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RESEARCH PAPER

Despondency in the Works and Lives of Emily Dickinson and Louisa May Alcott

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received:	The Antebellum period (1800 – 1860) in American history is marked by
February 08, 2022	the spirit of despondency, disillusionment and dejection due to socio-
Accepted: April 10, 2022	political narratives of the age. Louisia May Alcott (1832 – 1888) and Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886) are contemporary writers of the
Online: April 15, 2022	aforementioned period therefore exhibit same tendency of
Keywords:	rebelliousness against customs of society. The rationale of writing this research is to correlate the personal experiences of despondent
Despondency, Enlightenment Gender, Oppression	conditions of selected writers: unappreciated, uncanny, unhomely, and unloved to the wider arena of male dominant patriarchal society responsible for creating complexed psychological conflicts. The
*Corresponding Author:	research is divided into two main parts: first part is woven by theoretical framework of Seperate Sphere Theory, The conflict Theory and The Humanistic Theory while second part includes Object Relation Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory and The Attachment Theory. The
yumna.khatoon @fuuast.edu.pk	research is qualitative in approach aims to search historical, cultural, political and social approaches to judge the behavioral standards of society and challenging ways of both selected writers. The research paper helps the literary students of English Literature to explore and understand the ways these iconoclast writers tried to bring regeneration through literary contributions.
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Introduction

The history of American Independence is the history of sudden shift from barbarism to civilization, colonialism to pragmatic rationalism, rural republic to urbanization and from immigration to capitalistic industrialization. The philosophy of Americanism is declared as, "all men are created equal... With certain unalienable rights...life, liberty, pursuit of happiness" (Rehmaan, 2004, P.79). To achieve this moral and social happiness of natural, civil and legal rights the doctrine is based upon Self-help and Self-reliance. Abraham Lincoln declared that, "We all declare for liberty... We do not mean the same thing... Plainly the sheep and wolf are not agreed upon the same definition... Precisely the same difference prevails today among us human creature" (Rehmaan, 2004, P.41). To attain the aforementioned definition of Liberty, Ideology of Self-identification was teeming in every individual in America.

The period between 1800 till 1860 is known as the Antebellum Era, prior to industrialization based on racial discrimination and disenfranchisement. Since 1776 Slavery in the Thirteen Colonies of America was legal institution till first step was taken in 1820 as the Missouri Compromise signed by President James Monroe to impose federal restriction on slavery. However South; the center of slavery (provided cheap labor for cotton, tobacco, sugarcane and rice plantation) objected to the bill passed the statement that matter should

be settled in Constitution. To acquire more profit Indian Removal Act or Trail of Tears was passed in 1830 that led to forced removal of tribes to the South in order to hold their lands make them vulnerable, submissive and passive slaves of system. In 1850 the Fugitive Slave act was passed by United States Congress which required all escaped slaves who fled to the North to get liberty. In 1857 Dred Scott case was landmark in American history. Scott was a black slave sued in US Supreme Court for freedom. His masters took him to Missouri Free Territory therefore he appealed to be freed from bondage of slavery. The Supreme Court held the view that Constitution did not include American citizenship for Blacks therefore rights and privileges for American citizens should not confer upon Blacks.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln became the President and announced abolition of slavery. The brutal bloody Civil War (1861-1865) ended with the Confiscation Act of 1862 and Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that made slavery illegal. The Reconstruction Era (1863 – 1877) is accompanied by the Civil Rights Movement. The Social, political, economic and legal events related to the Antebellum Era shifted to the Gilded Age (1870 – 1900) followed by a boom of Coalmining and Railroad construction caused millions of immigrants to travel to North. The Industrialization that begun in America by inventing a Cotton Gin Machine in 1793 reached to threshold by encouraging textile industry. American industrialized world replaced manual work by machinery created chaos and pandemonium. Individuals were in grip of social forces engendering sense of Insecurity, Humiliation and Divided Consciousness. Karl Marx in The Thesis of Feuerbach stated, "Society itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism... a state of famine... Universal war of devastation... Because there is too much civilization... Subsistence... Industry and commerce" (1969, P. 40).

The flourishing period of Post – War or Post – Antebellum witnessed a series of economic setbacks due to: The Black Friday Gold Panic (1869), The Great Chicago Fire (1871), The Equine Influenza (1872), The Demonization of Silver (1873), The Long Depression (1873). Due to negative effects of events Americans suffered financial problems such as prices decline, market crash, Business failed and Banks begun to collapsed. There was no salvation, no deity and no help to release individuals from clutches of turmoil. The period is marked by unemployment, homelessness, maladjustment and deflation. The Cultural and Social destruction caused phantasmagoric atmosphere of despondency, dejection, disappointment and disillusionment in life and literature of America.

Literature Review

Literature Review covers up the entire gap of literature upon which no discussion has made on comparative analysis of selected writers and their socio-political conditions of environment. The discussion has made on available facts and is impartial analysis. American literature in Antebellum and Post-bellum period exhibited new social and environmental conditions to present innovative, rebellious, vernacular and individualistic novelty in their own cult. The retrogressive tendency of age casted shadow of Pessimism, Cynicism and Determinism in literature as a way to Realism, Naturalism and Transcendentalism. Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886) and Louisa May Alcott (1832 - 1888) are iconoclastic writers of American literary tradition of Antebellum period. The narrative of their writing is similar to provoke responsibility, freedom and power polemics to overcome dehumanized aspect of age. Despondency, Depression and Deprivation became dominant trope of their writing to highlight the ways toward Salvation and Moral Transgression in detailed exploration of emotions. The leitmotif of their work is search for selfhood as a part of universe and universe as part of self. The objective of research is to search historical, sociological and cultural approaches to judge the behavioral standards of society and challenging ways of individuals to bring progressivism and dynamism.

Operational Definition of Despondency

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Despondency means state of being low in spirits, state of being hopeless and dejected (P. 412).

Theoretical Framework

The study is qualitative in approach comprised of two main parts: Louisa May Alcott's Literary Contributions and role of Despondency and Emily Dickinson's Literary Contributions and role of Despondency which connect the series of events experienced by the authors. The emotionally threatening events had endless effects on their lives internalizing maladaptation to environment resulted in Biosocial disturbance, Health decline, Manic Depression throughout their lives. Part I is explored by the Contemporary Theories: Separate Sphere theory by Betty Friedann in Feminine Mystique (1963), The Conflict Theory by Charlotte Perkins in Women and Men(1898) and The Humanistic Theory by Gaslow in The Hierarchy of Needs(1943) to represent a paradigm shift from Fragmented identity to Self - Actualize process. These Theories helped to focus on how Alcott in Oppressed Patriarchal culture gained the new identity as a prototype to advocate rights of women in Gender – Oriented society. She rebelled against Patriarchal culture and presented women characters as revolutionary images who rejected their roles as burden bearer.

The Second part is dissected by Contemporary Psychoanalytical Theories of Segmund Freud in The Ego and the Id (1962), Object Relations Theory (1921) by Melanie Kelin and Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) by Leon Festinger. The theories revealed the unspeakable truth related to devastating and damaging experience of Dickinson in textual anxieties to get understanding of catastrophic events resulted in work of introspection and retrospection.

Material and Method

This article aims to explore qualitative research methodology based upon primary sources of data; Primary texts and Elegies of Alcott and Dickinson. The secondary data of research is based upon research journals, books, Internet resources, library research to provide support to developing argument.

Results and Discussion

Louisa May Alcott's Literary Contributions and Role of Despondency

Louisa May Alcott in *Little Women* states that, "I ask not for crown... Nor try to conquer any world except the world within" (1983, P. 162).

Louisa May Alcott appeared on literary scene of 19th century as an abolitionist and feminist, emphasized on need of reformation, recovery and relief in society. Her parents Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail May were Transcendentalist. Amos Bronson Alcott established The Concord School of philosophy in 1879 in Massachusetts. The 19th century is known as Golden Age of Utopianism dedicated to social and economic reform in order to live freely outside the mainstream society peacefully. The Community of Brook Farm Massachusetts was one of them based on ideas of Transcendentalism became center of intellectual visits by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Julia Ward Howe and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Alcott grew up in company of leading intellects of time.

Due to worsening financial condition the Brook Farm was closed in 1847, the moment Alcott realized that her father was impractical to provide enough financial support and security to family. There begun her lifelong promise to appear as Caretaker of her family

and challenged the values of patriarchy and male dominance. She never married to provide support to her loved ones as shown in title of her novel, *The Long Fatal Chase of Life (1866)*. The citation of Arthur Miller best suited to her perilous journey, "From Orestes to Hamlet, From Medea to Macbeth the underlying struggle is that of individuals attempting to gain his rightful position in society" (Laal, 2013, P. 172).

The first hand experiences of Alcott shaped her values about life, society and sustenance. In 1862 she volunteered as nurse in hospital during American Civil War and devoted her life time achievements to Social Aid Societies and Organizations. The unsanitary condition of hospital caused her Scarlett Typhoid Fever, which she showed in The Little Women (1868) in character of May. In 1863 she published *Hospital Sketches* and wrote down to Alf Whitman, "I can't fight, I will content myself with working with those who can". The same passion she showed in character of Jo when she said, it's bad enough to be a girl... I'm dying to go and fight with papa" (1991, P. 91).

Madeleine B. Stern and Leona Rosenberg in 1975 discovered that Alcott started her career under Pseudonym of A. M. Barnard suggested by her publisher Thomas Nile. The social ideology of Separate Sphere Theory was dominant in 19th century. The ideology imparted private sphere of home to women and public sphere of outside world to men. It was a time when girls were not allowed to get education on equal terms with men. They did not have right to vote, to own property, to take divorce and to have custody of their children. Scientist Paul Broca discovered that average brain of woman is weighed less than 140 grams than male and society took this reason as the ground for inferiority of womanhood treated woman as emotional rather than being judgmental and rational. Only few professions were allowed for them nursing, cleansing and household chores. The purpose of female education was to inculcate the practical skills and moral values to be good dutiful wives. Betty Ferdinan in Feminine Mystique (1963) called it Oppressive Paradigm that imparted Stereotypical Identity to Women as submissive, passive, domestic, virtuous and self-sacrificing (1963, P. 156). In Women, Culture and Society (1974) Michelle Rosaldo named Separate Sphere theory as Domestic Dichotomy and condemned the Political structure and its need for instrumentalization, marginalization, exploration and stereotype Objectification of womanhood (1974, P. 66). The fact is endorsed by Feminist Sociology is a Conflict Theory of Charlotte Perkins Gilman in Women and Men (1898) proposed that Women are unpaid laborers whose division of labor is not biologically fixed but imposed on them by society. She called the Separation as Socio-biological Tragedy because women are not included in as part of Survival for Fittest (1989, P. 90).

America emerged on map of world as representative of American Dream for Liberty and Equality but these rights were denied to women who supposed to belong another world. Alcott did not see women as incapable of individualism and intellectual activity but rather handicapped by standards of society. The extreme sense of detachment from her rights and sense of belonging made her Rebel and Revolutionary to the customs of society. She emerged as the greatest admirer of the Declaration of Sentiments in Seneca Fall Convention on Women's Liberation (1848) and she became the First Women to register her vote in Massachusetts. Alcott after getting inspiration and strength from Seneca Fall Convention, begun to write her plays with her own identity by publishing Flower Fables (1854).

Little Women is bildungsroman, coming of age, realistic and sentimental novel. Due to immense popularity and commercial success Alcott penned down two sequels featured Little Men (1871) and Jo-boys (1886). It was one of the teachers' top 100 books for children announced by National Education Association. The novel is adapted to film for 7 times and staged since 1912 till 2019. It is adapted into TV series by 1958 to 2018. It is adapted in drama Spring Girl in 2018.

Little Women is written in third person Omniscient point of view this means narrator knows all the girl's thoughts, feelings, actions, past, present and future. The novel tells the story of four teenager protagonists March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy ages between 12 till 16. They live with their mother Mrs. March in New England while their father serves for army during the American Civil War. The Reader follow the girls growing up, their domestication, dreams, expectations, falling in love, solving their issues, marriages and finding path in life. The narratives, the selected authors' approach are gender theory and feminine vocalist because women in Western World used to be attributed to private life the house and family and man attributed to public sphere everything outside home. The civil war during which the first part of the play started after presidential election in 1861 is a struggle between North and South Over issues of slavery. The absence of fatherhood is the narrative in which women had to stay behind took new roles look after domestic chores, train their children and to take part in public life as well. The time period marks first stage of feminism therefore play shows American woman had the options to develop themselves artistically into writers, artists, critics, teachers and nurses of society as researchers noticed in the play.

Alcott in the play centers on the independent spirit of New Woman in March sisters. Term is coined by Henry James to exercise control over their lives be it personal, social and economic making societies more egalitarian, progressive and free than to live in liminal situations and in between position. March sisters seek to understand their places in the world to claim their identities to live their life on their own terms to get own salvation. Meg marries young creates own family, Beth is subservient and dutiful to parents, Amy focus on own pleasure, art, personality and Jo struggles for personal and professional life, "Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide... which is true Celestial City" (1983, P. 211).

Alcott focused on Jo's character as Defiant to Social norm to infuse courage and hope in women of 19th century to prove the Inner Resources, Spontaneity and Creativity. The Humanistic Theory of Abraham Harold Maslow, The Hierarchy of Needs (1943) highlighted the terms Metamotivation culminating in Self-Actualizing needs of Self-identification, Self-acknowledgement and Self-reliance. According to Maslow the self-actualizer people are Reality centered and Problem centered individuals searched to resolve problems. They want to, "become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1943, P. 185). The physical appearance of Jo as penned down by Alcott appeared as, "Jo was very tall... Long limbs... Decided mouth... Grey eyes which appeared to see everything... Big hands and feet... Uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting in a girl didn't like it (1943, P. 16).

Traditionally if women do not follow the characteristics predestined for them, they were not socially accepted. Jo have a decided mouth means she is assertive and competitive. She likes the ways of males and feels pleasure to copy whistling, wearing boots, likes to play Skating and putting her hands in pockets.

Abraham Maslow describes features of self-actualizer as,

- Exhibit capability to resist Enculturation.
- Greater acceptance of themselves.
- Having Naturalness and Spontaneity (1943, P. 96).

Jo as Self - Actualizer resisted the Enculturation of female Suppression as mentioned in novel, "I'm the man of family now papa is away" (Alcott, 1943, P. 89). The second feature of Greater acceptance of herself is highlighted when she rejected to wear gloves in party,

never troubled about dress, did not want to look beautiful like other women and expresses, "I don't care for much company dancing" (Alcott, 1943, P.154). She preferred masculine ways to adopt because she thought men's life are much easier than women. There was an incident when her family got the news of father's illness. Due to despondent condition of her family, she sold her hair to arrange money for mother's visit to pick sick father. "My head feels deliciously light and cool... Soon have a curly boyish crop..." (Alcott, 1943, P.225).

She has the capacity to appreciate herself again and again and this quality transformed her as a writer and artist. Alcott herself played the role of Mother for her devastated family, supported Frederick and John her nephews after death of their father. Therefore, the moral sense, emotional support and mental strength she showed in her novels derived from home and family. In *Old Fashioned Girl* (1869) the protagonist Polly's loneliness and isolation in Boston symbolized her own when she tried to write novel in Reeds cut off from family and support. She became Cultural Critique in *Behind the Mask: A Woman's Power* (1866) and reversed the roles of gender identity. The title symbolizes that women power is hidden under garb of double standard society. The society want masculine power to support and secure them financially. However, Alcott highlighted that female power of intellect and innovation are the source of redemption to recharge them in the days of Despondency, "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship" (Alcott, 1943, P.105).

Emily Dickinson's Literary Contributions and Role of Despondency

Emily Dickinson is the God gifted, distinctive, vernacular voice of America. Her poetic genius is grounded into her locality of New England molded by social position of being a female in line of poetry. She developed Own Metrical Form, pursued Own Vision and unconcerned to literary decorum of age. Her patrilineal ancestors migrated to Massachusetts during the Puritan Great Migration of New England (1620 - 1640). Her parents Edward Dickinson and Norcross Dickinson were Calvinist. The theological features of Puritanism emphasized upon Congregationalism. The basic proponent of Puritanism was humans as descendants are totally depraved of worldly affairs having no free will. In between 1819 - 1892 Puritanism saw a sharp decline when Ralph Waldo Emerson, David Thoreau and Walt Whitman shook the foundation of faith, diverted the attention towards liberal approach to God, Nature and Sense of Oneness. The house of Dickinson family, The Homestead became the center of literary flowering by Emerson's visit. Dickinson was inspired by revolutionary poets, stirred Puritan beliefs which are responsible to create an environment of despondency as a biggest hurdle in the way of hope and salvation. She believes inner capabilities of individuals are far superior to Puritan tendencies. She abhorred Puritan doctrines and showed mirror to society that Puritanism bruised individual spirits made them dependent and submissive, "Christ is calling everyone here; all my companions have answered... I'm standing alone in rebellion" (Alcott, 1974, P.165).

The environment of Puritanism imparted her Self - Introspection and Self-Analysis. As a Transcendentalist she believes that God has endowed every person a unique revolutionary spirit to do work of genius as a self - reliant man. From 1834 – 1847 she studied at Amherst College remained isolated and alienated from surrounding. The next year she attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary at the age of 17 but left it and return to Amherst. She witnessed the heinous effects of Civil War and wrote more than 1100 poems during this period. The death of her father in 1874, was the greatest misery to her and from that time she never left her house at Amherst. The following year her mother paralyzed and died in 1882 followed by the death of her Nephew in 1883. The friend of her father Judge Otis Lord provides her satisfaction in days of distress but he too died in 1884. She suffered from emotional trauma from which she never recovered. She had persistent eye trouble and later diagnosed with Bright Disease (Kidney Disorder).

The Contemporary Trauma Theory of Judith Lewis Herman in Trauma and Recovery (1992) explained that, "Trauma renders the victim helpless and hopeless condition evokes the terror of catastrophe by encountering threats to life or with death" (1992, P.192). She underwent Post Traumatic Stress Disorder of Hopelessness, Numbness, detachment, derealization, depression and finds difficulties to maintain her relationship with kith and kin. Psychoanalytical approach is an excellent tool to read beneath the lines, reasons for deviant behavior apart from normalcy. All behaviors are phenotypes resulting from interaction of Nature and Nurture. According to Sigmund Freud, "Life is built around tension and pleasure" (Guerin, 2005, P. 152). Freud in The Ego and the Id (1962) was concerned with child psychology and divided the stages of child to the Oral, Anal and Genital. Each stage is associated consciously or unconsciously to outside world for Identification procedures adopting values, attitudes and behaviors. Initial psychological perspectives of Despondency, Loneliness and Depression arose from psycho dynamics of Mother- Child Relationship. Melanie Kelin extended Freudian approach in Object Relations Theory and asserted the fact that child's relation to mother formed her personality in adult life. Loneliness and Despondency arouse from unattractive and unattainable union between mother and child, prompted child to retreat into world of imagination and Fantasy and remained dissatisfied and disconnected from surrounding.

Her Love poems are called as Pseudologia Fantastica. The term was coined by German Physician Anton Del Brueck for people who seek an escape into deceptions and delusions. Dickinson's dissatisfaction with her mother became the basic Maternal Deprivation Syndrome. The Attachment Theory developed by John Bowlby in 1951 suggested that Children and Young ones must have good interaction with mother to develop peer relationship at all stages. The lack of it can cause Trauma and mental disorder. She could not maintain healthy relation with her brother Austin and sister-in-law Susan due to inferiority Complex of having no existence, no home, no sexual power, no future and no identity. She confiscated her interaction with society becomes recluse. To become a woman means identification with mother and to be a victim of exploitation and phallocentrism. To embrace feminine vision means to neglect the gift of Creativity. Amidst of these personal situations She brought Psychological Cataclysm to poetry. Death is the universal ultimate experience of all humans. She presented the effect of death on humans as a journey to immortality. She expressed, "Because I Could Not Stop for Death... He kindly stops for me... The Carriage held but just ourselves... Immortality (Alcott, 1998, P.479). She presented Death as personification of kind gentleman to pick her in a carriage for the beginning of another journey. She replaced the sense of grave with house having warmth, peace and safety which she lacked in this world. After she dies, she feels that centuries are shorter than one day. There is no time dimension after death.

The Apology of Socrates (399BCE) is a novel written by Plato in which he contemplates over Socratic death and propounds two opinions about death: Migration of soul and Eternal Oblivion. In The poem *I Felt A Funeral in my Brain* Dickinson ponders overs death and incarnation just like Plato she describes the psychological states of dead person, "My mind was going numb... And hit a world, at every plunge. And Finished knowing them" (Alcott, 1987, P.68). Spiritual journey of spirit started as a part of natural cycle leaving the world full of pain and miseries, to dwell in peace and solitude forever. Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) is proposed by Leon Festinger asserted that individuals tried to get internal stability. The contradiction of ideas, beliefs and values of inner state to outer world caused Cognitive Dissonance resulted in mental stress. Dickinson as a reclusive poet suffered Manic Depression with periods of charismatic and verve poetic activity. She experienced pain of existence and pain of suffering to the brim of Despondency, Despair and Dismay: sought new prerequisites of freedom of expression in her writing.

In 19th century Elegies took a new shape to express public and private lamentation. The tradition of mourning provides semblance to order of death. The exploration of Transcendentalism as nature and reunion of man in sense of Oneness served as a source to delineate Elegy. Death appeared as part of Natural Cycle in which humans sung in unison with nature. Due to drastic effects of The Civil War Elegy becomes Collective Cultural Preoccupation of melancholy. Dickinson's elegies published posthumously by her sister Martha Dickinson. She was affected personally by death of father, mother, friends Leonard Humphrey, Charles Wadsworth, Ottis Philips Lord, cousin Sophia and nephew Gilbert. She acknowledged death complaint and consolation in dozens of her beautiful elegies. I meant to find her when I came, Her Final Summer was it, I cannot live with you, I measure Every Grief I meet, I felt a Funeral in my Brain, Because I could not stop for Death, I died for Beauty are her renowned elegies worthy of value and appreciation.

Same similarity is found in case of Louisa May Alcott who also suffered same traumatic experience of death of her parents, Sisters Elizabeth and May, nephew Gilbert and friend Henry David Thoreau. She culminated the effects of mourning in her appealing elegies like I heard a fly buzz when I die, I did not reach thee, To the bright East She flies, The passenger, Little Paul, Thoreau's Flute and Our Madonna. Despondency became the major theme of both writers due to Pain of Loss.

Conclusion

The Horation formula suggested that Literature is written not only for the purpose of delight but to instruct. The detailed discussion maintains the view that Louisa May Alcott and Emily Dickinson despite the horny ways of life remained dedicated, devoted and determined to achieve regeneration through Despondency. As a consequence of tragic events in life they were muffled by estrangement to surrounding. Their brain becomes the setting to challenge cultural, religious and social destruction, to open up new vistas of reason and enlightenment for upcoming generations.

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