In this thoroughly researched and well-documented text, Clark explores the history of the reception of *Little Women* from its publication in 1868 to the present. In addition, she considers how critics and the public viewed Alcott herself – in a sense exploring Alcott’s own reception with children and adults, scholars and the general public, from her sudden celebrity due to the popularity of the book to her “reclamation” by feminist scholars in the twenty-first century.

Clark opens with a description of her own childhood copy of *Little Women*, thus situating herself as a longtime reader of the text. She points out that although twenty-first century readers believe they are reading an “authentic” version of the text, *Little Women* is a mutable text. The words aren’t always the same. The illustrations and packaging vary widely. The social context in which we encounter the text varies too, and what we already “know” about the book before we read it colors what we read” (2). This by no means invalidates the work – Clark is a meticulous scholar who backs her assertions with mounds of evidence – but seems entirely appropriate for a discussion of what is, for many readers, a very personal relationship with a story.

What follows is a detailed look at various adaptations of the original text – annotated versions, picture books, illustrated editions, versions with the text dumbed-down for modern readers, stage plays, films, television movies and mini-series, anime, and a recent operatic rendition. As adaptation theorists believe, Clark views these adaptations as unique entities, but also “scrutinize[s] reviews of adaptations...to gauge response not just to the adaptation itself but to Alcott’s novel, or to the public image of the novel...[because] audience members still connect it...to some degree, with the presumed original” (7). She also traces evidence of the hold this text has on American popular culture, citing the now ubiquitous merchandising tie-ins such as dolls, clothing, games. other artifacts of material culture such as a stamp issued in 1993, and the preservation of Orchard House, where Alcott wrote and set the story, as a museum.

Using diaries, letters from fans, elite critical reviews, reviews in popular publications, library reading lists, ‘spin off’ novels, and other primary sources, Clark views *Little Women* through the voices of a wide variety of people – members of the literary establishment, children, adult memoirs (both of famous and ordinary people), and Alcott herself. Each chapter highlights an
“era” in the reception of the book beginning with how Alcott became “Aunt Jo” for millions of readers in the U.S. and abroad, to the final chapter ‘Celebrating Sisterhood and Passion Since 1960.’

Depending on one’s view, *Little Women* is a classic of American children’s literature, one of the great American novels, or a no-longer-relevant work written for girls. The reality is much more complicated. *The Afterlife of “Little Women”* weaves together the reception history of this single text, but also the history of the American literary canon and its uneasy relationship with children’s literature, and how societal shifts influence our view of a particular literary work. As Clark demonstrates, the story of *Little Women* has “permeated American culture” (198) to such an extent that although our relationship with it will undoubtedly change, it will continue to be a part of our culture for the foreseeable future.

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