"I'd rather do everything for myself, and be perfectly independent":

A History of Female Agency in American Young Adult Novels

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Introduction**:**

The Appeal of the Rebel Woman in Young Adult Literature

The literary canon can be described as books and other texts the reading public's cultural leaders deem the most influential and important of a certain time and place. In her article "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March," Catharine Stimpson posits the existence of a "paracanon" in response to the canon. The paracanon, Stimpson states, is a collection of books or texts created because "some people have loved and do love them" (Stimpson, 958). Gathering the praise of large groups of people, a piece of writing gains great importance in the influence it has on its readers. Books like Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women,* Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette,* and John Green's novels *Looking for Alaska, Paper Towns,* and *An Abundance of Katherines* prove to be both extremely popular and amazingly influential on the readers they attract, many of whom are teenaged girls and young women.

All of the novels examined for this senior project have become a part of the paracanon. Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* was one of the bestselling novels of its time and was reprinted eight times between 1824 and 1828. Taught in countless high schools and colleges, *The Coquette* remains popular despite being published over 200 years ago. Today's readers refer to Foster's novel as "illuminating," strongly stating that if "you like Austen you will like this," and calling Foster a "true literary talent." Never being out of print, *Little Women* has sold over 1.78 million copies in 150 years. Reviews of *Little Women* remain positive even 150 years after the original publication. Readers on Amazon are calling it an "old classic begging to be re-read," a "rich, old-fashioned, soulful book that holds oceans of feeling," and would "recommend [*Little Women*] to all ages." Alcott's novel has also led to many stage, film, and television adaptations. There are multiple film adaptations and many acclaimed actors and actresses have starred in

roles, such as the 1933 adaptation staring Katherine Hepburn, a four-time Oscar-winning actress, or the 1994 adaptation featuring Winona Ryder, who received an Oscar nominee for her performance as Jo March. Greta Gerwig, esteemed actress, writer and director, is making the eighth film adaptation of *Little Women,* set to be released in December of 2019. John Green has also taken the literary world by storm with his debut novel *Looking for Alaska,* which received the 2006 Printz Award and has been published in over thirty languages. Green's *Looking for Alaska* was published in 2005 and has gained so much traction that the online streaming service, Hulu, is adapting the novel into an 8-episode limited series. The novel is referred to by teen readers as a "masterpiece," both "thought provoking and beautiful."

I will argue in this project that if each of these novels have their place within the paracanon based on the popularity each novel has gained that is because they also all possess female characters who stray outside of the social norm and specifically gendered expectations. Whether it be through their sexuality, their ambition, or their blatant disregard for authority, the female characters in Alcott's, Foster's and Green's novels chaff against the expectations of their gender, which have been most clearly laid out by Barbara Welter in her article "The Cult of True Womanhood." The phenomenon of "The Cult of True Womanhood" can be defined as the expectation of a woman to be four things: pious, pure, submissive and domestic. Though true womanhood grew as an expectation in 19th century America, these values have survived throughout the years and are still a part of female expectation nowadays. The female characters in young adult novels are trapped within the expectation of the qualities of a true woman but become inspiring to readers in the ways they attempt to defy them.

My project explores the fact that these characters' rebellion is not rewarded in these novels, but rather leads to domestication and sometimes death. Alcott's *Little Women* is a prime

example of lovable rebellious characters who ultimately become domesticated. Jo March, described as "rude" and "unladylike" by her sister (Alcott, 9), is praised and loved for those characteristics that place her as "a tomboy" (Alcott, 9). Stimpson herself notes that Jo March is a character who appeals to the readers "who resist the cult of true womanhood" (Stimpson, 967). Jo March strays from the gendered expectations; Alcott has her articulate her discomfort with gendered expectations:

> "I hate to think I have to grow up and be Miss March and wear long gowns and look as prim as a China aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy." (Alcott, 9)

Jo's "feisty independence," or her departure from femininity, while an issue for the gendered expectations that the novel creates, gains her a fan base of equally distressed young girls looking for a way out of the strictness of female expectancy. Jo's "too tough" attitude and desire for "independence and power" creates hopefulness for young female readers looking for a way to rebel against societal expectations (Stimpson, 967). "Jo March" Stimpson writes, "loves her freedom, her mother, and her family of origin" (Stimpson, 968), but once married and Mrs. Bhaer she "loves her boy students' freedom." Stimpson points out that Jo Bhaer is "no longer angry, less impetuous, and cleansed of sadism" compared to the earlier Jo, who was filled with all of these things (Stimpson, 968). Jo's transition from Miss March to Mrs. Bhaer symbolizes the transition from rebellious female child to complacent female wife. The transition from rebel child to domestic wife creates the idea that young girls, as Jo does in her becoming Mrs. Bhaer, will have to give up their independent desires and fulfill the patriarchal expectation of

domesticity. Still, as I point out in this project, Jo opens up a space for readers to imagine independence from gender norms.

Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* also portrays a rebellious female character who gains the reader's love and sympathy. Eliza Wharton is a woman in search of the freedom to choose. The sympathetic tale of Eliza Wharton, a woman who falls victim to seduction and lust, also grabs the interest of many readers. When published in 1797, *The Coquette* became a best seller, whether this be due to the mothers buying it as a cautionary tale for their daughters, or women reading it for pleasure and entertainment. Eliza's actions pull her away from the expected and accepted role of a young woman in the eighteenth century. She is expected to be courted then married, to have children and stay monogamous, but Foster's novel allows the reader to explore the circumstances in which a woman deviates from the straight and narrow path of female conformity. Eliza becomes known to the reader by not only her own writing, but the recollection of others experiences of and with her. The first secondary description the reader gets of Eliza is in her respectable suitor Mr. Boyer's letter to his friend Mr. Selby. He says he was introduced to "Miss Eliza Wharton; a young lady whose elegant person, accomplished mind, and polished manners have been much celebrated" (Foster, 9). Upon his first encounter with Eliza, Major Sanford, another suitor but one who is not deemed respectable by his community, describes her as "lovely" stating that she "entered the room with a brilliance of appearance and gaiety of manner" (Foster, 17). Both of these men give high praise based on their first introduction to Eliza, and while Major Sanford's opinion barely falters -- "In my mind Eliza has no competitor" (Foster, 183) -- Mr. Boyer's does after Eliza insists she does not want to get married right away: "I have thus overcome my feelings, and repelled the infatuating wiles of a deceitful girl" (Foster, 109). The differing descriptions of Eliza create a shifting view that

becomes unreliable from the different accounts. The reader can either choose to believe Eliza's recollection of her experiences, in which she insists her desire to wait is justified, or choose to disregard her and believe the men who look to tarnish her reputation and name. The first-person narrative allows the reader to see and understand the circumstances of Eliza and the decisions that she makes. This creates a connection between Eliza and the reader, so even when the men's opinions differ, the relatability of Eliza Wharton to the reader and the charismatic and honest language she uses in her description of events makes the reader still love Eliza. Foster's *The Coquette* features a strong woman with strong values of her own. But just as Jo March becomes a selfless mother, Eliza Wharton is punished for her quest for independence. She gets pregnant out of wedlock, ostracized, must flee her home, and eventually dies along with her baby.

Amazingly, in the Twenty-First Century, things are not much different. John Green, the Number One New York Times bestselling author of *Looking for Alaska,* continues with the trope of the rebellious female character. The popularity of the female characters in these novels does not differ much from that of Jo in *Little Women* or Eliza in *The Coquette,* and their desire for independence still exists too. Characters like Alaska Young in *Looking for Alaska* live and rebel the same way as Jo and Eliza do, pulling on the rebellious heartstrings of young readers. Alaska Young is the cool girl who smokes cigarettes, drinks wine, and collects books in her "Life's Library." The air of mystery about her is what makes her an intriguing character, and the way Miles, the narrator, describes her, makes the reader fall in love with her in the same way he does. Alaska, as Stimpson asserts of Jo, is "an active reader and writer who initially claims power over language" (Stimpson, 968). In *Looking for Alaska,* Alaska says:

> I've maybe read a third of 'em [books]. But I'm *going to* read them all. I call it my Life's Library. Every summer since I was little, I've gone to garage

> sales and bought all the books that looked interesting. So I always have something to read. But there is so much to do: cigarettes to smoke, sex to have, swings to swing on. (Green, 20)

Here Alaska emerges outside of the conforming female character by placing herself as both intelligent and overtly sexual. Her claim to her sexuality is what diverges her away from the expected female characteristic of modesty and morality. The confidence and fearlessness that Alaska shows in this statement is what draws readers in; one reader says, "Alaska may be the most messed up character I have ever read about. But also the most interesting." The popularity of Green's novel places it within the paracanon alongside *Little Women* and *The Coquette.* The reception of Green's novel coincides with the reception of Alaska, in all of her moodiness and mysteriousness.

The paradox of the female character in young adult literature is that the novel attempts to keep girls and women stunted, all the while giving young female readers hope. The love for these characters creates a love for the story they are from, driving a large amount of popularity of the novel, as they become "fantastic reads" or "classics begging to be re-read." Each of these novels creates a space for readers to both yearn for independence, as the central female characters do, and see the many ways they are restricted from these desires. I will argue that, while the novels create lovable and relatable female characters, they also continue to portray the patriarchal standards that a woman should uphold in a way that deems it impossible for agency and voice to be possessed as a female. As the female characters become inspirational and relatable in their rebellion against the shackles of "true womanhood," the novels hold them to a realistic standard.

Chapter One:

Eliza Wharton's Loss of Voice and Life in *The Coquette*

Hannah Webster Foster wrote *The Coquette* as a novel discussing the life of a woman who encounters the impossible choice: to marry without love or get labeled coquettish and suffer consequences like pregnancy and death. *The Coquette* is often described as a steady best-seller and is known to have been passed down through female generations. The novel was used as a sort of cautionary tale, or "rule book" for young women. The endgame: Do not be an Eliza Wharton.

The novel follows Eliza Wharton, a young woman, recently widowed by the death of her late fiancé, Reverend Haly. Eliza's release from this unwanted suitor stems from her belief that "marriage is the tomb of friendship" (Foster, 30). Her rejection of marriage places her outside of the expectation of a woman. Whilst Eliza remains content in searching only for friendship, she begins to get courted by two men, Reverend Boyer and Major Sanford. Eliza shows hesitance in choosing a life partner, partly because of her disposition toward marriage, but also because the responsible choice, Reverend Boyer, does not excite her. However, Eliza's resistance toward Mr. Boyer does not stop her friend Lucy Freeman from pushing her toward him; she tells Eliza, "you will not find a more excellent partner than Mr. Boyer" (Foster, 34). Mr. Boyer is the pious and moral man who is set to fix Eliza of her rebellious ways. Eliza's friend Mrs. Richman even tells Eliza that she has the "wrong ideas of freedom, and matrimony" and that "Mr. Boyer would happily rectify them" (Foster, 39). Eliza's ambiguity about her future husband causes Mr. Boyer to eventually give up on his pursuit as he feels that she would not be a suitable wife, along with his assumption that Eliza would rather Major Sanford. Eliza not only loses her opportunity to marry Mr. Boyer, but Major Sanford also gets married to someone else. When Eliza tries to get Mr. Boyer back, after deciding that she really did love him, she realizes he is already committed

to someone else. Eliza is then seduced by Major Sanford, who is still married, and they have an affair until she discovers she is pregnant and runs away from home and from the harsh public judgment she will face. Eliza goes into labor and dies during childbirth. Eliza's fate is not uncommon for women who stray from their expected role, as I will discuss further. The ways in which the novel does not allow Eliza to be independent and free in choosing who she will marry engages with the ideals of a "true woman."

While introducing rules for young women to follow, the novel also shows the consequences of what happens when they are disobeyed. The result of rebellion being Eliza's loss of voice and then loss of life. Written as an epistolary novel, the form becomes just as important as its content in terms of voice. The epistolary form gives each person equal opportunity to speak in the first-person. This means the reader gets to learn the thoughts of any character who writes a letter, as opposed to first-person narration that provides the point of view of a single character. The reader follows the story of Eliza Wharton through a series of letters from herself and others. The shifting first-person narrative allows the reader to hear the personal declaration from Eliza insisting upon her desire to resist expectation and be independent to love who she wants while allowing the reader to hear from other characters who are imposing patriarchal and conformist expectations onto her. While the epistolary form is revolutionary for hearing multiple characters' inner thoughts and insights, it also allows for a physical representation of Eliza Wharton's silencing.

Death is conceivably the final act in silencing the wayward woman; however, Eliza begins fading from the story of her own life far before that. Eliza's silencing begins shortly after her straying from moral womanhood. The diminishing number of her letters and their final elimination reflect that society does not have space for women who do not obey the rules. As a

woman who is unmarried and sexually deviant, her voice becomes impossible, causing Foster to introduce a morally sound woman, Julia Granby, to speak for her. With Julia Granby replacing Eliza's voice and becoming the voice of female morale, Eliza's personal thoughts and feelings of every situation are replaced by Julia's account. There are ten letters that the reader sees after Major Sanford reveals he has slept with Eliza and she is pregnant, and only two of those letters are written by Eliza. Even then, these letters written by Eliza are nested within Julia Granby's letters, further illustrating the impossibility of a sexually active but unmarried woman's voice. As Daniel Diez Couch says in his article "Eliza Wharton's Scraps of Writing: Dissipation and Fragmentation in *The Coquette*," that "without her voice, only their perspective stands" (Couch, 687). And indeed, without her voice and personal account of the incidents of her life, only Julia, Sanford, and Lucy's views on the situation Eliza has found herself in are given to the reader, creating a biased experience for the reader. Because of this authorial change, Eliza is no longer there to speak for herself; she is overshadowed and silenced because of her straying from moral womanhood. Julia is placed into the story to juxtapose Eliza and her immoral actions. Sanford discusses Julia in a letter to a friend saying that she is a woman Sanford "would never attempt to seduce," while previously in that same letter he mentions his "full possession" of Eliza (Foster, 202-203). The placement of these two women pits them against each other in terms of morality and purity. Major Sanford sees Eliza as someone who can easily be seduced; in his earlier letters he tells his friend: "I fancy this young lady is a coquette" (Foster, 21). Without Eliza's voice being documented, she is taken out of her own story. Julia may be recounting the story and information, but the reader will no longer receive Eliza's first-person inner thoughts. After her death, unsent letters are found but not shown. The act of mentioning the letters but not showing them to the reader emphasizes the loss of voice that Eliza experiences during the journey toward

her death, as well as the impossibility that Foster has of producing the voice of a sexually deviant woman. Daniel Diez Couch rightly states that "all of her attempts to recreate herself through language have failed" and so Eliza pulls away and silences herself as a way to avoid what Couch calls "the female chorus" or the judgment of her friends based off of societal standards (Couch, 691). The fear Eliza has of "the female chorus" stems from her placement on the outside of "true womanhood." Welter's definition of a true woman is one who possesses piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Eliza's actions cause her to differ from those who follow these standards, such as Lucy or Julia, and so Eliza is condemned to harsh judgment from her peers due to her individual acts. Eliza is no longer a woman of society because the absence of purity was "unnatural and unfeminine" (Welter, 154).

Along with the authorial silencing and elimination of Eliza Wharton, she is actively silenced by objectification as well. Sanford is constantly referring to Eliza in a degrading fashion, implementing the destruction of Eliza's personhood. In the letter where Sanford reveals to Charles Deighton that he finally slept with Eliza, he states that he finally has "the full possession of [his] adorable Eliza" (Foster, 202). The use of the word "possession" simplifies the sexual act to one of domination. Eliza is no longer a person with thoughts and emotions; she is a body waiting to be had. Sanford's possession of Eliza not only possesses her sexually, but morally and linguistically. While Sanford can express his actions freely to his friend, Eliza does not have that luxury. Her position as a woman leaves her to omit her desires for the fear of a spoiled reputation, because as Walter's says in "The Cult of True Womanhood," purity and submission are two of the staples of a true woman's being. She does not write to any of her friends about what has happened, and it is only when Julia Granby sees a man leaving the parlor in the dark that Eliza finally confesses her indiscretion.

Chapter Two:

The Elimination of Female Agency in *Little Women*

Creative expression is a vital piece in the projection of the female voice in *Little Women*, which like *The Coquette*, was a best seller and particularly beloved by American women readers. This young adult novel, written by Louisa May Alcott, follows four sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, through the transition of childhood to womanhood. Like *The Coquette*, the girls are given social rules they must learn in order to become the "little," married and quiet, women they are expected to be. Within the first chapter, Jo, Amy, and Beth are established as artists. While discussing purchasing Christmas gifts, Jo expresses her wish to buy a new book, where Beth wishes to spend her money on new music, and Amy on new drawing pencils. The girls also create a magazine based on a novel by Charles Dickens, implementing the idea of literary culture and artistry in the March household. Creativity and artistry are important parts of the matriarchal March household, as the family is constantly singing and performing together, despite its dangers. (The father is ostensibly away on account of the Civil War, a ruse that allows Alcott to create an all-female world.) The strict expectations placed on young girls who are on the verge of "little womanhood" gives the young girl two options: one is to let go of her outside ambitions, and become a quiet married woman as an adult, or two, as explained by Louise Westling in her article "Tomboys and Revolting Femininity" to "pay the price of shame and guilt as an adult, "and continue on with a "troubled sense of self" (Westling, 157).

The expectation of wifely determination is undermined by the girls' devotion to artistic expression. The March girls are expected to be thinking about their futures as wives. Instead, the girls dream of futures where they are famous writers and artists, while the aspiration to be a successful wife slips the mind of all of the girls, except for Meg. Even in Meg's desire for the

domestic life, a husband is not mentioned, only “nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money” (Alcott, 148). In contrast to Meg, Amy, says, “I have ever so many wishes, but the pet one is to be an artist, and go to Rome, and do fine pictures, and be the best artist in the world.” Like Amy, Jo wants to “write books, and get rich and famous, that would suit me, so that is my favorite dream,” (Alcott, 149). The desires resonate with the references to the nicknames “Little Raphael” and “Regular Shakespeare” that Alcott connects with Amy and Jo. Beth also does not dream of a husband or a family. Meg, however, only yearns for money and luxury.

The establishment of creativity as a dangerous and distracting activity is shown through Mr. Laurence’s disapproval of Laurie’s musical practice. The rejection of Laurie’s musical practice stems from the story Mrs. March tells her children:

> I think it was because of his son, Laurie’s father, married an Italian lady, a musician, which displeased the old man who is very proud. The lady was good and lovely and accomplished, but he did not like her, and never saw his son after he married. They both died when Laurie was a little child, and then his grandfather took him home. I fancy the boy, who was born in Italy, is not very strong, and the old man is afraid of losing him, which makes him so careful. Laurie comes naturally by is love of music, for he is like his mother, and I are sat his grandfather fears that he may want to be a musician. At any rate, his skill reminds him of the women he did not like, and so he ‘glowered.’ (Alcott, 62)

This excerpt from the novel depicts the issue with female artistry that is shown throughout the novel. Alcott portrays a large emphasis on the fact that Mr. Laurence did not like Laurie’s mother, as it is stated twice in the story Mrs. March tells her daughter. There is no distinct

reasoning behind Mr. Laurence's dislike toward his daughter-in-law, however, the story Mrs. March describes gives artistry the power to create discourse in families. Like Laurie's mother, the March girls find solace in music and the arts. The discourse created by creative expression resonates within each of the sisters' experience. The story of Laurie's parents stands as a warning: if the March sisters follow a life of creative expression and art, the fate of Laurie's parents will become their own.

The excerpt about Laurie's parents helps establish the arts as a dangerous factor when considering the expectation of a future of domesticity for the March sisters. Like in the story of Laurie's parents, art can be distracting from the goal of "little womanhood" therefore it should be eliminated. The sister, Amy, finds her voice through drawing, however, her creative voice is constantly muffled by the emphasis on education. Amy's connection to drawing creates problems at school and serves as a distraction from her education in the novel. Her constant drawing distracts her in school and causes her teachers to complain "that instead of doing her sums she covered her slate with animals, the blank pages of her atlas were used to copy maps on, and caricatures of the most ludicrous description came fluttering out of all her books at unlucky moments" (Alcott, 46). The dismissive attitude toward Amy's art silences her creative voice in a proper setting. The teacher's expectation and push for Amy to do math or study maps instead of following her passion in art indicates an expected plan, one that is filled with an educated curriculum rather than creativity, still stifling her voice. Amy's association with art and drawing may be deemed negative in the context of her education, but at home, the opposite is true. Alcott states that the sisters call Amy, "Little Raphael" and that she was "never so happy as when copying flower, designing fairies, or illustrating stories with queer specimens of art" (Alcott, 46). Unlike in school, the March family is astounded by Amy's artistry and praises the expression,

rather than punish it. Alcott's use of a reference to Raphael creates a strong sense of artistic being within Amy. The use of the term "Little Raphael" establishes the desire for greatness and importance in art. Raphael was a sixteenth-century artist, who gained following and popularity through his work in painting. He created a series of Madonna's concluded in around 1514, the same time where the Pope hired him as his chief architect. Much of Raphael's work was created and held in Rome, finding homage in the Vatican. Alcott's use of Raphael in comparison to Amy foreshadows the exhibition she makes to Rome. Amy March becomes the opposite of a woman like Eliza Wharton from *The Coquette* in that she lives. But Amy grows up and gives up her art, silencing her creative voice, in order to become successful within the gendered boundary, while Eliza is silenced due to her non-conforming way of life.

The non-conforming female character who is most like Eliza Wharton is seen through Josephine March, who is called Jo as well. The connection between creative expression and voice, and the silencing of the two, can be followed within Jo's story. Alcott establishes Jo as an extremely talented writer having Beth exclaim, "I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You are a regular Shakespeare!" (Alcott, 12). Alcott uses the reference to William Shakespeare in comparison to Jo with the same intent as Raphael in comparison to Amy. Shakespeare is widely regarded as the world's greatest writer, so the comparison between he and Jo demonstrates the amount of talent her family sees in her. Jo's affirmation for writing gives her a creative voice that helps her speak of wishes outside of the feminine sphere.

Both Amy and Jo have been established in the text as great artists. The youngest March sister, Beth, established as the quiet sister with a passion for piano. Her love of music begins to conflict with her shy personality. She is praised by her siblings and by Mr. Laurence for her excellent musical talent. Beth's extreme shyness pulls her away from her musical talent, as well

as diminishes her motivation to do anything besides be a sister to her siblings, and a daughter to her parents. Alcott writes, “Beth had her troubles as well as others, and not being an angel but a very human little girl, she often ‘wept a little weep’ as Jo said, because she couldn’t take music lessons and have a fine piano” (Alcott, 45). The timid nature of Beth March is a silencing factor in its own. She yearns for a way to express her voice musically but cannot do it. Beth is a symbol for the place in between the two options of being “the girl who insists on following her ambitions” and paying the price of “shame and guilt as an adult” or being the girl who obeys and follows the feminine restrictions in order to grow up a proper woman and wife. Beth never expresses any goal other than “to stay at home safe with Father and Mother and help take care of the family.” When prompted to express a bigger wish, Beth replies, “I only wish we may keep well and be together, nothing else” (Alcott, 149). Her statements of complacency further cement her in the purgatory between girlhood and womanhood. The placement of Beth beside Amy and Jo supports the idea that a girl can choose one of two paths: a wayward woman or a wife but cannot survive in between them. Because Beth is at a standstill, caught between the path Amy will follow, and the path Jo will follow; the happy wife, or the discontent artist, she cannot survive. A girl with no desire to be a woman, wife or not, will not grow to be one in the literary universe that holds so much onto womanhood. Like Eliza, Beth dies.

Jo becomes an example of the dangers that stem from creative expression. While Jo is praised for being extremely talented by her siblings, there are moments where her passion for writing leads to dangerous outcomes. Jo has plans with Meg and Laurie to go out and Amy wishes to tag along. Jo refuses, telling Amy that Laurie paid for their tickets already, and it would be impolite to ask him to pay for Amy. The argument continues, and Amy gets left behind. Amy, infuriated and insulted, burns up Jo’s notebook with all of her stories in it. When

Jo searches for her notebook, Amy reveals that she will never see it again, as she burned the whole thing up. During this argument, Jo's anger gets the better of her:

> Jo's hot temper mastered her, and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying, in a passion of grief and anger-
>
> "You wicked, wicked girl! I never can write it again, and I'll never forgive you as long as I live." (Alcott, 81)

In this excerpt, Jo's temper leaves her to physically harm Amy. The destruction of Jo's book, Jo's art, creates something dangerous within Jo that is so passionately strong that she hurts her own sister. Jo's reaction is an example that the novel uses to insinuate the idea that passion leads to danger, as it did for Eliza Wharton in *The Coquette*. The argument between Jo and Amy continues after the destruction of the book. Laurie and Jo have plans to go ice skating on the pond. Amy, again, wishes to join, and follows the pair out when she sees them leaving through the window. The ice is too thin toward the middle of the water, and Laurie advises Jo to stay close to the edge, however, Jo keeps this imperative information to herself, as "she had cherished her anger till it grew strong and took possession of her, as evil thoughts and feelings do unless they cast out at once," (Alcott, 83). The manifestation of Jo's anger from the previous day leads her to ignore her sister's wellbeing and believe that Amy can take care of herself. She does not warn her sister against the dangers of skating out too far, and Amy falls through. Jo portrays an extremely dangerous temperament which stems from the destruction of her writing. Amy falls through the ice because of Jo's silence that was based on the destruction of her writing. By creating such a volatile anger in Jo, Alcott secures the idea that creative expression can only lead to negative results, which is why it must be stopped by silencing the artistic voice.

The incident between Jo and Amy leads to a lesson of repression from Mrs. March. She says, “I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it” (Alcott, 85). The idea here is that if Jo has explosive feelings, she needs to learn to keep them within herself. This is a perfect example of silencing through societal expectation. Mrs. March learned to control her temper and her emotional expression through her own mother and only when Mr. March came into the picture, did she find it “easy to be good” (Alcott, 86). The inclination that to be “good” one needs to repress their emotion is problematic in itself but becomes detrimental when it is being imposed onto a young or “little” woman. Stephanie Foote writes in the article “Resentful *Little Women*: Gender and Class Feeling in Louisa May Alcott” about negative emotions and the effect they have on the production of gender forms within the novel (Foote, 66). Foote’s argument is that the incidents in which the March girls express negative emotions, such as the ice-skating incident with Jo, allow the novel to introduce lessons on how to be a proper female. Jo’s dangerous outburst and the story of Laurie’s mother are meant as cautionary tales.

The childhood desires of the young girls affect each of their futures differently. Although Amy continues to draw and take art classes, she works on her womanly expectations as well. Eventually she falls in love with Laurie and they end up married. Amy is able to secure the role of happy wife, while Jo worries that she will end up alone. Jo continues to write while still rejecting the female role as she did when she was younger. In the end, she seems to find love with an older man who assumes dominance over her. She is also is troubled with a dutiful life, instead of the domestic wifely household that was described in Meg’s dream future. Again, Beth does not make it to the place of transition with her sisters. She becomes ill and is too weak to fight off the illness. She is described in the novel to be very content in her role as youngest child.

She expresses that her only wish is to remain with her sisters and to be happy. Her lack of motivation or will to be something other than a part of the March family leads to the ultimate silencing of her character. Beth lacks ambition and so there is no place for her in the rest of the novel.

In *Little Women* as the girls get older, they are expected to find their place as wives. Jo March can no longer be the rebellious, boyish girl that she once was, she is expected to find a husband and support him. Instead, Jo follows her authorial ambition by writing short stories and submitting them to magazines, however, a woman writing sensation fiction is something to be embarrassed of. In the chapter "A Friend" Jo meets with the editor of a magazine called the *Weekly Volcano,* Mr. Dashwood, and pitches her stories, however, she does not claim them to be her own. In this way, the third-person narrator reinforces the erasure of Jo's capable voice. Instead of taking ownership of her stories, she tells Mr. Dashwood that it is a friend who is looking to submit her stories. Jo's refusal to take ownership of her work contributes to the idea that women need to carefully construct moments of when to claim their voice and when to remain silent.

Where Jo could be a writer as a child and be renowned as a "regular Shakespeare" when she is older it becomes something to be embarrassed of. Jo meets with Mr. Dashwood, the magazine's editor, and completely relinquishes ownership of her work. The entire experience Jo is visibly uncomfortable and embarrassed because writing sensation fiction is not the work of a "true woman." Alcott writes:

> Feeling that she must get through the matter somehow, Jo produced her manuscript and, blushing redder and redder with each sentence, blundered out fragments of the little speech carefully prepared for the occasion.

> "A friend of mine desired me to offer-a story- just as an experiment- would like your opinion-be glad to write more if this suits"
>
> While she blushed and blundered, Mr. Dashwood has taken the manuscript, and was turning over the leaves with a pair of rather dirty fingers, and casting critical glances up and down the neat pages. (Alcott, 354)

In this excerpt from *Little Women,* the narrative works to show Jo's shrinking down of self-accomplishment when she continues the charade of the faux friend that she is giving credit for her own work. The discrediting of herself removes her voice from the context of self-expression. Alcott also uses the repetition of Jo's blushing to emphasize the embarrassment she feels submitting this type of fiction. Jo is blushing and blundering. Alcott continues to insinuate the embarrassment of Jo by juxtaposing Mr. Dashwood's "dirty fingers" with the "neat pages." This comparison shows the reader that the type of fiction Jo is writing is impure and therefore, unwomanly. Jo's embarrassment leads her to completely discredit herself, going as far to attempt to prove her skill while simultaneously giving away merit. Alcott writes:

> "Not a first attempt, I take it?" observing that the pages were numbered, covered only on one side, and not tied up with a ribbon-sure sign of novice.
>
> "No, sir, she has had some experience, and got a prize for a tale in the *Blarneystone Banner."* (Alcott, 354)

The loss of personal voice is continued through Jo's omission of ownership of the writing. Jo simultaneously adds onto her merit while silencing herself by stating that the writer has won a prize prior to submitting for the *Blarneystone Banner* but without admitting that the writer is her. The way Jo is speaking of her accomplishments but crediting them to someone else is

oxymoronic in that she is both proud and embarrassed of the work she is doing. The erasure of Jo's creative voice continues when Mr. Dashwood says, "We'll take this […], if you don't object to a few alterations. It's too long, but omitting the passages I've marked will make it just the right length" (Alcott, 355). This line solidifies the idea of the male perspective changing the female voice. Alcott continues to amplify the predicament that Jo has with losing some of her creative genius by stating:

> Jo hardly knew her own MS. Again, so crumpled and underscored where its pages and paragraphs, but feeling as a tender parent might on being asked to cut off her baby's legs in order that it might fit into a new cradle, she looked at the marked passages and was surprised to find that all the moral reflections-which she had carefully put in as ballast for much romance- had been stricken out. (Alcott, 355)

The comparison to the piece of writing to a baby shows the attachment Jo feels toward her story in full. Changing the story and losing some of the elements would be like cutting off the limbs of a baby. The morbid image describes the inner turmoil Jo feels when told to shorten her piece. The destruction of parts of the story takes a fraction of Jo's voice away, and the jarring imagery used in its description depicts the loss of agency Jo has upon the piece.

Jo's voice is not only silenced through the omission of her authorial status or the cutting down of her writing, but also through the male gaze and the objectification of the female appearance. Demonstrating this, Alcott writes, "Oh, did she?" And Mr. Dashwood gave Jo a quick look, which seemed to take note of everything she had on, from the bow in her bonnet to the buttons on her boots" (Alcott, 354). Through just one look, Mr. Dashwood shrinks Jo down to her appearance. This objectification takes away Jo's voice by limiting her to that of the look of

the clothes on her body. Jo is no longer an accredited author who has won a prize for her writing, but a body that has found itself in the sight of the male gaze.

Chapter Three:

Alaska's Erasure through Content, Form, and the Male Gaze in *Looking for Alaska*

John Green's bestselling Young Adult novel *Looking for Alaska* is about a new student at a boarding school who grows to love the enchantingly mysterious Alaska Young. The basic plot of the novel is the relationship between the new boy in school, Miles Halter, and the mysterious Alaska Young; however, below the surface, the novel works as hard as *The Coquette* and *Little Women* to silence the ambitious, independence seeking female character. The novel is split into two parts, "Before" and "After," both of which reference Alaska Young's death. The novel's binary form presents an interesting irony when it comes to projection of voice within the novel. The title and plot of the novel centralize Alaska, insinuating the idea that she is the most important character; however, she dies before the story is over. While the focus is placed on Alaska, the story is only heard through the young male perspective. Written in first-person, Miles is the voice the reader hears throughout the novel, not Alaska's, thus limiting the potential of the female voice. The issue of diminishing voice and silencing a female character is a theme that can be found in earlier young adult novels, like Foster's *The Coquette* and Alcott's *Little Women*, which together comprise the historical trajectory that led to Green's work. The repetitive nature of this ploy to silence female characters raises the question of whether any progress has been made in the gender politics of voice or not. The Green novel initially obfuscates the answer by foregrounding the story of a young woman.

The form of a novel and the narrative point of view are techniques that are used to eliminate Alaska Young's voice. The use of first-person narration creates an omission of voice in John Green's *Looking for Alaska*. Using a first-person narrator that is not Alaska defers the reader from hearing her voice clearly and uncompromised. The first-person narration from Miles,

nicknamed Pudge, leaves the production of Alaska's voice in the hands of his recollection. As discussed, Alaska seems like the central character on the basis of the novel, but the reader cannot hear her unless it is through a report from Miles. Alaska makes statements such as, "Come on. You know what? There are people with real problems. I've got real problems" (Green, 27), but the first-person narrator allows the omission of the problems she is mentioning. Because Mile's voice is the one the reader is given instead of Alaska's, there is no other opportunity the reader gets to peer into her inner thoughts and emotions besides those she chooses to speak aloud.

Looking for Alaska's first-person point of view allows the reader to hear the inner monologue of Miles, who grows a strong affection for Alaska. In many first-person narrated novels, the voice of the narrator is expected to be the protagonist. The closeness developed by the ability to see experiences through the narrator's eyes prompts this idea; however, the centralization of Alaska Young's character in the novel argues against the idea of the narrator being the main character. Though Alaska is the protagonist in this novel, the reader never gets insight into her thoughts. Her voice is only presented to us through Mile's recollection. Having Miles as the first-person narrator distances Alaska from the reader, creating a longing for her voice, a desire for her presence. There are certain instances in the novel where Alaska is described as 'moody' whether it be verbally from one of the characters, or through Miles' first-person narration. The reader only ever hears of why the other characters think she is being moody, or what she did or said to be perceived as moody, but the reader never receives an explanation from Alaska. The novel invites moments in which Alaska can voice her thoughts and emotions, but the invitation is almost always rejected. For example:

"How've you been?" I finally asked.

> "I'm not really up for answering any questions that start with how, when, where, why, or what."
>
> "What's wrong?" I asked.
>
> "That's a what. I'm not doing what's right now. All right, I should go." She pursed her lips and exhaled slowly, like the way the Colonel blew out smoke. (Green, 68)

This moment is an example of Alaska omitting her voice. The reader cannot grasp where Alaska is coming from because the novel does not allow us to see that far. Green eliminates the development of a deeper connection with Alaska's character by eliminating the opportunity to see why she is feeling or doing what she feels or does. The reader, just like Miles, cannot decipher the emotions being shown without being given a reason, thus leaving Alaska as the 'moody' girl who refuses to answer simple questions. While this is an act of agency for Alaska, it is also a demonstration of the novel not having room for emotional women. Alaska stays silent because, as Welter notes, "submission [is] perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women" (Welter, 158). While it is an act of rebellion for Alaska to refuse to answer Miles' question, she is also submissive (as the female counterpart of the narrator) in that she remains silent about the things affecting her. Alaska's decision to stay silent about how she is feeling resonates with Eliza Wharton in *The Coquette* when she writes "you must excuse me if my letters are shorter than formerly. Writing is not so agreeable to me as it used to be" (Foster, 185). Eliza is stating that the projection of her voice is no longer agreeable to her, and in the same way that she is choosing to be silent in terms of writing, Alaska is choosing not to answer questions asked to her.

The novel is set up so that Alaska is a passive character, but there are moments when Alaska breaks through this restriction and becomes vulnerable, giving insight to the reader that

was not there before. In the chapter "Two Days Before" Alaska seizes the opportunity to use her voice. The group of friends is playing a game Alaska introduces called 'Best day/Worst day.' She first talks about her Best day being when she visited the zoo with her mother; the story is short and concise, "where [Alaska's mother] liked the monkeys, and [Alaska] liked the bears" (Green, 119). The 'Best day' story is short, but it still shows a small insight into Alaska's inner thoughts and likings. Her insight and voice shines through when discussing her 'Worst Day,' stating:

> The day after my mom took me to the zoo where she liked the monkeys and I liked the bears, it was a Friday. I came home from school. She gave me a hug and told me to go do my homework in my room so I could watch TV later. I went into my room, and she sat down at the kitchen table, I guess, and then she screamed, and I ran out, and she had fallen over. She was lying on the floor, holding her head and jerking, and I thought she had fallen asleep and that whatever had hurt didn't hurt anymore. So I just sat on the floor with her until my dad got home an hour later, and he's screaming, 'Why didn't you call 911?' and trying to give her CPR, but by then she was plenty dead. Aneurysm. Worst day. I win. You drink. (Green, 119)

This excerpt demonstrates Alaska's opening up to her friends, as well as the reader, in order to show a more personal, vulnerable voice. However, Alaska continues to stray from the trope of the overly emotional female but stating strongly "I win. You drink." The novel's form allows for opportunities where Alaska is no longer a passive character. The moments her voice is implemented, and Alaska shows depth are extremely impactful, as it is rare in the novel. Through this excerpt the reader gets to peer into Alaska's past trauma and see what shapes her as a young

adult. It gives insight as to why Alaska does certain things. When Alaska's internal thoughts and emotions are shown it is through the expression of emotional and traumatic experiences. The novel produces Alaska's stories of death and regret; however, it is still through Mile's lens, diminishing the agency Alaska is grasping for in terms of speaking her past truth.

The "Before" section leaves the reader wondering if they will ever get a solid and insightful answer or reasoning from Alaska. Alaska is still alive in the "Before" section, but the reader does not get to hear her voice. While she is alive the novel has the opportunity to move Alaska from a passive character to a central one, but the use of Miles' first-person narration eliminates that because the reader will only hear what Miles is giving them. The "After" section does little to give the reader the answers they seek along with the possibility of Alaska speaking them. The form of the dialogue changes in the "After" section. Initially, after the news of Alaska's death is revealed, there is a total loss of dialogue. Green begins to write conversations without quotations: "And I said, you saw her and he said yes and I said how did she look and he said, just a bit of blood coming out of her nose" (Green, 141). Not only has Alaska lost her voice absolutely, her death seems to postpone the possibility of any voice breaking through. By writing without clear dialogue and submerging the conversation into the text there is an absolute loss of voice in the novel, at least for a few moments after the revelation of Alaska's death. Alaska dies and all language and voice is postponed, as hers has been for the entire novel. The reader sees emotional instability as a characterization of Alaska, while she is alive, through the degradation of male characters. She is called crazy and moody multiple times and the emphasis on instability continues even after her death. The opposition of male versus female is placed within a discussion of reasoning. Alaska is placed against a male friend, Chip, nicknamed the Colonel in an argument of emotion versus reason. The Colonel states:

> I was so tired of her getting upset for no reason. The way she would get sulky and make references to the freaking oppressive weight of tragedy or whatever but then never said what was wrong, never have any goddamned reason to be sad. And I just think you ought to have a reason. My girlfriend dumped me, so I'm sad. I got caught smoking, so I'm pissed off. My head hurts, so I'm cranky. She never had a reason. (Green, 149)

The Colonel's statement emphasizes an absolute silencing of Alaska. Through her death there will be no explanations. There is the struggle to find reasoning and the struggle to understand that her silenced voice has left with the rest of the characters, as well as the reader. There is also the comparison of male and female emotion and explanation. The unreasonable mood swings the Colonel describes in this excerpt is not a new concept. Green solidifies the idea of female hysteria and unreasonable outbursts when he uses the character of the Colonel to emphasize that he always has reasons, and Alaska never did.

The loss of female voice does not only come from Alaska's inability to speak, but through the belittling of female emotion. When Miles firsts meets Alaska, he becomes infatuated, and as a result he relentlessly asks the Colonel about her. The Colonel responds to Miles' inquiry saying, "Enough with the Alaska already. By my count, there are ninety-two girls at this school, and every last one of them is less crazy than Alaska" (Green, 24). The word "crazy" is used here on the surface to lead Miles away from his initial attraction to Alaska. However, the use of the word crazy connects with more problematic roots than what it is used for on the surface. The implication that Alaska is crazy sets the tone for the rest of the novel. This sets up the reader to read any moment or dialogue that Alaska is involved in with the idea that she is crazy, thus diminishing her agency and voice even more. The novel uses the trope of female emotional

instability to shrink Alaska. Miles says, “I didn’t know whether to trust Alaska, and I’d certainly has enough of her unpredictability- cold one day, sweet the next; irresistibly flirty one moment, resistibly obnoxious the next. I preferred the Colonel: at least when he was cranky, he has a reason,” (Green, 75). The implication that Alaska, the female, does not have a reason for her moodiness compared to the Colonel, the male, who always has a reason creates a division in the connection of emotion, reason, and gender. Green makes it so the reader has to assume that Alaska does not have a reason, because that is what is written, and the statement is not disproved through Alaska because her voice is silenced.

After her death, Alaska’s voice seems to come through falsely due to the fact that the reader receives it through another character. While Miles is dreaming, he is imagining Alaska’s voice. The Alaska that we get in this moment is not actually her, but Miles’ creation or idea of her. It is also Miles idealizing Alaska, taking away more of her agency, because what he is telling the reader is completely through his lens and portrayed based on his idea of Alaska rather than her actual being. Miles says:

> I am sleeping, and Alaska flies into the room. She is naked, and intact. Her breasts, which I felt only very briefly and in the dark, are luminously full as they hang down from her body. She hovers inches above me, her breath warm and sweet against my face like a breeze passing through tall grass.
>
> “Hi,” I say. “I’ve missed you.”
>
> “You look good, Pudge.”
>
> “So do you.”
>
> “I’m so naked,” she says and laughs, “How did I get so naked?”
>
> “I just want you to stay,” I say.

> "No," she says, and her weight falls dead on me, crushing my chest, stealing away my breath, and she is old and wet, like melting ice. (Green, 147)

Mile's recollection of his dream gives a false voice to Alaska. The reader is hearing her speak, but it is not actually Alaska. The moment occurs after her death and the idea that the narrator, Miles, is the only vessel for Alaska's voice to come through is made prominent. The projection of her being naked is also a silencing factor. The sexualizing and objectification of the female character reduces her to nothing but an object of sight, not speech. The sexualization of Alaska's dreamed embodiment diminishes her real and physical voice. The book *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* touches upon the subject of death and sexualization. In the chapter, *"*Points of Departure: Death, Culture and Representation," Kathryn James writes, "cultural anxiety is located in the "excessive" sexuality of the female" making death a cure (James, 16). James' argument supports the idea that Alaska's death was due to the overt sexuality and disregard she had for societal gendered rules. Alaska continues to fade from her friends' memories when the Colonel discusses his grievances post-death. The Colonel says, "In my dreams, she doesn't even look like herself anymore. I don't even remember what she looked like" (149). The loss of physical attributes represents the ultimate loss of Alaska. The loss of her life led to the loss of her body, leading to the absolute loss of her voice. The opposition of Miles' dream and the Colonel's forgetting of Alaska's appearance signifies the loss of Alaska as a whole and the permanence of her diminishment. The only way the reader can hear Alaska is through the male character's memory or through factious occurrences such as the dream.

Epilogue:

Twenty-First Century Stories with Eighteenth-Century Values

While the ideals of the 19th century, pressing women to be pious, pure, submissive and domestic, seem to be a thing of the past, 21st century novels are still promoting strict restrictions for female characters, along with the use of the same techniques seen in Foster and Alcott's novels. While *Looking for Alaska* is John Green's debut novel, the thread of silencing female characters continues in another two of his novels, whether it be physically, or by dehumanizing and idealizing the female, it is nothing that has not been done before. Despite the treatment of these female characters, Green still remains popular. Green's novel *An Abundance of Katherines,* published in 2006, received the Printz Award in 2007 and has been called a "fantastic read" with a "clever, well-written, fun voice." *Paper Towns,* Green's 2008 novel that debuted number five on the New York Times Best Seller list, has been called "dynamic and complex" by readers. The book grew so popular that it was adapted into a film in 2015, featuring stars like model Cara Delevingne, who won a teen choice award for Choice Movie: Best Breakout Star, solidifying the book and movie's popularity among teens and young adults. While young adults are finding entertainment and connections in these novels, it is important to point out the subtle ways they exploit and silence female characters, just as it was for Foster and Alcott's novels.

John Green's *An Abundance of Katherines* is packed with the idealization of the female character, a notion that stifles the individual female's voice. The novel follows Colin Singleton, a recent high school graduate, on a journey of self-discovery after a breakup. The catalyst of this journey is a recent split from Colin's nineteenth girlfriend. Colin's ex-girlfriend is referred to as Katherine XIX. The number XIX, places Katherine at the end of a long list of partners, each of whom is named Katherine. The circumstances of Colin's relationship status lead him to search

for a way to predict the outcome of future relationships. During his journey, he is constantly working on an equation to fit his agenda. Not only is it problematic that Colin only pursues girls with the name Katherine, but it is also an issue that he rejects the individuality and separate voices of these girls in order to simplify them into a mathematical equation from which he wishes to benefit. He eliminates the voice of each of his girlfriends and their individuality, and the reader is only introduced to a numerical order of females that have led to Colin's heartbreak. Colin is reducing his female partners into numbers for memorization benefit, as well as using them as variables in an equation. Each of the Katherines that Colin has dated becomes flat and voiceless, as numbers and variables in mathematical equations are.

The insinuation that each girl needs a number to identify her completely debilitates the individuality of the female. Sometimes even reduced to just a number -- "XIX had a dog too," (Green, 99) -- Colin's most recent ex-girlfriend loses her agency, becoming just a number on a list. Colin continues to do this; even when not speaking of his ex-girlfriends, the individual female becomes a part of a collective, like the times when Colin inches closer to a new love interest but resists because "she was a Lindsey" (Green, 151). Referring to the possible love interest as "A Lindsey" diminishes her individuality and puts her as a part of a group instead of an individual person. Instead of being identifiable for their personality, the females in Colin's life become collective parties. In terms of "The Katherines," there are nineteen different young women with nineteen different lives, characteristics, personalities, and hobbies who the reader does not learn about because the novel is simplifying these dynamic human beings into numbers.

Just as the other novels discussed in this project, the form does little to help the female characters have agency. The form of this novel is written in the third-person, with the narrator closest to Colin Singleton. While the reader follows Colin through this journey of heartbreak, we

only hear one side of each story. Colin thus victimizes himself, stating reasons why his former lovers have cut things off, and calling for the reader to pity him. Colin tells the reasons he believes the girls have broken up with him, but we never hear from the actual girl. The novel even goes so far to dispute the little voice that the Katherines are given. While all nineteen Katherines voice some sort of agency when acting on their own desire to break up with Colin, even this is taken away. Colin, again, collectively omits all nineteen reasons for the girls breaking up with him. He refers the first time he was dumped by a Katherine as that "which marked the beginning of Katherines having ridiculous, idiotic, and frequently oxymoronic reasons for breaking up with me" (Green, 205).

The novel works to show each Katherine as the villain in Colin's story, insinuating that each of them broke up with him for "ridiculous, idiotic, and frequently oxymoronic reasons" (Green, 205). In one instance, Colin calls one of his many Katherines and discovers that he was actually the one who broke up with her, when he believed it was the other way around. This shows the reader that Colin is an unreliable narrator, and when we do not hear the female voice the story gets misconstrued. Similarly, in Foster's *The Coquette,* when Boyer or Sanford recount events with Eliza, she is made to be the villain, but when we hear from her and gain perspective through the female lens, the story changes completely. In *An Abundance of Katherines*, Colin is trying to figure out his formula for the break up equation but cannot seem to get one of them right. In his memory he was dumped by Katherine III, but the graph keeps showing that Colin was in fact the one to break up with her. After some discussion with his friend, it is revealed that Colin may be wrong. At that moment he calls the Katherine he has not spoken to in years and asks her who broke up with whom within the very brief relationship. It is then finalized that Colin did in fact break up with Katherine III. This occurrence is the supporting factor in the

argument that the lack of female voice, or even a voice from another party, gives the male narrator too much power in deciding who the villain and victim is. Colin has proved himself an unreliable narrator, and he even continues on to say that memory and storytelling is relative. When briefly giving a synopsis of all nineteen relationships, he says, "since it makes a better story, I choose to remember that she dumped me" (Green, 203). This connects with Foster's *The Coquette* in that two scenes that condemn Eliza Wharton for coquettish behavior are both from male perspectives. If memory and storytelling are relative as Colin decides, then how does the reader know whether to condemn Eliza, or her pursuer? In *The Coquette*, the scene of the ball is discussed three times, one to Boyer from his friend, one from Sanford, and one from Eliza. Within the letters of both Boyer and Sanford, Eliza is pinned as the problem. She is too flirtatious with Sanford at the ball and is creating a problematic view of herself. In Sanford's letter he deems that Eliza was looking for him to pursue her and knows what she is getting when dealing with him. In Eliza's account, she is preyed on by Sanford, and cannot get a moment of peace without him approaching her. This occurs again when discussing the scene of the garden. In the men's letters we see Eliza as the sneaky and coquettish girl who was alone with Sanford, a man she is not married to, in a garden, but in Eliza's recount we see that she went into the garden alone and was followed after she specifically wished to remain alone. The aggressive pursuance of Sanford and the ignorant assumptions of Boyer condemn Eliza even if she did not do what was said in their letters. Just as Eliza was condemned for something due to another's recollection of a moment, Katherine III is continually demonized by Colin, even after the truth is discovered. Eliza's story had been manipulated through Major Sanford and Mr. Boyer's gaze. Similarly, Colin manipulates the story of Katherine III for his benefit, thus eliminating the voice that Katherine III should have by completely disregarding it

The silencing of female characters does not only come through omission of voice, but through the debasing of female accomplishment. When Colin's friend Hassan convinces him to take this post-high school, post- breakup road trip they end up in a small town in Tennessee called Gutshot, where they meet Lindsey Lee Wells and her mother Hollis, with whom they wind up staying. Hollis is the owner of a textile company. It is revealed toward the end of the novel that the company is in trouble, and many of the products they make, which Colin discovers are tampon strings, are buried or stored in a warehouse. In the book *Misfit Children: An Inquiry into Childhood Belongings,* Christopher Parkes writes an article called "The Child Prodigy Ages Out." In this article, Parkes alludes to Hollis and her job as the factory owner. He writes, "Hollis has turned the once proud textile company into one that manufactures a product that we are supposed to find comically backward, connected as it is to the female body" (Parkes, 135). The context of the novel does not allow the reader to see progress in the fact that a female owns a company on her own, because it has made it so the company is failing. Hollis' accomplishments are diminished by taboo assumptions of the female body, as well as the feeding into the stereotypical notion that women are not meant to run things. Connecting back to the early novels discussed, the place of a woman is in supporting her husband, and although Green's novels are written in the twenty-first century, they still have the patriarchal lens that *The Coquette* and *Little Women* were crafted to rebel against hundreds of years ago.

As if the two John Green novels did not support the trend enough, Green has a third novel, *Paper Towns*, which solidifies the creation of the silent and mostly invisible female character. *Paper Towns* is about a high school senior Quentin, Q for short, who admires Margot Roth Spiegelman from afar. The two were childhood friends but drifted apart in their teenage years. One night Margot creeps into Q's window and takes him on a spontaneous journey filled

with breaking and entering, graffiti, and an overall seeking of revenge. Margot has been cheated on by her boyfriend and lied to by her best friend, so she is looking for a way to get them back. That is the plot of the first part of the book: a reckless teenage girl with a vendetta convincing her neighbor and old friend to go on this journey with her, even though he could be jeopardizing his future by committing these crimes. To Q, Margot is an enigma, and because of the first-person narration, she becomes an enigma to the reader as well. Similar to Green's debut novel, *Looking for Alaska* in the second part of the novel, Margot disappears, and Q is left to spend the last weeks of his senior year searching for her. Margot's disappearance from the novel resonates with both *Looking for Alaska* and *The Coquette* in that her disappearance silences her, and her voice is replaced by another. Margot is no longer there to speak for herself, so the reader relies on Q's knowledge of Margot to guide us through finding her. Green writes "A Margot for each of us- and each more mirror than window" (Green, 202) and that is exactly what Margot becomes. Instead of being a person with a voice, she becomes the embodiment of what the people around her want her to be. She has become physically unobtainable and without a voice. The idea of her becomes Margot instead of her actual person. Green's elimination of Margot through the plot emits a fragmentation of her character. When Q finally finds Margot at a "pseudovision," or an abandoned housing subdivision, she tells him "I was the flimsy-foldable person, not everyone else. And here's the thing about it. People love the idea of a paper girl. They always have" (Green, 293). Margot indeed becomes a paper girl when she is only a viable person through the eyes of others, just as the Katherines, Alaska Young, Jo March and Eliza Wharton were.

This is not to say that these novels should not be enjoyed by the masses who love and praise them. However, it is important to notice why and how these novels create minimal space

for rebellious, non-conforming female characters. Characters like the coquettish Eliza Wharton, the tomboyish Jo March, and the wild and crazy Alaska Young become tragically lovable when the reader is aware of the tactics used to push these women aside. While the power of the rebellious female character is what becomes intriguing, it is a disappointing fact that these female characters do not get to remain for that long. The young adult novel eliminates space for these women to exist, pushing them out of the story so that their voices are not heard. However, there is hope for a change, for a creation of space for these women who do not identify with "true womanhood." As young adult literature moves more toward mirroring reality and the push for gender equality continues to emerge, it seems now more than ever these female characters need to be given agency and a voice.

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