

**AMERICAN LETTERS: MODELLING LANGUAGE AND CHARACTER  
IN THE 19TH-CENTURY UNITED STATES FICTION FOR THE  
YOUNG: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT AND MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY**

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The title points to a vast topic – the efforts of an entire nation to make itself anew and establish its directions after a traumatic Civil War (1861–65). It also examines the different ways in which numerous writers sought to mediate such cultural and historical debates for young readers, and, in their narratives, to visualize possible models for the development of ‘Young America’ and young Americans. Discussion is confined to a few examples drawn from texts by two prominent nineteenth-century women authors. First through instances from novels by Louisa May Alcott (1832–88) which are still widely read and critically studied. Then through a glance at Alcott’s contemporary, Mrs. A.D.T. Whitney (1824–1906) now almost forgotten. Scenes of reading and writing, gentle instruction in language and letters, form a significant strand in the debate about what American children were learning, and the kind of adults they might become.

*Key-words:* the alphabet; reading; gender; L. M. Alcott; A. D. T. Whitney.

My title points to a vast topic, to which a single paper cannot do justice. A full treatment would have to encompass the efforts of an entire nation to make itself anew and establish its directions after a traumatic Civil War (1861–65); it would also have to examine the different ways in which numerous writers sought to mediate such cultural and historical debates for young readers, and, in their narratives, to visualize possible models for the development of ‘Young America’ and young Americans. Here, however, my intention is simply to give a glimpse of some of the subject’s many facets. Discussion will, therefore, be confined to a few examples, drawn from texts by two prominent nineteenth-century women authors. It will introduce some themes and briefly set some contexts, first through instances from novels by Louisa May Alcott (1832–88), favourites in her day, constantly in print, and still widely read and critically studied; and then through a glance at Alcott’s contemporary, Mrs. A.D.T. Whitney (1824–1906), also beloved in her time, but now almost forgotten [Note 1]. As in the examples which follow, scenes of reading and writing, gentle instruction in language and letters, form a significant strand in the debate about what American children were learning, and the kind of adults they might become.

A small episode offers a point of entry. Towards the close of ‘Part Second’ of Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868–69), still one of the most famous American books for younger readers, we come across this scene – of a small boy learning from his grandfather the letters of the alphabet:

Mr. Bhaer came in one evening to pause on the threshold of the study, astonished by the spectacle that met his eye. Prone upon the floor lay Mr. March, with his respectable legs in the air, and beside him, likewise prone, was Demi, trying to imitate the attitude with his own short, scarlet-stockinged legs, both grovellers so seriously absorbed that they were unconscious of spectators, till Mr. Bhaer laughed his sonorous laugh, and Jo cried out, with a scandalized face, –

‘Father, father! here’s the Professor!’

Down went the black legs and up came the gray head, as the preceptor said, with undisturbed dignity, –

‘Good evening, Mr. Bhaer. Excuse me for a moment, – we are just finishing our lesson. Now Demi, make the letter and tell its name.’

‘I knows him!’ and, after a few convulsive efforts, the red legs took the shape of a pair of compasses, and the intelligent pupil triumphantly shouted, ‘It’s a We, Dranpa, it’s a We!’ [4, p. 491].

The passage is visual, and it is no surprise that it was selected by Frank T. Merrill for graphic depiction in the first major illustrated edition of the text [3]. Though amusing, however, the tableau also brings into focus themes that remain important throughout the four volumes of Alcott’s March family chronicles. Like the ‘W’, the doubled letter, ‘double U’ [Note 2], constructed out of black and scarlet legs, it is a scene of union, here, of opposites. After a narrative of war, privation and suffering, and death in the family and the nation, the picture speaks of continuities, uniting the youngest and the oldest: the grandfather, Mr. March, who has survived the Civil War and the new generation, the child, Demi, born since its ending. With its comic touch, the scene also humanizes Mr. March, the head and moral centre of the household, hitherto a figure somewhat remote from the day-to-day scenes of domestic life, and the activities of his wife and daughters [6]. Here, the male patriarch enters completely into a scene usually the province of the woman: child-care, nurturing, and the induction into letters and the alphabet, as the prelude to books and reading. Such union, the text suggests to its readers, can only be for the good. Although *Little Women* is a novel centred on female rites of passage, it constantly seeks to open up questions about gender divisions, and to dissolve the barriers between; and, alongside its manifold versions of ‘the feminine’, it explores different models of masculinity – among them, the androgynous boy, or the man of feeling [28], [26].

In ‘Part Second’, Alcott introduces the next generation, with the birth of male and female twins, and the narrative begins more directly to open up issues of very young boyhood. The girl child, Daisy, is visualized as one of the most conventional gender portraits within the series: a ‘rosy, chubby, sunshiny little soul [...] made to be kissed and cuddled, adorned and adored’; saved from being an angel by her ‘delightfully human’ touches of naughtiness [4, p. 488], she remains untroublesome to her elders, and occupies a space on the edges of the narrative. With Daisy’s brother, Demi, however, Alcott draws readers’ attention towards male development; problematizing and complicating what is to be a ‘boy’. If parents hoped to avoid raising a brute, what were the alternatives? Demi is presented as a precociously intelligent child whose features adults scrutinize, as a text, for reassurance about his future character. Observing his interest in philosophical questions, ‘his anxious grandmother said, “My dear, do you think it is wise to talk about such things to that baby? He’s getting great bumps over his eyes, and learning to ask the most unanswerable questions”’ [4, p. 489].

The dangers perceived as inherent in a dedication to words are that the boy child will become oversensitive, feminized, intellectual, with a literacy gained at the expense of his masculine, physical, prowess; or even, at an extreme, that words will completely drain his vitality. The family servant prophesies an early death: ‘that child ain’t long for this world’; and his mother welcomes the occasional pranks – involving dirt or greediness – which seem to give ‘convincing proofs that he was a true boy’ [4, p. 469]. But the spectacle here demonstrates another kind of solution – longer lasting, and more satisfactory. As readers have been told earlier: ‘Demi learned his letters with his grandfather, who invented a new mode of teaching the alphabet by forming the letters with his arms and legs, – thus uniting gymnastics for head and heels’ [4, p. 487]. Mr. March is not entirely original: his

technique simply takes further a representational tradition, of 'Body Alphabets' extant since at least the 1780s, where letters were depicted as human bodies in action, often in comical postures [14, p. 88–90]. But as a way of combining work and play, mental and physical exercise, the grandfather's lesson helps to suggest a new model of the male child as a 'true boy' – a young man of letters, who can be both sensitive and sturdy. Demi remains a site for anxiety into subsequent texts, bringing before the reader larger visions of childhood in danger: 'those pale precocious children who amaze and delight a family sometimes, and fade away like hot-house flowers, because the young soul blooms too soon, and has not a hearty body to root it firmly in the wholesome soil of this earth' [4, p. 239]. But, tracing the judicious balance of 'male' and 'female' influences in his life, the narrative takes him through to a successful adulthood, and a career which combines letters and practicality: he gains distinction in College but becomes a publisher – a maker of serious letters and books, including literature for children. From the beginnings in this scene, then, Alcott unfolds a man's story, which offers a fresh and supportive role model to her own young readers and to the adults in the family circle. Demi conforms to one desired male cultural narrative, entering a distinguished path into business and trade, but, in a way which upholds the value of sensitivity: as the guardian and disseminator of culture. As the grown-up, Demi emphasises his chosen place of work has an 'atmosphere so different from the dark offices and hurly-burly of many other trades, where nothing but money is talked about' [4, p. 937].

In its immediate narrative context, the alphabet scene's main purpose is to precipitate the romantic denouement, bringing closer together the spectators here: the heroine, Jo March, and the visitor, Professor Bhaer, and leading to their engagement in the next chapter. But in Alcott's wider narrative, it looks ahead to the future, unfolded in *Little Women's* sequels: *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). Set at Plumfield, Jo's own radical coeducational (and to a degree, multiracial and multiethnic) school, these later texts offer an extended vision of educational possibility, exploring how children might best learn, and how they might develop into the kind of young men and women the American republic needed. In Jo's own married career, as many critics have recognized, Alcott represented a fusion of the radical and the domestic – Jo is a proto-feminist (or, as she calls herself in the phrase of the period, she is 'strong-minded'), but as a famous author for children and presiding head of a successful school, she also remains in the traditional woman's 'sphere', as mother, and moral, emotional and spiritual influence [17], [16], [18], [29], [1]. In their cultural work, as author-educators, Jo and Louisa May Alcott, her creator, visualize the children in their care, in ways that seek to challenge some of the powerfully emergent new models of the post-Civil War United States. Their anxieties focus on both individual and national character; and, with variations of emphasis, were shared by many of their contemporaries.

Demi's exuberant phonetic rendering of the 'W', as a 'We!' captures the mood and meaning he himself embodies, in his shared tableau with his grandfather. Read in a broader cultural context, his little scene of cooperative learning unconsciously expresses a larger meaning at odds with the individualistic ethic that Alcott, in all her texts, presents as one of the most serious threats to the American society of the day. Publishing *Little Women* in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Alcott was aware of the dangers to character posed by an accelerating capitalist economy. This world of new money, major industrialisation (stimulated by the war itself), and the consequent shifts to a culture of consumerism, was coming to be known as the 'Gilded Age' [10]. Such cultural changes generated concern about how to preserve a moral centre, in the self and in the nation; like the worries about disappearing childhood in twenty-first century Britain, many Americans in the mid-nineteenth century feared the risks to young people where older patterns of character had lost their force. The dominant cultural pressure, at least for middle-class children, seemed

now to be competitive individualism – or as Herbert Spencer called it, Social Darwinism. For boys, this proffered a narrow pattern of masculinity, taken to an extreme in the sharp, money-grabbing business practices Demi would reject. As Michael Kimmel explains, even by the 1840s and 1850s, the prevailing social role models, within the rampant entrepreneurialism of the day, had been exalted into the ‘cult of the Self-Made Man’: young men devoured popular biographies and inspirational homilies to help future self-made men create themselves [...] [T]he proving ground was the public sphere, specifically the workplace. And the workplace was a man’s world (and a native-born white man’s world at that). If manhood could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men [21, p. 141].

For girls, in turn, such competition imprinted the templates of fashion, as they attempted to display themselves as desirable commodities on the marriage market. The reciprocal dynamics of male competition and female display would be made explicit in two radical analyses at the end of the century: the feminist activist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Women and Economics* (1898), and the sociologist, Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) [Note 3]. But images of American girls pluming themselves in the style of Society ladies (and glimpses of the young men who survey them) recur, as symptoms of social debility, throughout Alcott’s texts [30]. As readers are told in *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, the Gilded Age risks raising its children to be ‘restless, aimless, frivolous, and sick’ [2, p. 213]. So, thirty years before Gilman and Veblen, *Little Women*, through Meg and Amy’s narratives in particular, exposed, in scenes and language accessible to young readers, the temptations of fashionable society, and the perils of a sophisticated self-consciousness, or precocious sexuality. Many of the best-known scenes of the novel, repeatedly illustrated, translated to stage and screen, and debated by scholars in arguments about Alcott’s feminism or politics [26], [8], represent the sisters attempting to shape themselves into fashionable forms: Amy placing a peg on her nose, or affecting elaborate speech, to give herself a more aristocratic air; Meg with a powdered face and a low-cut dress, flirting over champagne at a Society ball. Which versions of the child-self will produce the adult? In *Little Women*, the home resists the culture, just as the father survives the war. On his return, Mr. March, treats his daughters (as he will his grandson) as printed texts: he reads and approves, for example, the history of Meg’s roughened hand, now ‘prettier’ to him, ‘hardened’ and ‘pricked’ by domestic efforts, than it was when ‘white and smooth’ and dedicated to ‘fashionable accomplishments’ [4, p. 23], [22].

Alcott’s portraits of further generations of young boys and girls at Plumfield School again present her own reading audience with counter-cultural versions of success and failure. Jo seeks to rehabilitate children from all classes, injured by a range of factors, from parental pressure to poverty. The texts reframe, for example, images of disability, engaging readers to sympathize with two eight-year old boys: one with a severe stutter, the other with a severely crooked back. Conversely, narrative commentary, born out by subsequent plot developments, directly challenges contemporary social values, relating of a young entrepreneur in the making: ‘Many men would have thought him a smart boy, but Mr Bhaer did not like his way of illustrating that Yankee word, and thought his unboyish keenness and money-loving as much of an affliction as Dolly’s stutter, or Dick’s hump’ [4, p. 541]. Descriptions of damaged children prompt readers to try to visualize more wholesome ways of living: an indulged rich child – a ‘pale, puffy boy, dull, fretful and lazy’, or a once-intellectual boy, harmed as Demi was not, by his father’s ambition. Driven to a brain-fever by overwork, his mind was wiped clean like a blank slate, and now, at thirteen, like a helpless six-year old, he vainly struggles to remake himself, to reconnect to the world through letters: ‘[d]ay after day, he pored over the alphabet, proudly said A and B, and thought he knew them, but on the morrow they were gone’ [4, p. 542].

In Alcott's own texts, more generally, the life of language generates fresh energy. Good books, in a prevalent trope of the period, represent nourishment, healthy food [25]. Alcott seeks to supply this: her heroine, Jo, declares 'I like good, strong words, that mean something' [4, p. 44]; and Alcott resented having to soften her own text's slang and local idioms, at her publisher's request [28]. Throughout her narratives, engagement with story, books or art represents the means to agency: whether this is a sewing circle of young women, listening to New Woman literature read aloud [4, p. 1006], or a very young boy, overwhelmed by the applause when he recites a short poem [4, p. 739]. At the climax of *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, Alcott places one of her most striking visualizations of a future America: a beautiful statue, modelled by a girl artist, as the image of the 'coming woman': 'bigger, lovelier and more imposing than any we see nowadays, and at the same time, she is a true woman'. In debate, the girls agree that she should be given the symbols of her talents – including a pen, and, as a right, the ballot box [2, p. 243–244]. It was these texts of Alcott's, with their creative models for a vigorous young society, which President Theodore Roosevelt would later confess that, as a child, he had 'worshiped' [27, p. 26].

In the same passage of his autobiography, Roosevelt also recalls another childhood favourite, like Alcott once viewed as a family author, now labelled mainly as a writer for girls [11]. In the space that remains, to indicate the broader extent of such concerns, I shall turn briefly to this writer: Alcott's prolific contemporary, Mrs. Adeline D.T. Whitney. Whitney sprang to fame in 1860 with a set of satirical rhymes, *Mother Goose for Grown Folks*, then, like Alcott gained a wide readership with a set of interlinked novels: the *Real Folks* series, published from 1863–73. While Alcott's texts have continued to intrigue scholars, through their tensions and contradictions, Whitney, even in her lifetime, had begun to lose readers through what was seen as her 'religious tone', 'little preachments', and 'mysticism' [32, pp. 209–210]. Her strong, central message that women's place should remain in the home, sustained her general neglect, even through the rediscovery of 'lost' women authors in the wake of second-wave feminism, at the end of the twentieth century [24, 7, 23].

Nevertheless, it is this very religiosity that underpins Whitney's far-reaching fascination with the way God writes the world – as a place of letters and signs, which we must learn to read aright. In its search for the dynamic alignment of human and providential stories, Whitney's work, I suggest, emerges as subtle and forceful, and might productively be approached through her life-long interest in all aspects of words, language, narratology, and plot, demonstrated at every level in her texts. Educated at George B. Emerson's school for girls in Boston, Whitney herself was exposed early to theories that it was important, for moral growth, to teach very young children to associate words with things, with God's objects in nature; and, at a later age, that to grasp the roots of language was the foundation of all knowledge [15], [14]. Beginning her career in the wake of the writings of Charles Darwin, Whitney sought to challenge secularized, mechanistic views of human development, by asserting God's deeper, embedded meanings, written through Nature. Again, as with Mr. March, God, as a father, teaches through gesture: 'We, and all about us, are syllables of an infinite revelation. They may call it evolution, for a new name, if they will, but it is what God tells us, of ourselves and Him, all the same. He talks to us with his fingers, – because we are deaf and dumb' [40, p. 76]. Whitney's fiction constantly returns to the materiality of language and letters; these texts seem to anticipate and refute post-structuralist linguistic models, through repeated assertion that, though words might seem arbitrary, even a syllable may enact meaning. As a Darwin-like scientist explains to one of Whitney's central girl characters, the simplest words are visual and powerful: '“Tender,” and “true,” “strong,” “brave,” “great,” “tiny”; you can see the delicate touch, the unswerving line, the swell and tension of the muscle, the bare, free, unflinching brow, the

expansiveness and the holding [...] Words are only the arbitrary signs. We talk and think in living types. If language does not suggest these, it has no meaning' [35, p. 161], [41, p. 94-95]. In all Whitney's stories, care for language is an index to moral potential. The reader soon learns which characters to trust, as (to take just one example) in a tale of some young school boys who set up shop. It becomes clear that Algernon who was 'particular about his terminal "g's" and other niceties of speech' [39, p. 120] will develop into a fine man, whereas Jo, with his sloppy speech, will slide into dishonesty and theft. Algernon's linguistic solidity is matched by straightforward business practice, and he impresses the adults around him with his alternative approach to capitalist enterprise, founded on honest practice rather than on profit, and catering to need rather than creating artificial wants.

In a late, advice book, *Friendly Letters to Girl Friends* (1896), Whitney offers direct commentary as to how her readers might try to visualize themselves, and direct their own life narratives. Like Alcott, through addressing a youthful audience in her fiction, she seeks a major rewriting of the national story. Like Alcott, she affirms: 'Society, truly regarded, is the enlarged family' [40, p. 126]; where dysfunction in the one is inseparable from warping in the other. Again, she identifies the menace to the nation of middle-class aspiration, and the risk to young people's moral nature: 'A professional society woman is a parasite upon the world's heart-growth; helping, as a microbe of disease, to eat out its vitality' [40, p. 121]. She also points a parallel between the 'delusions of self-seeking' in society with 'the vanities of the platform' [40, p. 124], [9]. She does not condemn the desire to dress well, or be beautiful, but deplors the social system in which girls grow up to construct their self-image in terms of fashionable performance and sexual display:

'I wish the girls growing up could see what a mission they might take up as American women. Our own American women – those of highest training and possibilities – are responsible. There is a great waste of the force which they should be in the nation, either in foolish surface-living, of elegant form and pretense, or in a struggle to assert an outside power.' [40, p. 124]

In her extended argument, here and elsewhere, Whitney figures self-development through physical metaphors of working with fabrics and design. The child-self is a plan for a future house (contributing to the larger habitat of the nation); or a pattern for weaving or sewing, incorporating its individual life-thread into the broad text of society. Encounters with books are all-important: these are the windows, to see into ourselves and into others; or the yarns to spin out our own story: 'Perhaps stories help us, best of anything, to find ourselves out, and so set us either confirming or developing, or checking and denying our proclivities' [40, p. 26]. Even the youngest child, she believes, will take pleasure from letters and words, independent of the content of the story. Power and meaning will follow: 'So in books; mere language, grown out of life, is a spell in itself; what else do we do with letters but *spell* into words the signs that make them talismanic, that give them power [...]' [40, p. 43].

Whitney's own fiction offer older children models for such agency. Whereas Alcott's Plumfield School experiments with its healing agenda in a pastoral enclosure are removed from mainstream society, Whitney's *Real Folks* series takes its reformist programme from the country into the depths of the city [34], [36], [37], [38]. In the third novel, which has the series title, her young characters are at the fore in trying to put heart back into a culture divided by wealth and poverty, artificial grace and unspeakable filth. The texts follow the growth of children and of neighbourhoods, as the central characters attempt social amelioration. They reshape their own notions of family to make room for a disabled child and for a young African American girl; then extend their efforts by offering themselves as examples of better living to children in the slums. Again, repeatedly, key scenes place the development of language at their centre. So, older girls make picture books for city

orphans: cutting and pasting images of flowers and animals to help small non-readers to visualize the country. As one girl observes: 'Pictures are to *tell* things'; and as another perceives, any page stimulates new narratives: 'the stories that have got to be told about every picture' [37, p. 158, 157]. But the girls face a further challenge: the shock that the city has debased language itself. The infants of the slums are 'wild little folk' who can be enticed with gingerbread and popcorn, 'but they would not stay. They were digging in the gutters and calling names; learning the foul language of the places' [37, p. 264]. In a description of a young child, using rough words and talking of abuse as a matter-of-fact occurrence, Whitney mediates the problems for her readers through the focus of a child more like themselves: middle-class, sensitive, literate:

'Hazel drew a hard breath as she let the girl go. Back to her crowded cellar [...] the swearings and the lickings. What was one hour at a time, once or twice a week, to do against all this?

But she remembered the clean little round in her face, out of which eyes and mouth looked merrily, while she talked rough slang; the same fun and daring, – nothing worse, – were in this child's face, that might be in another's saying prettier words. How could she help her words, hearing nothing but devil's Dutch around her all the time? Children do not make the language they are born into. And the face that could simply be merry, telling such a tale as that—what sort of bright little immortality must it be the outlook of?' [37, p. 277–78].

This visualization preserves a romantic image of childhood – the child is still unpolluted; but, in the interaction between society and individual, unless language is cleansed there can be no full moral growth.

One of the various solutions young Hazel attempts is to give children letters – again, encouraging learning through material play: 'Sulie and I will paint 'em: great big ones, all colors; and hang 'em up with ribbons, and every child that learns one, so as to know it everywhere, shall take it down and carry it home' [37, p. 262]. But for Whitney's own audience, colourful words are only the beginning: the text, finally, hands Hazel's story over to its readers, urging them to extend the work, to go out into their neighbourhoods as 'Real Folks' [37, p. 282].

This return to basics, to the building blocks of life and letters, represented Whitney's own efforts over a long career. It is perhaps no surprise that now one of the works for which she is remembered is not a work of literature, but a set of innovative alphabet-blocks, for which she successfully filed an application, and gained U.S. Patent No. 257, 630, May 9, 1882:

The child or learner using the blocks, instead of selecting a block representing in itself a completed letter or character, as with the alphabet-blocks in common use, may be furnished with or may select the blocks of this set which together represent the desired letter or character, and may then construct it for himself. (Specification, US Patent Application No. 257,630, filed December 6, 1881).

Here, then, in breaking words and letters down into a few essential sticks and curves, of different lengths, she offers children the essentials of language, and the equipment to visualize their own letters, and to make their own words, characters and life stories.

### Notes:

1. Indeed, contemporary readers regarded Whitney [Mrs. Adeline Dutton Train Whitney] as equal to Alcott, or, in some aspects, better. As one of Alcott's reviewers commented in July 1870:

There is no country in the world, it is said, where children count for so much as in the United States, nor where so much is done for them; but, for some reason or other, we have

not produced any thoroughly good writer for children. Possibly it may be true, as is charged against us by enemies, that it is only Young America that is born here, and that there are never any Americans who really are young. At all events, whether from want of an audience, or from whatever cause, it is easy to name all the American writers who skilfully address themselves to the childlike mind. Miss Louisa Alcott we take to be about as good as any, though one sort of the work that she does Mrs. Whitney perhaps does better. [12, p. 113–114].

2. For general discussion of the letter ‘W’, [13, p. 143].

3. Gilman wrote a short story, ‘Five Girls’, in the style of *Little Women*, and in an analytic note commented on her ‘broad humanitarian trend, the insistence on family life, and on freedom and progress’ [19, p. 327].

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**АМЕРИКАНСЬКА ЛІТЕРАТУРА: ФОРМУВАННЯ МОВИ ТА  
ХАРАКТЕРУ В АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ХУДОЖНІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ ДЛЯ  
МОЛОДІ – ЛУЇЗА МЕЙ ЕЛКОТТ І А. Д. Т. ВІТНІ**

**Памела Найтс**

Після закінчення громадянської війни (1865) у Сполучених Штатах Америки багатьох дитячих письменників турбувало майбутнє нації, а також проблема виховання дітей у нових умовах. Війна спустошила країну – треба було загоїти рани та все відбудувати. Однак новими цінностями стали споживання, заробіток грошей,

індустріалізація та успішний бізнес. Це була етика конкуренції, індивідуалізму та досягнення успіху (так званий “соціальний дарвінізм”). Чи могли діти в такому матеріалістичному суспільстві розвиватися духовно? Якими були гендерні умови, яким стане суспільство? Розглянуто художні твори Луїзи Мей Елкотт і А. Д. Т. Вітні – впливових у XIX ст. американських письменниць для молоді. Досі відома перша письменниця; другу ж – забули, бо вважали надмірно побожною. Обидві письменниці зробили вагомий внесок у обговорення питань, пов’язаних з дітьми, їхнім вихованням та суспільством після громадянської війни. Використано епізоди з художніх творів, де діти читають, пишуть, вчать абетку, слова, мову. Вони свідчать, що обидві письменниці пов’язують мову з духовністю: американські діти можуть змінити суспільство, якщо розвиватимуть свою мову. Докладно розглянувши тексти можемо зауважити, що авторки ставлять під сумнів головні культурні цінності. Вони свідчать, що навчаючи можна виховати саме таких молодих чоловіків і жінок, яких дуже потрібно американській республіці. Луїза Мей Елкотт пропонує нові гендерні форми поведінки, врівноважуючи “чоловічі” та “жіночі” риси. Вона показала, що хлопці бувають чуйними, однак без надмірної заніженості, вони можуть важко працювати, не перетворюючись на бездушних бізнесменів (молодий персонаж Демі – майбутній видавець). Для дівчат небезпечна мода на споживання, а також конкуренція при полюванні на багатого чоловіка. Елкотт показує інші форми поведінки: сильний характер розвивається саме в тих дівчат, яких цікавить читання та які творчо ставляться до мови. Розглянуто мовну теорію А. Д. Т. Вітні. Для неї усі слова – знаки Божої мови. Вона показує читачам, що слова мають повчальну силу, а молодь відповідає за написання історії своєї країни – адже вона здатна змінювати суспільство. Робота закінчується згадкою про те, що А. Д. Т. Вітні винайшла кубики з абеткою: вона хотіла, щоб навіть найменші діти прилучалися до вивчення літер і слів і через те створити нову міцну мовну основу суспільства.

*Ключові слова:* абетка; читання; високодуховний персонаж; гендер; США; Л. М. Елкотт; А. Д. Т. Вітні.