

## **Like Eliza Rachel Félix: Enacting Change in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask***

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A great success at the time of publication, Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask* received renewed interest after Madeleine Stern's recovery of it in the 1970s. Initially published in the *Flag of Our Union* in 1866, under the pseudonym of A.M. Barnard, and set in mid-nineteenth-century England, the novel depicts the relationship between Jean Muir, a Scottish governess of dubious background, and her employers, the wealthy Coventrys. Throughout the novel, Jean is portrayed as a skillful actress: not only does she successfully stage a few tableaux vivants, or living pictures, in order to entertain her employers, but she effectively "acts" in everyday life as well. Towards the end of the novel the reader realizes that she was a professional actress in France. Although economically and socially inferior to her hosts and employers, Jean manages to outsmart them through her shrewd and deceptive stories and performances, eventually securing her financial stability by marrying the head of the Coventry family, the old Sir John. Literary scholars have mostly analyzed sensational elements in the novel (Hackenberg 2008, Butterworth-McDermott 2004), class conflicts in the Coventry household and society (Schewe 2008, Fetterley 1983), women's curtsy and professionalism as adopted "masculine" skills in the prime of the

ideology of domesticity (Elliott 1994), and the significance of women's participation in nineteenth-century parlor theatricals (Chapman 1996, Dawson 1997). What remains unexplored, however, is the connection between Jean's tableaux vivants and her broader cultural mission as well as the connection between Alcott's model for the protagonist and the protagonist herself. I contend that in *Behind a Mask*, Alcott emphasizes the instability of ethnicity, specifically Jewishness, and class, specifically governesses, in order to challenge the dominant, Christian and patriarchal social order. Similar to Alcott's other potboilers, *Behind a Mask* is set abroad, but the novel alludes to the issues of American society, particularly the increasing Jewish presence on American soil and women's resistance to patriarchy.

The narrator's early remarks reflect Alcott's allusions to Jean as a performer of Jewishness and a member of the class of governesses. Alcott's first and most important hint of this kind occurs at the beginning of the novel, when the narrator compares Jean to Rachel, or Eliza Félix (1821-1858), the internationally known nineteenth-century French Jewish actress, famous for her support of women's emancipation and pride in her Jewish ancestry. After one of master Gerald's early arguments with Jean, the narrator notes that Jean, while responding to her employer, looked at him "*with a gesture like Rachel. Her eyes were grey, but at that instant they seemed black with some strong emotion of anger, pride, or defiance*" (Alcott 2004, 7; emphasis added). Alcott was familiar with Rachel's acting. In 1855, Rachel performed in the United States, and Boston was one of the places in her tour ("Foreign Actors on the American Stage" 1881, 524; Stokes 1996, 68). Alcott was in Europe in 1865-66 (Showalter 1988, xxi), while Rachel was still considered the most outstanding tragic actress on the old continent. Though Rachel was glorified everywhere, her detractors often labeled her avaricious in order to denigrate her as a successful public woman ("Rachel" 1855, 199; Stokes 1996, 70). In order to create

Jean, Alcott borrows Rachel's histrionic skills, types of roles, and personal characteristics such as shrewdness, determination, and vitality, which were also ascribed to Jews in the nineteenth-century racial science and popular culture.

Alcott's second important hint announces her experimentation with the figure of the governess. Jean enters the Coventry household as a new governess, a liminal figure so convenient for the radical mission that Alcott assigns to her. The Coventrys are not aware that Jean's appointment as Bella's governess is just a performance that helps her achieve her goals. At the beginning of the novel, Gerald condescendingly speaks of Jean and other women of her social status even before he meets her. When his cousin, Lucia, offers to tell him about the new governess, he exclaims: "No, thank you. *I have an inveterate aversion to the whole tribe*" (Alcott 2004, 3; emphasis added). The word "tribe," though it usually has an ethnic connotation, here refers to the class of governesses, who were, just as Jews, regularly perceived as a group apart. I argue that through these hints and allusions, Alcott relays the message of attempting to reshape the predominantly Christian and patriarchal cultural center.

Jean's savvy performances of Jewishness in a constraining cultural theater help her move from a poor governess to a rich aristocratic lady. The protagonist's social ascent reveals the cultural potential that the figures of the Jew and the governess have in Alcott's vision of society: the potential to challenge and reshape the established social order through their liminality. Combining Daphne Brooks's concept of "free movements" through "off-center performances" and Michel de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" (policies and actions of the powerful) and "tactics" (ruses of the powerless), I will consider Jean's performances in the Coventry household a tactical intervention in the cultural center dominated by the English aristocracy. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that though Alcott praises Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish cleverness, determination, and vitality, she simultaneously

exposes (stereotypically) Jewish treachery to the scrutiny of the readership. Drawing on Bryan Cheyette, who is indebted to Zygmunt Bauman, I argue that Alcott's presentation of Jewishness is "allo-Semitic," that is, simultaneously philo- and anti-Semitic, revealing her complex, ambivalent attitude towards the increasing Jewish presence and agency in the United States.

### **Alcott, Feminism, and the Liminality of Class and Ethnicity**

Alcott's family was a strong influence on her passion for feminist causes. As Madeleine Stern notes in her introduction to *The Feminist Alcott: Stories of a Woman's Power*, "Feminism was in Louisa May Alcott's genes" (1996, vii). Her parents, Bronson and Abby May Alcott, firmly believed that "woman suffrage" was the most important reform of the day since women were economically and legally subordinated to men (ibid., vii). Louisa's parents' dedication to feminist causes served as a stimulant in her struggle for women's rights later on. In 1868 Alcott became a member of the New England Woman Suffrage Association, which inspired her literature on female emancipation in the 1870s (Showalter 1988, xxiii). Her dedication to feminist causes is evident in her newspaper responses, letters, and novels, particularly potboilers. In her letter to Lucy Stone, a famous fighter for woman suffrage, Alcott asserts, "I am so busy just now proving 'woman's right to labor,' that I have no time to help prove 'woman's right to vote'" (quoted in Stern 1996, xix). Alcott's letters to Boston's *Woman's Journal*, "the only woman suffrage paper published in Massachusetts," prove her devotion to women's rights (Stern 1996, xix). Though Alcott's letters and pamphlets testify to her feminist agenda, her most creative way of advancing feminist ideas was fiction-writing, particularly her posthumously discovered potboilers, published anonymously or pseudonymously

mostly in the 1860s, the decade of the bloom of Victorian sensation novels, whose melodramatic plots thrilled audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

The 1860s was the decade in which the courtroom became a popular venue for the uncovering of familial intrigues, sins, and felonies, and though these titillating occurrences were regular concerns of sensational journalism, they were most dramatically rendered through the sensation novel. Nineteenth-century commentators on literature considered the sensation novel a genre intended for audiences with no sophisticated taste in literature. As Lyn Pykett points out, authors of sensation literature centered their plots on crimes committed by excessively impassioned and psychologically deviant characters (1994, 4). Similar to popular theatrical melodramas, this genre exposes the down side of family life, challenging the common perception of home as one's haven from the outer world. The opposite sexes' different views on marriage and family, Victorian "gender roles," as well as women's social positions, rights, and emancipation are common concerns of Victorian sensation literature (*ibid.*, 10). Furthermore, these novels deal with legal issues pertinent to Victorian family and marriage. Their characters are involved "with wills and the inheritance of property, with the laws of bigamy and divorce, and with issues arising from women's lack of legal identity and rights" (*ibid.*). Even though sensation novels typically end with ideological closures that support official metanarratives, they do challenge Victorian social mores (*ibid.*, 13). Questioning the established social boundaries and investigating the fears and problems arising from such actions, the sensation novel exposes dark aspects of Victorian life to the scrutiny of its readership, implicitly calling for organized social actions of resistance.

Inspired by her British contemporaries, Alcott easily adopted the conventions of the genre and created a great number of thrillers, or gothic tales, all of which are set in European countries or the Caribbean. Among her most popular potboilers are

“Pauline’s Passion and Punishment” (1863), “A Pair of Eyes” (1863), “A Marble Woman” (1865), “V.V.: or, Plots and Counterplots” (1865), “The Fate of the Forrests” (1865), and “Taming a Tartar” (1867). As I have previously mentioned, despite foreign settings, all of Alcott’s thrillers deal with or allude to the issues pertinent to American society of the day. In her sensation fictions, filled with female characters’ explicit and implicit rebellions against their male counterparts, Alcott raises her voice against men’s dominance and calls for the organized feminist action.

In *Behind a Mask*, Alcott’s protagonist accepts an appointment as a governess, and the figure of the governess in nineteenth-century transatlantic literature regularly embodies various social conflicts. The governess is a liminal character who, according to T.J. Lustig, “epitomizes nineteenth-century anxieties concerning social and sexual borders” (1994, 149). This figure blurs class distinctions. Sometimes the governess’s parents are “merchants, civil servants ... officers, and clergymen” whose social status has deteriorated, and sometimes her parents are “farmers or tradesmen” who progress in social hierarchy (Broughton and Symes 1997, 14). When governesses worked in socially ascending families, they represented “status symbols for their employer as teachers of their children” (ibid.). They were expected to obey the rules and preach the values of the family they worked for, but they were simultaneously humiliated by their masters. The fact that the governess was located, as Christine Doyle puts it, “in some nebulous place above the level of servant but below the level of family,” was the underlying reason for the common belief that she was outside of the established social spheres (2000, 146). Through her employment, the governess encroached on the land of men, and through her adherence to high moral principles, she occupied the space of female chastity and docility. The governess’s class and gender liminality catalyzed the appearance of the literary tropes of the governess as an asexual, virtuous woman and as an unscrupulous

sexual predator (Broughton and Symes 1997, 178-179). Furthermore, as Elizabeth Schewe points out, “Because the governess was a relative stranger accepted within the borders of the family, for Americans she likewise embodies the threat of racial and immigrant others within the borders of the nation” (2008, 579). Thus, the governess in transatlantic literature was a figure loaded not only with various class, gender and sexual fears and desires of the dominant social order, but with that order’s ethnic and national anxieties as well.

*Behind a Mask* was published between the two waves of Jewish immigration to the United States (1820s-70s and 1880s-1920s), and the increasing Jewish presence on American soil triggered Christian responses. As Matthew Frye Jacobson explains, with the amalgamating influx of various European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was difficult to determine the borders between different kinds of whiteness: “one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites” (1998, 6; original emphasis). With the rise of theories of development in the second half of the nineteenth century, from evolutionism and counter-evolutionism to the eugenic school and sciences of mind and mental capabilities, Jewish people attracted popular scientists, who arduously tried to detect, describe, and define Jewishness as distinct from Anglo-Saxon whiteness. As Jacobson explains, physiognomic features such as “skin color, nose shape, hair color and texture, and the like,” or in Blumenbach’s terms, “the fundamental configuration of face” were “visible markers” of Jewishness and were considered recognizable “signs” of “an essential, immutable, inner moral-intellectual character” (ibid., 174). By the Civil War, Jewish immigrants had been considered distinct based on their faith, and not on their “blood” (ibid., 177). However, the Civil War and its aftermath witnessed the rise of the severest anti-Semitism. Subsequently, Jewish features did not just help Christians recognize Jews “in their greed (or their Jacobinism or their infidelism or their treachery),” but the

Jewish “physiognomy itself” became associated with Jewish “essential unassimilability to the republic” (ibid., 178). According to Jacobson, Jews were a target of sciences of development not only because of various possibilities for interpretations of Genesis, but also because of their devotion to blood, ancestry, and belonging, which was an essential value of various nationalist movements on the old continent (ibid., 179).

The American vernacular and visual culture quickly appropriated stereotypical descriptions of Jews in ethnographic studies. As Michael Dobkowski’s study entitled *The Tarnished Dream: The Basis of American Anti-Semitism* (1979) demonstrates, anti-Semites often portrayed Jews as perpetrators, usurers, sources of social degeneration, and unassimilable aliens. However, stereotypical portrayals of Jews were not exclusively anti-Semitic; philo-Semitic presentations were present in the public arena as well. According to Jonathan Karp, philo-Semites viewed the (stereotypically) Jewish characteristics that marked the whole group as “compatible, useful, employable, and even exemplary, without, at the same time, being threatening” as highly commendable (2011, 218). The oppressed non-Jewish ethnic minorities considered Jews a paragon for their own social elevation. For instance, African American activist and philo-Semite Booker T. Washington believed that Jewish “economic self-help and mutual assistance” were the crucial characteristics that African Americans had to acquire in order to progress and prosper like Jews (ibid., 216). In spite of many denigrating portrayals of Jewish people in popular culture, philo-Semites cast Jews as a praiseworthy model for American citizens.

Besides the social significance of the Jewish presence on American soil for Alcott’s choice of Rachel as a model for the protagonist in *Behind a Mask*, there is an interesting biographical fact that explains Alcott’s interest in Jews. Although Alcott’s mother had “the Sewalls, Quincys, and Hancocks” among her ancestors, “her father,



Colonel Joseph May, a Revolutionary veteran and a pillar of the First Unitarian Church,” was of “indistinct” origin (Elbert 1997, xv). Drawing from Madelon Bedell, the Alcotts’ biographer, Sarah Elbert asserts that the Mays were the progeny of John May, who immigrated to America in 1640 and who had worked as a “shopmaster” in England (ibid.). His last name had two spelling forms: “Maies” or “Mayes,” and he could have been of Portuguese descent (ibid.). This last name entails his Jewish ancestry as well, and Bedell speculates that among the first Mays who immigrated to America were “Portuguese Jews who fled the Inquisition” (quoted in ibid.). Louisa and her mother had “dark hair and eyes,” and Louisa described her skin as “sallow” or “brown” (quoted in ibid.). Unlike the two of them, Bronson had “blond” hair, “blue eyes,” and was of Anglo-Saxon descent (ibid.). He was convinced that “Anglo-Saxon ‘races’ possessed more spiritually perfect natures, were generally ‘harmonious,’ and had more lofty intellects than darker-skinned people” (ibid.). Bronson was grounded in the contemporary beliefs that different groups were marked by certain hereditary features that helped them prosper or led them to disaster (ibid., xvi).

Alcott’s family’s views of descent and belonging as well as the popular scientific racism contributed to the author’s approach to the issues of ethnic identity. As a girl, Louisa considered herself “moody Minerva” and was very different from her sister, a “blonde artist who combined work and pleasure in a more easy-going style” (ibid.). Jean Muir is a unique hybrid construction that emerged from Alcott’s experimentation with ethnic mixtures and liminalities. Jean is blond and delicate, with grey eyes, and thus reminiscent of what Bronson considered individuals of Anglo-Saxon descent. However, the expressiveness of her piercing eyes, her invincible determination, and her passionate and clever performances are reminiscent

of the grand Rachel, and more broadly of the stereotypical portrayals of Jews, and of Bronson's descriptions of Louisa and her mother as willful and fiery beings.

Alcott's own interpretation of Rachel through the creation of Jean Muir reveals the author's ambivalent relationship with the figure of a Jewish person. As Cheyette has convincingly argued, in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English and American literatures, the Jew is often loaded with both positive and negative desires of the dominant, Christian, social order (1993, 6; 1996, 11). According to Cheyette, the Jew reflects "the possibility of a new redemptive order as well as the degeneration of an untransfigured past" (1993, 6). Very often the Jew can simultaneously belong to "both sides of a political or social or ideological divide" (*ibid.*, 9). Therefore, the image of the Jew is fluid. As Cheyette explains, "Even within the same 'character,' the otherness of 'the Jew' was such that s/he could be simultaneously 'male' and 'female' and 'black' and 'white' and ultimately ... both 'philosemitic' and 'antisemitic'" (1996, 11). Drawing on Bauman, Cheyette underlines the importance of "the term *allo-semitism*," which encompasses "antisemitism and philosemitism as two relatively distinct aspects of a much broader process of differentiating Jews from other human beings" (*ibid.*, 14). The figure of the Jew is simultaneously an embodiment of Christian ideals and aspirations as well as an incarnation of Christian anxieties and trepidations. Following Cheyette's convincing argument, we can say that Jean Muir is an allo-Semitic character. Her determination to achieve her goals in a male-dominated society reflects Alcott's approval and praise of Rachel's support for feminist causes, but Jean's extreme shrewdness and callousness sometimes elicit the reader's criticism of allegedly Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish shortcomings.

As a remarkably successful public woman, Rachel was interesting to contemporary biographers, theater critics, and journalists, who often spoke of her

Jewish ancestry and her pride in it. As a daughter of a Jewish peddler, who had connections with the Hebrew community in the Marais, Rachel developed a strong sense of belonging to her ancestral culture (Stokes 1996, 68). Nineteenth-century journalistic descriptions of Rachel's countenance were often imbued with stereotypical perceptions of Jewish people. For instance, a contributor to the August 14, 1841 issue of *The Dramatic Mirror, and Literary Companion* depicted Rachel as follows: "In person, Mademoiselle Rachael [sic] is of middle stature, slightly, but beautifully formed; and her head is of Grecian contour, with features regular, though petite: *the only indications of her Hebrew-parentage are the jet-black hair and lustrous dark eyes*, which appear small beneath their low level brows" ("Mademoiselle Rachael [sic]" 1841, 3; emphasis added). Evidently, this writer found it necessary to detect and mention the (stereotypically) Jewish characteristics in Rachel's physique, which testifies to the nineteenth-century vogue of racial profiling and classification. Rachel constantly endured severe anti-Semitic offenses (Stokes 1996, 68). Some of her contemporaries labeled her as materialistic and manipulative, noting her lack of attachment to men ("Rachel" 1855, 199; Stokes, 70).

A famous anecdote with a Catholic Archbishop highlights Rachel's Jewish pride. According to the author of "Louis Philippe and Mademoiselle Rachel," published in the December 1854 issue of *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature (1844-1898)*, during one of Madame Récamier's "literary mornings," Rachel performed several excerpts from Corneille's *Polyeucte*, playing the role of Pauline, the dedicated wife of the Armenian nobleman who chose to convert to Christianity in the time when Christians were prosecuted in the Roman Empire ("Louis Philippe and Mademoiselle Rachel" 1854, 529). Following her husband, Pauline accepted Christianity as well. Before Rachel was about to exclaim Pauline's famous line, "Je vois, je sais, je crois!" (or, in English, "I see, I know, I believe!"), an

esteemed Catholic Archbishop had entered the salon, interrupting her performance (ibid.). Even though the Archbishop kindly apologized for his intrusion, Rachel refused to continue her performance of Pauline's conversion to Christianity. Instead, she announced with dignity that she would perform a few sections from Racine's *Esther*, which she did passionately, "thus remain[ing] ... faithful to the Jewish religion" (ibid.). After the Archbishop graciously commended her performance of *Esther*, "Mademoiselle Rachel made a most charming obeisance, and answered, her eyes lowered, but with firmness, 'Monsieur, je crois!'" (ibid.). The anecdote testifies to Rachel's devotion to Judaism as well as to her ability to easily change attitudes towards her viewers and successfully shift dramatic roles in front of them.

Rachel's most remarkable influence on contemporary French theater was her revitalization of the classical tragedy through an emphasis on the importance of women in different nations' histories. Through her impeccable performances, Rachel reshaped the tragic stage, dominated by men, from playwrights to stage workers to tragic heroes (Stokes 1996, 66). She enriched staged tragedies by giving power to female characters whose roles she performed. For instance, in Rachel's performance of Camille in *Horace*, "the political battle was counterpointed by the sexual": although Camille was a delicate woman, she was victorious in the battle owing to her manipulation of men (ibid., 83). Her presentation of Phèdre, especially her "ghostlike" appearance on the stage, emphasized women's irrepressible eroticism and their "disruptive power" (ibid., 104). In Madame Girardin's *Judith* (1843), Rachel attempted to refresh and enrich the well-known "biblical" story with the contemporary tragic style (ibid., 68). Rachel was capable of portraying the complex personalities of powerful women, by highlighting their bravery, wisdom, love and passions.

By portraying Jean as Rachel, Alcott assigns her character a unique mission: Jean accomplishes her goals through her conscious performances both on and off the stage, proving that women's will and agency are reliable tools in their struggle for a place in patriarchal society. By ascribing Rachel's determination, acting skills, and roles (particularly the role of biblical Judith) to Jean, Alcott opens a path for the governess's social mobility and encourages resistance to patriarchy. As much as the reader admires Jean's acting skills, s/he also notices her callousness in the struggle to climb up the social ladder. Similar to all the protagonists of sensation novels, Jean is not a fully likeable character. If Alcott integrates Jean's/Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish agency and cleverness in her vision of progressive womanhood, she simultaneously exposes to the scrutiny of her readership Jean's/Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish materialism and unscrupulousness, even though she explains that these traits have resulted from an unjust social hierarchy.

### ***Behind a Mask***

Prior to writing *Behind a Mask*, Alcott traveled around Europe as a paid nurse and companion to an ill friend (Showalter 1988, xxi). She visited Britain and especially enjoyed the English countryside, which very likely motivated her to set the plot of the novel in an aristocratic household close to London. The Coventry home became a site for Alcott's experimentation with class, gender, and ethnicity, portrayed through the protagonist's everyday performances as well as her staged tableaux vivants. The first four chapters of the novel portray Jean's daily performances as a governess, through which she tries to manipulate the Coventrys by appealing to them in different ways. The fifth chapter concentrates on the three tableaux that Jean consciously stages in order to accelerate her final success. The last four chapters depict the aftermath of Jean's tableaux, revealing the outcomes of her artistry and artfulness: Jean outsmarts

Gerald, her young master, by marrying his uncle and the head of the Coventry family, Sir John. The novel thus fully presents Jean's gradual and skillful rearrangement of the established hierarchy in the aristocratic world.

Jean's intervention in the Coventry household and nineteenth-century British and American cultures in general can be explained through a theoretical model consisting of Brooks's concept of "self-actualization" through "off-center performances" and de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" and "tactics." In her study of African American performances in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century transatlantic world, borrowing Carla Peterson's concept of "empowering oddness," Brooks examines performances of race and gender that African Americans invented in order to "move more freely" (2006, 6). Suggesting that such performances can be called "eccentric," Brooks notes that, according to Peterson, one of the meanings of the word "eccentric" actually "extends the notion of off-centeredness to suggest *freedom of movement* stemming from the lack of central control and hence new possibilities of difference" (ibid.). Avoiding "constrictive race and gender paradigms" prescribed by the dominant, white, social order, the characters that Brooks analyzes "rehearsed 'off-center' identity formations to disrupt the ways in which they were perceived by audiences and to enact their own 'freedom dreams'" (ibid.). Since these characters could not be easily detected in their "off-center" actions, Brooks calls their performances "opaque," pointing out that such performances emphasize "the skill of the performer who, through gestures and speech as well as material props and visual technologies, is able to confound and disrupt conventional constructions of the racialized and gendered body" (ibid., 8). Drawing on Brooks's argument, I contend that disguising herself in the uniform of the governess off the stage and dressing herself in the clothes of Judith, a suffering damsel, and Queen Bess on the stage, Jean

manipulates the Coventrys, moves freely through their circles, accomplishes her personal goals, and destabilizes the established order in the cultural center.

De Certeau's cultural theory helps us understand the dynamic between the wealthy and powerful Coventry aristocrats and Jean as a marginal other. As de Certeau points out, a "strategy" is "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power ... can be isolated. ... [I]t is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other" (1984, 35-36). Spaces delineated by the strategies of the powerful are penetrated and reshaped through tactical operations of the Others. In de Certeau's words: "The space of a tactic is the space of the other ... It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids ... In short, a tactic is an art of the weak" (ibid., 37). Relying on her performance skills on and off the stage, Jean uses unique opportunities for initiating changes in the structure of the Coventry family, opening a path for similar changes in society as well.

Alcott's representation of the dynamic interaction between the English aristocracy exemplified in the Coventry family and Jean, the Scottish governess depicted as the legendary Jewish actress, reworks a number of aspects of British and American cultures. In terms of ethnicity, the social milieu that Jean enters exemplifies the space of the English social prevalence. In terms of class, the Coventrys represent the wealthy gentry, the owners of land and social privileges that Jean seeks to appropriate by marrying an affluent aristocrat. The aristocracy's derision and stereotyping of governesses are strategies that the dominant social order exercises in order to distinguish itself from the "menacing" Other. In terms of gender, the system

that Jean eventually subverts is based on male dominance.<sup>1</sup> Lady Coventry, her daughter Bella, and niece Lucia live on the money that Gerald and Edward inherited from their late father. Women's access to money is secured mostly through marriage or inheritance. The fact that the Scottish governess seeks to create some space for success in the predominantly English society, makes her an ethnic Other. Her determination to move upward in the British class hierarchy, or to change her social position from the temporary position of governess to aristocratic proprietress, marks her as a threat to the current class stratification. Furthermore, Jean's performances of Jewishness make her an ethnic Other in both Britain, critical of Disraeli's access to power, and the United States, permeated by post-Civil-War anti-Semitism. Finally, her defiance towards powerful men in the household marks her as a courageous woman fighter against patriarchy. Jean's on- and off-stage performances help her move forward in her battle for women's rights, higher social rank, and wealth, and her performed Jewishness is the most important insignia on her fighter's body.

Jean Muir's arrival is depicted as a theatrical event. Gathered in their living room, the Coventry family, consisting of Lady Coventry, her sons Gerald and Edward (the younger son), Bella, and Lucia, are awaiting the appearance of Jean Muir. The Coventrys are reminiscent of an audience for a parlor theatrical, waiting for the curtain to lift and the show to begin. While the others await Jean's arrival with eagerness and curiosity, Gerald does not look forward to meeting Jean at all. As mentioned earlier, when Lucia offers to tell him about the new governess, he disapproves of the entire "tribe" (Alcott 2004, 3). Gerald's remark sets the pattern for

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<sup>1</sup> Elliott's article (1994) focuses on the possibilities and restrictions of Jean's (and women's) authenticity and of very few occupations for women of the day. Fetterley's article (1983) investigates the connections between Jean's art of impersonation and survival as a woman in men's world.



his distrust of Jean's charm and good manners in the first half of the novel since he believes that affected amiability is a common feature of the whole class.

As soon as Jean arrives, the Coventrys examine her just as spectators examine an actress. In the narrator's words, "everyone looked at her then, and all felt a touch of pity at the sight of the pale-faced girl in her plain black dress, with no ornament but a little silver cross at her throat ... But something in the lines of the mouth betrayed strength, and the clear, low voice had a curious mixture of command and entreaty in its varying tones" (5-6). Jean's modest uniform is a prop that helps her elicit an emotional response from the viewers of her off-center performance under the mask of the governess, but what impresses her audience most is her inner strength, aided by her charming voice and self-confident posture. In order to prove that she can be an excellent piano teacher, she plays old Scotch tunes, but almost faints out of hunger and weakness. Even then, Gerald distrusts Jean's sickness, alluding to the whole scene as acting. He whispers to Lucia: "Scene first: very well done" (7). Gerald's comment announces the interaction between Jean and himself: Gerald will be a keen observer and interpreter of Jean's performances.

At this point of the plot, Jean's power as an actress is revealed through her artful responses to the Coventrys' comments and requests. Overhearing Gerald's remark, Jean retorts with "Thanks. The last scene shall be still better" (7). Jean's statement suggests that her everyday performances of the duties of the governess are going to be well-planned and purposeful. As stated above, the narrator emphasizes that, while responding to Gerald's comment, Jean pierced him with her eyes like the grand Rachel (7). As Jean's targeted audience, Gerald is stricken with her effective conveyance of resistance and pride. Through the narrator's words Alcott explains that "Young Coventry was a cool, indolent man, seldom conscious of any emotion, any passion, pleasurable or otherwise; but at the look, the tone of the governess, he

experienced a new sensation, indefinable, yet strong” (7). Jean’s successful change of mood and tone is evident on the same evening, when Jean, after her bitter exchange with Gerald, speaks sweetly and gently with Mrs. Coventry. When the old lady proposes the initial one-month appointment to Jean in order to see whether Bella would like her, Jean replies softly, saying: “I shall do my best, madam” (11). The change in her voice and attitude is superb. The narrator emphasizes that “One would not have believed that the meek, spiritless voice which uttered these words was the same that had startled Coventry a few minutes before, nor that the pale, patient face could ever have kindled with such sudden fire as that which looked over Miss Muir’s shoulder when she answered her young host’s speech” (11). Here Jean’s clever adjustment to different targeted audiences is reminiscent of Rachel’s successful changing of roles in front of Madame Récamier and the Catholic Archbishop.

Jean’s acting skills are especially evident in the moments when the narrator discusses changes in Gerald’s perception of the governess. Gerald’s initial remark about the class of governesses motivates Jean to teach him a lesson about women’s power. Jean succeeds in gaining the favor of Bella with her informed lessons (20-22), Mrs. Coventry with her serving of tea and plucking and arranging of flowers (8, 17), Edward with her kindness to his horse (16), and Sir John with her sophisticated conversations (13-15). The catalyst of Gerald’s softening towards Jean is the episode in which she takes care of him after Edward stabs him in an outburst of fury. After Gerald asks Edward to temporarily leave the Coventry residence since Edward has fallen in love with Jean, who has rejected his advances, Edward attacks his brother (36). However, Jean jumps in to prevent the second stroke (36), takes care of Gerald before the doctor comes (36-37), and when Gerald sends for her later, she appears in his room in a light summer dress (40). Such a significant change in her clothing style makes Gerald see Jean as someone more complex than his stereotypical notion of the

governess. The narrator informs us of the effects of Jean's new off-stage performance on Gerald as follows: "A fresh, gentle, and charming woman she seemed, and Coventry found the dull room suddenly brightened by her presence" (40). Jean's different look makes Gerald recognize the other side of her persona – that of an attractive woman capable of triggering the interest of an aristocrat. Jean's performances as a liminal figure who pleases and serves are opaque, off-center actions. She chooses these tactics in order to make the territory of the mighty her own. The only real role that Jean plays in the household is the role of the professional actress. Aided by the vast assortment of props adjusted to different situations, Jean creates a fertile soil for planting new seeds in the existent system. Heralded by the aforesaid off-stage performances, the series of Jean's on-stage shows helps her defeat Gerald.

Alcott's choice of tableaux vivants as a parlor theatrical through which Jean announces her radical feminist mission was not incidental since in the late 1800s and early 1900s progressive women used this performance genre in order to call for resistance against patriarchy. Though initially performers in living pictures were mostly men who posed as ancient statues and heroes, as time passed and taste in tableaux production shifted towards presentations of literary scenes and paintings, women became leading participants in the genre. As Mary Chapman points out, in the nineteenth century, tableaux performers were mostly women, and since men who took part in the performances were cast as wanderers, "observers," or "voyeurs" whose "gaze" towards actresses "framed" the "scenes," tableaux vivants often served the dominant social order as tools for the reassertion of patriarchal ideology (1996, 29-30). By representing literary, historical, biblical, and mythological figures as well as the scenes from well-known paintings, such as Titian's, Velasquez's, or Degas' portraits of women, performers aimed at motivating their spectatorship to adopt the

patriarchal values invoked through a tableau (ibid., 33-35). However, as Chapman notes, living pictures gradually abandoned an emphasis on female “virtues” and signaled a possibility of “social mobility”: by inspiring women to behave as stylish figures in tableaux, the authors of tableaux manuals “promised” their readership an acquisition of a sophisticated “taste” and thus social “elevation” (ibid., 28-29). In order to stage scenes from outstanding paintings, female tableaux performers sometimes exposed their almost naked bodies in front of an audience, which caused controversial debates about the role of tableaux in nineteenth-century American society, simultaneously opening the space for women’s usage of tableaux for progressive and subversive causes (ibid., 26-27). Evidently, this genre of performance was used to reinforce the values of the dominant social order as well as to challenge and resist them.

The series of three tableaux vivants, which occurs in the middle of the novel, encapsulates Alcott’s crucial messages about women’s agency and emancipation and vehemently moves Jean towards her final success.<sup>2</sup> By playing the role of Judith, Jean emulates Rachel’s tendency to represent well-known heroines in order to emphasize the importance of women for national progress. By pausing as the suffering damsel, Jean reflects Rachel’s inclination to perform the characters of the wooing women devoted to their partners and thereby attracts Gerald even more. By performing Queen Bess, Jean reminds us of Rachel’s inclination to stage female rulers and secures the triumph in her mission against male dominance. Jean’s tableaux fruitfully conflate the counterfeit with the real, announcing Jean’s agenda regarding class and

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief analysis of gender implications in the first two tableaux only, see Chapman (1996). For an analysis of dramatic literacy as a tool for the domestic negotiations done by middle-class women (and Jean Muir in particular), see Dawson (1997). Dawson concludes that by staging heroines and rebels, tableaux posers influenced the viewers’ perceptions of their bodies. For an analysis of *Behind a Mask* as Alcott’s allegorical reflection on writing, of Jean Muir as an allegorical presentation of sensation literature, and of the roles of Jean’s tableaux in the allegory, see Hackenberg (2008).

gender in everyday life and affirming Rachel's and (stereotypically) Jewish positive characteristics, such as cleverness, adaptability, and determination. The role of Jean's tableaux is thus twofold: they invert the traditional ideological purpose of the genre – the endorsement of patriarchy – by inviting the women in Sir John's drawing room and women readers of the novel to stand up for their rights, and they simultaneously cast Jewish women, particularly Rachel, on whom Jean is based, and Judith, whom Jean stages, as models for other women fighters.

The first tableau announces Jean's gender mission and reflects Alcott's affirmation of the ancient Hebrew heroine. As Elaine Showalter argues in the introduction to *Alternative Alcott*, the author's description of Jean's performance as Judith was likely influenced by Horace Vernet's famous pictorial rendering of Judith's story titled *Judith and Holofernes* (1831), in which Judith murders Holofernes, who has sexually assaulted her (Showalter 1988, xxx). Jean stages the tableau in Sir John's house, and in this aristocratic space, in the role of Judith, she decapitates Holofernes. The narrator's descriptions of the tableau testify to Jean's acting talent: she is not effective in real life only, but on the stage as well. In the narrator's words, "She [Jean in the role of Judith] was looking over her shoulder towards the entrance of the tent, with a steady yet stealthy look, so effective that for a moment the spectators held their breath, as if they also heard a passing footstep" (Alcott 2004, 52). Jean's look keeps her audience mesmerized and suspenseful. Her make-up and facial expression help her convey Judith's anger: "She had darkened her skin, painted her eyebrows, disposed some wild black locks over her fair hair, and thrown such an intensity of expression into her eyes that they darkened and dilated till they were as fierce as any southern eyes that ever flashed" (52). Jean's darkened complexion and eyebrows as well as artificial black locks help her evoke an image of a Jewish person, usually described as darker than Christians in nineteenth-century

British and American popular cultures. The protagonist's emphasis on Judith's image and fierce look suggests that she pays special attention to the character's distinctiveness, pride, and resolution, all of which are reminiscent of Rachel's portrayal of Judith and other heroines.

Echoing Rachel's emphasis on women's heroics, Jean impresses the audience, particularly Gerald. The narrator informs us that when someone in the audience asks: "Doesn't she look as if she really hated him?" Gerald replies: "Perhaps she does" (53). To Gerald, the tableau successfully blends the biblical plot with Jean's contempt for abusive men. Having heard about Jean's unsuccessful romantic relationship with his acquaintance Sydney, Gerald believes that in her tableau of Judith and Holofernes, Jean stages her own revenge against her former lover. The narrator explains that "It was not all art: the intense detestation mingled with a savage joy that the object of hatred [that] was in her power was too perfect to be feigned; and having the key to a part of her story, Coventry felt as if he caught a glimpse of the truth" (53). While Gerald believes that Jean's performance of Judith is fueled by her anger towards Sydney, he is not aware that through this carefully selected tactic Jean vehemently advances along her off-center route to success in the cultural center. Unlike the popular heroines of the tableaux vivants, such as Beatrice Cenci, Charlotte Corday, and Fatima Bluebeard, who were sentenced to death for acts of violence against men, Jean, in the role of Judith, decapitates Holofernes without being punished for her crime (Chapman 1996, 32-38, 43). Through this living picture, she manages to do what she is not allowed to in everyday life – murder an abusive male leader without being incarcerated and sentenced to death – which means that the living picture provides her with a space for the presentation of her agenda in the patriarchal home and society.

Through Jean's masterful rendering of biblical Judith, Alcott praises the Hebrew heroine's radicalism.<sup>3</sup> By placing Judith's story at the beginning of Jean's series of tableaux and by modeling Jean's performance of Judith on Rachel's rendering of famous female fighters, the author emphasizes these Jewish women's audacity and progressiveness. In the decade when Alcott vehemently advocates women's rights to work and to vote, the legendary Jewish heroine and the phenomenal French Jewish actress, both of whom are internationally known for their support of women's causes, serve her as paragons. Alcott's portrayal of the first tableau is philo-Semitic, and she respectfully notes the importance of these Jewish women for the future female emancipation.

The second tableau announces Jean's fight for class mobility. In this living picture the governess plays the role of a suffering damsel who dies in the arms of her Cavalier lover, performed by Gerald. The damsel is murdered by the Roundhead soldiers who pursue her lover. The narrator describes the scene as follows: "One arm half covered him [Gerald/the cavalier] with her [Jean's/the damsel's] cloak, the other pillowed his head on the muslin kerchief folded over her bosom, and she looked backwards with such terror in her eyes that more than one chivalrous young spectator longed to hurry to the rescue" (Alcott 2004, 54). Though this tableau casts Jean in the role of a wounded and powerless woman, it does attest the protagonist's cleverness. Aware of the fact that the progressiveness of the first tableau vivant made Gerald notice her hatred towards the oppressive men, Jean plays submissiveness in the

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<sup>3</sup> See Margarita Stocker's Freudian analysis of female characters based on Judith in the 1860s sensation fiction in Britain (1998, 160-165). According to Stocker, in this genre of literature, the reincarnated Judith serves as "the culture's uncanny" (ibid., 165). As Stocker explains, "a representation of the uncanny should, by Freud's account, register both the potency of instinctual drives and the Law (the ego/society, that renders them forbidden). As simultaneously murderess, siren and divinely appointed avenger, Judith registers precisely this combination of the instinctive with the punitive" (ibid).

second one. Here again the real and the counterfeit are conflated: Gerald/the cavalier is not intimidated by the governess/the damsel who dies in his arms, and by playing the role of the Cavalier he descends from the pedestal of his high social rank, which opens a possibility for his marriage proposal to the governess in everyday life. Gerald even confesses to himself that “Many women had smiled on him, but he had remained heart-whole, cool, and careless, quite unconscious of the power which a woman possesses and knows how to use, for the weal or woe of man” (55). The selected quotation reveals the fact that Gerald acknowledges women’s agency and that they can succeed in their confrontations with men if they choose the right tactic.

Jean is aware of her influence on Gerald in this tableau, which helps her continue her subversive mission. She congratulates herself as soon as she notices the effects of her acting on Gerald: “She felt his hands tremble, saw the color flash into his cheek, knew that she had touched him at last, and when she rose it was with a sense of triumph which she found it hard to conceal” (55). The tactic of acting as a wounded woman enables the protagonist to move a step closer to the shift in gender power in the novel. This opaque, off-center performance of female fragility helps Jean entangle Gerald in the cobweb of her artfulness, misleading him to think of her as softer and frailer than she really is and enabling her to increase her influence on him and the family relations. Through this tableau Jean again does what she is not allowed to in everyday life – rest and die in the arms of the Cavalier played by her employer. The scene attests the author’s approval of the protagonist’s (stereotypically) Jewish adaptability in the fight against her condescending employer, which gives this tableau the philo-Semitic touch.

The last tableau announces the realization of Jean’s goals. The character that Jean represents, Elizabeth I of England, or Good Queen Bess (1533-1603), was Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn’s daughter, famous for keeping her country immune to



civil wars that afflicted many kingdoms on the old continent at the time, for resisting “the massive military threat of the Spanish Armada,” and for her charismatic persona (Hulse 2003, 3). Rachel performed the role of the Catholic Queen Mary Stuart (“The Drama” 1855, 447), whom Queen Bess executed for high treason, but she did not play the role of Bess, the believer in the freedom of religious worship and the supporter of Protestants. However, Alcott’s choice of Queen Bess for Jean’s final tableau is not incidental. By playing the role of the admired female ruler, who advocated national unity and religious freedoms, Jean emphasizes the potential of female leadership for the building of a better society. When Lucia asks Jean to play Bess because she is supposedly “the only lady with red hair” (Alcott 2004, 56), though in actuality because Lucia wants to separate her from Gerald, Jean accepts the invitation and secures an ultimate victory.

Unlike the previous living pictures, Jean’s tableau of Queen Bess occurs in a secluded corner of the living room, and Gerald, who restlessly decides to look for tardy Jean, is the only witness and spectator of this living picture. As Gerald finds Jean alone and pensive, just as she planned, the narrator informs us that “She was leaning wearily back in the great chair which had served for a throne ... Excitement and exertion made her brilliant, the rich dress became her wonderfully, and an air of luxurious indolence changed the meek governess into a charming woman” (57). This description suggests that the real and the counterfeit harmoniously conflate in Jean: her costume and indulgence in luxury make her reminiscent of upper-class women. Jean is so effective in her presentation of Bess that she even appropriates her royal posture. Enchanted by Jean’s appearance, Gerald offers his help in case she is concerned about something. This is the moment when the tableau vivant ends, and Gerald and Jean’s dialogue leads the plot towards the final resolution.

Jean's answer to Gerald's question reveals her awareness of the radical potential of the conflation of the staged event with everyday life. The protagonist states: "This dress, the borrowed splendor of these jewels, the freedom of this gay evening, the romance of the part you played, all blind you to the reality. For a moment I cease to be a servant, and for a moment you treat me as an equal" (57). Jean is closest to her success in this opaque, off-center performance. She is an eminent English sovereign, more powerful than Gerald himself. Gerald approaches Jean as an equal human being while she is openly under a mask, and not behind it. The blurred boundaries between the counterfeit and the real in this episode are the catalyst for the crucial changes in the family dynamic, and such a conflation of the fabricated scene with everyday life through the instability of the assumed roles is a unique tactic of off-center performativity.

As soon as Jean's brief silent performance of Queen Bess is over, she completely conquers Gerald's heart through an off-stage trick – a fabricated story of her life – thus making him her blind-sighted marionette. Acknowledging the kindness of Gerald's concern for her worries, Jean lies to him about her misery: the son of her previous employer, Lady Sydney, who was madly in love with her, whose advances she rejected, and who wounded her with a knife in a moment of despair and anger, now seeks revenge against Jean and says that only a marriage to an honorable man could save her (60). Jean does not want to be blackmailed by Sydney nor does she want to marry Gerald's brother, Edward, who is also in love with her (61-62). Instead, she accepts Gerald's offer of his friendship and services (62). She wants to make him feel like her gallant protector, and she assumes the posture of a tragedienne when she reflects on her life. In the narrator's words: "She sprang up, clasped her hands over her head, and paced despairingly through the little room, not weeping, but wearing an expression more tragical than tears" (62). Gerald is enchanted by Jean's

effective, off-stage performance of the suffering woman so that “Still feeling as if he had suddenly stepped into a romance, yet finding a keen pleasure in the part assigned him, Coventry threw himself into it with spirit, and heartily did his best to console the poor girl who needed help so much” (62). By making Gerald believe that she is a wrongly accused creature that desperately needs his help, Jean tricks him into the role of the protective cavalier even off the stage. All these final acts are Jean’s tactics that, as she hopes, will help her become wealthy and powerful.

Though Queen Bess is a good choice for Jean’s victorious tableau and Rachel is a good model for the rebellious Jean, there are crucial differences between Alcott’s protagonist and the two famous women. Like Queen Bess and Rachel, Jean does not feel any attachment to men. Instead, she manipulates men in order to achieve economic stability. There is a significant difference between Queen Bess (and Rachel) and Jean. While Queen Bess and Rachel manage to unite conflicting factions owing to their charismas, Jean does not want to keep the members of the Coventry family together. On the contrary, she tricks Gerald and Edward into a fight, which results in Edward’s departure from the estate and Jean’s unimpeded manipulation of Gerald. Furthermore, the protagonist deceives both Gerald and Sir John by claiming that she is an abandoned daughter of the late Lady Howard, making the gentlemen believe that she is a noblewoman with a miserable fate (49-51). Thus Jean’s conquest of Gerald through the last tableau is followed by her final and crucial off-stage performances, loaded with deceit and unscrupulousness. While the first two tableaux have the philo-Semitic tone, the last one, accompanied by Jean and Gerald’s conversation and Jean’s “war-mongering” in the Coventry family, reveals anti-Semitic undercurrents.

Though Jean succeeds in her radical mission against patriarchy, her constantly seductive and deceitful attitude towards men, particularly towards Gerald, sometimes

comes across as excessively harsh. After Jean makes a deal with Sir John accepting his marriage proposal, she still wants to keep Gerald enthralled just in case her plan with Sir John fails. During Jean and Gerald's conversation, Jean's eyes are "full of a brilliancy that looked like the light of love" (89). Since the reader knows about Jean's prior arrangements with Sir John, the aforesaid description of her eyes reveals her conscious manipulation of Gerald. However, when she realizes that Gerald is completely under her control and that Lucia has no power over him, Jean feels sorry for the unscrupulous behavior towards them (90). Although determined to punish Gerald for his initial remarks about governesses and triumph in her social-climbing endeavors, Jean is aware of her schemes that have helped her move forward towards the realization of her plan. In the narrator's words, "for now that her own safety was so nearly secured, she felt no wish to do mischief, but rather a desire to undo what was already done, and be at peace with all the world" (90). But, despite this brief insight into Jean's almost repentant soul, the protagonist never forgets Gerald's original condescending attitude towards her. Once again, Alcott's language confirms Jean's persistence in teaching Gerald a lesson about women's agency.

However, Alcott later justifies, or at least explains, Jean's craftiness and materialism as results of the cruel social hierarchy. When Edward unexpectedly returns home and gives Jean a check under the condition that she should instantaneously leave the Coventry household, the narrator informs us that "No word accompanied the gift, yet the generosity of it touched her, for Jean Muir had the relics of a once honest nature, and despite her falsehood could still admire nobleness and respect virtue" (96). If Jean is treacherous and avaricious, she is such because of the social context which she stems from – the context which favors privileges and rights based on birth. The governess who performs Jewishness on and off the stage in order to accomplish her agenda relays complex messages about the author's responses to

the Jewish presence on American soil. Alcott praises the (stereotypically) Jewish determination, vitality, and dexterity, but Jean's and the (stereotypically) Jewish treachery and passion for lucre, even though presented as products of the unjust social structure, are still exposed to the scrutiny of the readership to some extent. Jean Muir is thus a complex allo-Semitic character.

Through her careful selection and execution of tactics, Jean accomplishes her personal goals, rising from a governess to an aristocratic matron. As Sir John's wife, she ends up more powerful and wealthier than all the Coventrys around her. She manages to outsmart Gerald, which she emphasizes when she asks him, "Is not the last scene better than the first?" (108). Despite the fact that the Coventrys exercise strategies such as stereotyping, derision, condescension, and allegation in order to keep Jean in the place that society has designed for her, through her tactics Jean manages to manipulate and defeat them on their own terrain. A poor and marginalized woman without noble ancestry becomes the mistress of Sir John's estate, sitting on top of the familial and social hierarchical pyramids. Though she had to fight for her goals through her incognito off-center performances, once she executes her final tactic by marrying Sir John, she wins a place in the cultural center and starts living without a mask.

Like the other sensation novels of the day, *Behind a Mask* registers the contemporary social fears, particularly anti-Semitic and patriarchal fears, and offers a sensational resolution to the depicted problems. If the governess manages to marry well and stay in the family which she has tried to divide, and if she behaves honorably in the future, then the ideological closure invites forgiveness, understanding, and integration. If the protagonist accomplishes her goals and lives happily ever after even though some of her acts are treacherous, then Alcott does not punish this performer of Jewishness. Registering shortcomings in Jean as a performer

of Jewishness, Alcott does not vilify Jewish immigrants; instead, she emphasizes their virtues and skills, inviting a more comprehensive reading of Jewish characters or characters that perform Jewishness.

What then can we conclude about Alcott's presentation of Jean? She certainly accomplishes her goals, but she does that through her marriage to a wealthy aristocrat. Some critics have argued that her marriage to Sir John reinforces the ideological *status quo*, pointing out that the only way in which poor women can ensure their economic stability is by marrying affluent men.<sup>4</sup> I would conclude that by ascribing Rachel's features, roles, and acting style to Jean, Alcott propels the idea of a progressive woman from the margins who delineates her own space of action in the cultural center through a series of artfully designed and executed tactics.<sup>5</sup> Subtitled *A Woman's Power*, the novel illuminates the importance of women's self-awareness in the processes of liberation and emancipation, which Rachel highlighted in her glorious performances and everyday life. By inviting non-Jewish women to emulate their Jewish counterparts' proven behavioral formulas, the novel promotes otherness as a paragon of resistance to backward social standards and a source of cultural progress.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Butterworth-McDermott (2004) concludes that Jean perpetuates the conventions of the patriarchal society depicted in the novel.

<sup>5</sup> Fetterley (1983), Elliott (1994), Dawson (1997), Schewe (2008), and Hackenberg (2008) have also emphasized that Jean serves as a paragon of resistance to patriarchy.

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