

## **Gabrielle Donnelly: "Our Foreign Correspondent: Louisa May Alcott's Travels Through Europe"**

Louisa traveled to Europe twice - part of a trend, especially among the wealthy. The European Tour was the thing to do.

19th century people did not have the advantage of photographs and video but then again, that only addresses the visual.

Louisa had been dying to go to Europe all her life. Always adventurous. A big romantic, well versed in Northern European literature. Found southern Europe titilating - her thrillers were full of such details.

She was surrounded by people who had been to Europe.

Got her first opp in 1865 - William Weld asked Louisa to be Anna Weld's companion and nurse (along with Anna's brother George). Went in July of that year.

Even though she complained about Anna, she filled her letters with wonderful details of the trip.

Started in Liverpool and toured the English countryside.

Germany, crossed the Rhine, Switzerland (Vevey) and southern France.

Louisa very observant, loved watching and recording everything around her. Gabrielle did a very funny reading from Louisa's observations.

Anna grew to be 89 and had a child - not so sick!

Anna did not agree with Louisa as to what to do and see.

Louisa was lonely by the time she landed in Vevey. This is when she met Laddie. He was a Polish soldier - he was 20 and she was 32. He was musical. One of the models for Laurie in Little Women.

They loved conversing with one another. More than a friendship and less than a full-blown romance. (Was Louisa responsible for it not becoming something more? Did she put a stop to it and why?)

She was even happy on her birthday which was unusual.

Louisa finally left Anna to be on her own. John Pratt went to bat for her to make sure she got her fee.

She went to Paris and spent 14 days with Laddie. Gabrielle thinks she was not surprised that Laddie met her at the train station.

Louisa appeared to treat Laddie like a son rather than a lover though one has to wonder since she does not write about it in her journal.

She left Laddie and went to London, spent some time there. She and Laddie corresponded for several years.

Went home in July.

Travel broadens your horizon and teaches things about yourself.

She learned she needed companionship outside of her family.

Little Women came at an opportune time, portraying a close and happy family at a time when the country was entering into the post-Civil War period.

Many European influences, especially in Laurie (he studied music in Vevey and went to Paris).

Laurie a passionate Italian (not mild mannered like Laddie). Laurie has a sense of danger, and a hint of scandal in his life. Not as grounded as Jo who actually grounded herself through him.

Laurie's house represents Europe. There are things we don't know about the family. Hierarchical society in Laurie's house while the March home is a democracy.

The March house has its own culture as does the Laurence house. The March sisters like visiting the Laurence home but Laurie seeks out the March sisters' experience. Possibly Louisa was saying that America is better, offers a better life and culture.

Little Women made Louisa rich and she liked it. She was able to go to Europe on her own terms. She traveled with May and Alice Bartlett. Louisa chaperoned them. They left in 1870.

Shawl Straps from Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag about their adventures in Europe - Louisa was Lavinia and May was Matilda.

Louisa was a celebrity in Europe and enjoyed the perks.

Louisa's relationship with May complicated. Louisa tends to dismiss May through the character of Amy. Gabrielle thinks it's strange that Amy was not there when Beth died. Louisa also seemed to kill off Amy's artistic fire.

(could Amy's absence have been a means to push the story forward, for she did a lot of pondering about herself and seemed to grow up being with Aunt March.)

Louisa didn't really 'get' May's art at first; she didn't understand nor appreciate it. Louisa had been too busy perhaps to notice May.

After Europe, Louisa saw May in a more serious light. She also saw May through the eyes of her friend Alice. She perhaps for the first time actually saw May's work. May likely would have instructed Louisa on how to appreciate art while visiting galleries.

May reinvented herself in Louisa's eyes and this does show in Shawl Straps. Matilda is passionate about her art. May becomes an equal to Louisa in Louisa's eyes. May became 'cool.' :-) They ended up as friends and equals.

Bess in Little Men appears more than Amy (who really doesn't appear at all) - Bess has a whole chapter. Could Bess have been Louisa's way of granting justice to May by removing Amy from the conversation and making Bess a queen? Did Louisa and May perhaps discuss May's portrayal as Amy and Louisa felt a need to reconcile?

## **Jeannine Atkins: "May Alcott: Painting a Way Home"**

Writing *Little Woman in Blue* required sensory details of place.

Emerson provided for the Alcotts, advocated for artists.

Nature had its practical applications - the railroad, building houses, heating fuel

More trees and wildlife now than back in the day because of farming.

Emerson concerned about logging and thus bought Walden Woods. He allowed Thoreau to live there and build a cabin. Thoreau wrote in words what May sketched in pictures.

Emerson appreciated Thoreau who wrote about immersion in the present and future in America rather than looking back at Europe.

Little Women brought in a new genre of the domestic.

May learned about the spirit of place by hanging out with Louisa and walking with her - both were quite athletic.

Walking represented a forthright and independent woman. May rowing the boat herself was considered eccentric by the British.

Did a lot of activities outdoors which gave them more freedom than in the parlor.

Looking for God in the outdoors - the land was spiritual, yielding life. Bronson was not only a transcendentalist but a farmer. He immersed himself in the land both physically and spiritually.

Emerson felt that spending time in nature, especially painting it, causes them to connect more closely with nature.

May painted to see more clearly, looking more deeply, observing more closely. It can be a form a prayer.

May became an artist in a culture that valued words over images, leftovers from the Puritan culture where everything was plain (thou shalt not make a graven image)

Painting, like needlework, was seen as proper, but not professionally for money. Instead it had to enhance and help the family.

Sophia Hawthorne painted but Nathaniel saw it only as spiritual.

Drawing was encouraged for girls to appreciate nature. They were encouraged to study birds, flowers, etc. Science back then was about studying God's world, what you can see.

Emerson pleaded for Americans to create art here but one could only become serious by studying in Europe.

May was able to visit Emerson's library and copy artwork there.

Emphasis on myths and Greek and Roman gods in Europe and the Alcott girls were immersed in it as seen in the drawings on the walls of May's bed chambers.

May in her 20s sketched around town, helped out at home. Took a lesson from Sophia Hawthorne about how the artist fire can be quenched if not careful.

Studied anatomy with Dr. William Rimmer - did not have nude models - only France allowed that

May found her talent in drawing the outdoors while Louisa found her success writing about the home.

May taught lessons.

She painted the owl over the fireplace while nursing Louisa.

Concord Sketches featured landscapes but also people in those places which made the places alive. Louisa was underwhelmed as depicted in the introduction she wrote for the book.

May illustrated the first edition of *Little Women* and showed her need to study the figure which she very much wanted to do.

How did May feel as she was depicted in *Little Women*? Did she wish Louisa saw her in a more generous light?

May, unlike Amy, never gave up. She kept striving, learning, perfecting.

Jeannie felt betrayed when Amy gave up her art because she could not be "great."

Louisa saw herself as Artemus and May as Aphrodite but she wanted to be Artemus too.

European trip - learned to copy Turner's art - they both appreciated water as every changing and yet eternal.

She painted watercolors of famous sites to sell.

She loved the process and she loved making money.

Paris - May copied paintings in the Louvre and took classes. Described her process to her family in letters home.

May had 2 works displayed at the Salon and they were hung at eye level, a real honor.

Impressionists - Jeannine thinks May would have been interested in mastering it, especially after copying Turners.

friend Mary Cassette was getting into Impressionist art - first American to join the group.

May was a feminist in that she felt women were equally able to succeed at art.

Her friendships with other women artists was sustaining to her.

Women artists are still a small percentage of the present day successful artists.

*How to Study Art Cheaply* - Women were charged three times more than men to take the courses. May as eminently practical.

It was a big deal getting established as a professional artist and took a lot of courage.

Ultimately even though May never returned to America, she did send her daughter home to Louisa.

A study of a geranium was one of her last works.

A reading of Louisa poem for May, *Our Madonna*

Both sisters created beauty, one through the written word and the other through art. Louisa lifted up domestic life and made it beautiful.

## **Kristi Martin: "The Wilderness of Books: Literary Concord"**

Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott and Hawthorne - how their work created the idea of historical preservation .

Emerson is the reason for the community of great authors in Concord.

Emerson had been a Unitarian minister but after the death of his wife, fled to Europe to search himself and go on the lecture circuit. Married again, Lidia (Lidian) Emerson.

Emerson very mindful of the historic nature of Concord. Devoted to ancestry.

Apparently Emerson was selective about family history and re-imagined events.

Emerson wanted to create a new American spirituality, American literature.

He maintains that the "shot heard round world" shed the first blood of the Revolution in Concord, not Lexington.

Emerson first lived at the Manse; lost his brother Edward from TB so he entered the old house in grief.

After marrying Lidian, they moved into the Cambridge Turnpike home. Younger brother Charles and his wife Elizabeth were supposed to live there but Charles died.

Emerson wanted to create a literary circle and invited people to move to Concord including the Alcotts, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau and Hawthorne. Only Fuller declined to move there but spent much time at the Emerson home with extended stays.

Out in the wilderness of Concord with a literary circle to stimulate and share.

Hawthorne made the Old Manse a literary tourist attraction through his association with it.

The Old North Bridge, site of that first shot, is next door and became a patriotic tourist attraction.

Hawthorne used the stories of the Revolution in his writing.

Emerson himself and his grandfather William lived at the Old Manse too at different times.

Hawthorne researched the ancestors who lived at the Old Manse who were involved with their birth of our country to insure the Old Manse in the commemorative site.

An abundance of peace and quiet at the Old Manse.

Tourism can bring rest and peace; also like a religious pilgrimage - the Old Manse served both purposes. Hawthorne referred to the house as a parsonage.

Hawthorne considered himself and his wife as the rightful heirs of the Old Manse. Referred to it as "ancient" and made improvements to it while respecting its antiquity.

The Manse represented in material form spirituality - it was the concrete manifestation.

The attic of the Manse was important to Hawthorne.

The Hawthornes were eventually evicted and the Ripleys moved in. Yet Hawthorne's presence is all over the house, including graffiti.

By the 1860s the literary homes in Concord were becoming places where people visited. They eventually became tourist attractions. People came from all over the world.

In 1939, the Old Manse became an official commemorative site. Hawthorne's writings about the house secured its position as a popular tourist attraction.

Thoreau was alone in not having a house dedicated to him. People more associate him with Walden Pond.

Thoreau associated the natural world with antiquity.

Thoreau and Emerson supported the Concord Museum with many donations of artifacts. The families continued in this tradition.

Truth extracted from history is eternal according to Thoreau.

Thoreau was a traveler who remained at home for it was his mindset that was traveling.

Tourists visited his cabin. He and his bean field became fodder for tourist gossip.

Louisa May Alcott influenced by the Concord literary circle. In *Moods*, Jeffrey Moar, the Emerson character, lived in a house like the Old Manse. Adam Warwick is associated with the outdoors and the river journey taken in the story, much like *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack*.

To Louisa, the home was a type of wilderness with a load of domestic duties. Her fame also was a wilderness with the burden of overzealous fans. Her poem, "Fame," satirized the tourist industry in Concord.

Orchard House was the first house museum in Concord. Harriot Lothrop bought the house and 10 years later sold it to the Concord Women's Club for \$5000.

Orchard House was the physical proof that *Little Women* was true.