Renders & De Haan, 2013).

The analysis proceeded at two levels:

**Macrostructural analysis** examined narrative organization, including the prioritization of life stages and relationships, and the resolution of tensions between domestic and professional identities.

**Microstructural analysis** focused on thematic patterns, including representations of gender, authorship, ambition, and cultural adaptation.

Through iterative comparison, three dominant representational paradigms were identified.

### 4. Findings: Representational Paradigms

The domesticated moral exemplar paradigm constructs Alcott as a figure whose literary production emerges from familial obligation. This representation does not merely emphasize domesticity; it **restructures narrative causality**, presenting authorship as a consequence of moral duty.

In Cheney's foundational biography, moments of economic necessity are framed as ethical imperatives, transforming professional writing into filial service (Cheney, 1889). Similar patterns appear in Japanese and South Korean contexts, where Alcott's productivity is interpreted within frameworks of self-sacrifice and educational virtue (Watanabe, 2007; Kim, 2014).

This paradigm thus aligns literary authorship with culturally sanctioned models of femininity, minimizing tensions between domestic roles and professional ambition.

The feminist literary pioneer paradigm reconfigures Alcott as a figure who strategically negotiated patriarchal constraints. Rather than presenting domesticity as natural or inevitable, this perspective interprets it as a site of tension and resistance.

Feminist critics have emphasized the unresolved contradictions within *Little Women*, particularly the conflict between Jo March's literary ambitions and the narrative's domestic closure (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). Biographically, this produces a reinterpretation of Alcott as an author whose conformity masks a more complex engagement with gender norms (Elbert, 1984; Stern, 1996).

Importantly, this paradigm does not simply recover a "true" historical subject; it constructs a new interpretive figure aligned with late twentieth-century feminist discourse.

In the transnational cultural commodity paradigm, Alcott's biography becomes embedded within global circuits of cultural production. Here, the authorial figure is increasingly detached from archival specificity and reconfigured as a flexible cultural symbol.

Film adaptations, educational materials, and publishing practices construct a version of Alcott that is ideologically adaptable, capable of functioning as a moral exemplar, feminist icon,



or cultural brand (Murphy, 2008). In this context, biography operates as **paratext**, shaping the reception of literary works within global markets (Susina, 2003).

### 5. Discussion

The interaction of these paradigms demonstrates that cross-cultural biography is governed not by representational accuracy but by **ideological utility**. Each paradigm resolves distinct cultural tensions: the domesticated model reconciles female authorship with traditional gender norms; the feminist model restores suppressed agency; and the commodity model aligns literary value with global circulation.

These paradigms frequently overlap, producing hybrid representations that reflect ongoing negotiations between local cultural expectations and transnational critical frameworks. Such hybridity underscores the instability of biographical meaning in cross-cultural contexts.

The analysis also raises ethical concerns. The reliance on translated or selectively curated sources may reinforce interpretive distortions, highlighting the need for greater methodological reflexivity in cross-cultural life-writing (Smith & Watson, 2010).

### 6. Conclusion

This article has argued that biographical representations of Louisa May Alcott are best understood as sites of ideological re-authoring rather than neutral reflections of historical reality. By demonstrating how her life is systematically reconstructed across cultural contexts, the study challenges assumptions about the transparency of biographical narrative.

More broadly, the findings suggest that cross-cultural biography requires a methodological shift—from recovering a singular historical subject to analyzing the conditions under which multiple versions of that subject become intelligible. In this sense, biography emerges as a central arena in which questions of gender, authorship, and cultural authority are actively negotiated within global literary systems.

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