

Emerging trends in  
19th century  
children's literature:  
exploring didactic,  
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As the eighteenth century came to a close, there was a rise of children literature because the way society viewed children changed from children being seen as small adults to them being creative individuals that are easily influenced by everything around them. As a result, children's books became a way to teach children how to act correctly in society. (Grenby. 2014)

Although some stories are overtly didactic, both *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas and *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott exemplify children's novels that have a didactic plot line woven in with the emerging trends of adventure and entertainment.

Alexandre Dumas, the author of *The Three Musketeers*, is famous for writing strong morality into many of his works. He preached strong ethics throughout *The Three Musketeers*, shown through the main characters: D'Artagnan, Athos, Aramis and Porthos, each one exemplifying correct morals. D'Artagnan is portrayed as the poor nobleman who goes off to become a musketeer to help his family. Throughout the novel, he's distinguished by his ambition. Kitty, his love interest, describes his personality as having "the principal features of... ambition and pride". (Dumas. 514) Athos is seen as the wisest in the group. He is shown as the epitome of bravery and intelligence. After a duel, that Athos got seriously injured in, the musketeers were sent for by the King. They urge Athos to stay and rest, but he arrives to the King saying, "...you have sent for me, as my comrades inform me, and I have hastened to receive your orders. I am here; what do you want with me?" (Dumas. 48) Early in the novel, Athos is already showing his bravery and loyalty as a musketeer. Aramis is seen as the quiet, but intelligent friend who is fiercely loyal; D'Artagnan describes him as "

mildness and grace personified”. (Dumas. 64) Unlike Aramis, Porthos is loud and likes to boast about himself, but he also exemplifies intelligence and thoughtfulness. In a time of excitement, when Porthos thinks he’s going to eat a good family meal, he describes himself with great sadness as, “...a wanderer on the earth, a man without fortune, a man without family...”. (Dumas. 493) The main characters in *The Three Musketeers* can be used as examples for how children should embody moral characteristics. (Kane. *Three Musketeers*. 2018)

Alexandre Dumas had many anxieties pertaining to childhood and how it should be viewed. Dumas, himself, didn’t have a normal childhood because his father died when he was six causing his family to live in poverty. (Kane. *Three Musketeers*. 2018) The adventurous aspect of *The Three Musketeers* keeps the novel playful and interesting for young readers. As a result of these high energy episodes, the reader keeps turning the page, waiting for the main characters to meet another villain and get into another duel without noticing that there are pertinent messages placed within these scenes. In chapter 31, for example, after the musketeers’ duel the Englishman, they find a bag of money in the dead man’s coat. D’Artagnan takes it and they decide, instead of one of them keeping the money, to give it to a coachmen “ for you and your comrades”. (Dumas. 486) It is these moments of conversation between the musketeers that teach children correct ethics. Because these moments are hidden in between scenes of high action, a sense of childhood innocence and fun remains in the novel.

*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott is also often used as an example of early didactic writing in children’s literature. The sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, <https://assignbuster.com/emerging-trends-in-19th-century-childrens-literature-exploring-didactic-entertaining-and-adventurous-plot-lines/>

all exemplify good moral character along with demonstrating the importance of domestic duties and how they can foster growth. Meg is the example of a perfect nineteenth century woman, she's hard-working, respectful and polite. Meg shows how to take pride in her work and get joy from doing it. It is after John and Meg get married, buy a house and have some turmoil in their marriage that " Meg learned, that a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honor the art of ruling it not as a queen, but as a wise wife and mother".(Alcott. 556) Jo is quite the opposite of Meg; she is introduced to the reader by being reprimanded by Meg who says, " It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl; but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady".(Alcott. 6) Despite her negative characteristics, Jo is also sincere and intelligent. She demonstrates how to have a domestic life without compromising her personality. Beth is described as "...shy and quiet, sitting in corners till needed, and living for others so cheerfully that no one sees the sacrifices...". (Alcott. 56) Sadly she dies at a young age, so the reader can never see her develop into a mature woman, but she does help Jo see the importance of caring for others and makes Jo more mature. Amy is ambitious and graceful and is arguably the best example for learning the importance of domestic duties. Despite her long term dream of becoming a genius painter and marrying rich, she settles down with Laurie, a childhood friend and sacrifices her dreams because " Amy felt that no one could comfort and sustain her so well as Laurie...". (Alcott. 595) Because of their personal growth, the March sisters are perfect examples for children to see how to become the best versions of themselves without having to change their character. (Kane. Little Women. 2018)

Louisa May Alcott also had an unconventional childhood. Her father didn't make much money and was often away for work, so she became the one who had to earn money for her family by writing. This caused her to grow up quickly and miss key aspects of a normal childhood. (Kane. Little Women. 2018) She too, uses scene of high energy, such as when the sister's fight or play together, to keep the reader entertained while teaching lessons about character. In chapter 11, the girls decide to take a summer vacation and their mother lets them all stop their chores for a week, but she warns, " I think by Saturday night you will find that all play and no work is as bad as all work and no play". (Alcott. 154) Of course, Marmie ends up being right and the girls want to go back to doing their chores by the time the week is over. Scenes that are amusing, but have a hidden message keep children open to the message the author is showing. This formatting of rotating scenes of high energy with those with lessons, kept the story entertaining for children, so that they would have fun while learning.

Both The Three Musketeers and Little Women are relevant nineteenth century literary texts when explaining how societal changes affects children's literature. Because the view of children and childhood changed, children's literature grew as a genre to encompass many different aspects of societal standards. Parents still wanted children's books to be educational, but because childhood was being fetishized in society, aspects of adventure and entertainment became of equal importance. (Metz. Romanticism)