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English 110- Professor Tolliver

One Dimensional Characters in *The Inheritance*

The novel, *The Inheritance*, written by Louisa May Alcott, tells the story of Edith, a beautiful orphaned girl who discovers a secret about her identity which challenges and changes her position in society. Alcott's very grandeur style of writing provides readers an easier understanding of the theme of inheritance, although the theme is not particularly well developed, the over romanticism and the lack of depth within the characters weakens the novel as a whole.

The lack of dimension within the characters of the novel may be due to the fact that *The Inheritance* was one of the first novels that Alcott wrote at the age of seventeen, however this impacted the way that the characters were characterized, in turn making the novel a bit of a boring read. Throughout the book, all of the characters are defined by one personality trait, and this is how they are characterized throughout the entirety of it. The characters develop very little from the beginning to the end of the story. Edith is the main protagonist in the novel, and she is described as humble, modest, sinless, pure, virtuous, etc. Many times she refers to herself as humble and modest, "How one so poor and humble as myself can injure you I cannot tell... do not hate me for the wrong I may have innocently done you..."(Alcott, 60). Amy and Arthur describe Edith as humble and modest many times throughout the narrative, however, Edith also refers to herself as such, thus contradicting this statement in a way. When one refers to themselves as humble and modest, these characteristics seem to not apply in the same sense if someone else were to describe them as such. She is the character who portrays all things good,

and is accepted into this overly romanticised world, however there is nobody around to see her actions and there is no evidence to prove her personality. The style in which Alcott wrote the novel left no space for the reader to infer anything. The events happened in succession and there was very little room to read between the lines. Thus the character, Edith, was defined by the other characters around her.

Lady Ida is the main antagonist in this novel, and is described as bitter, unkind, and envious towards Edith. Like Edith, Ida is also an orphan, however she had not inherited much from her father, and had come to live with Lady Hamilton until she found a suitable suitor. She has “inherited the pride and coldness without the hidden tenderness her aunt possessed.”(13). She has a bitter personality, which was mainly targeted towards Edith, with no good intentions to counter it. Lady Ida is one of the only characters in the novel who has developed as a character by the end of the story, though her personality is still very similar to what it was in the beginning of the novel. In the beginning she is seen as this mean and jealous woman, which then by the end had come to realize the error of her ways. “...bitter tears flowed down her cheek, and her own lot seemed darker and more dreary still...Bowed with sorrow, despair, and disappointed hopes, she wept tears of self-reproach and shame.”(172-173). Although she is still bitter and envious of Edith, she feels ashamed of her actions and is “disgraced by her discovered sin”(173). She has come to realize that what she has done to Edith is wrong, however, she still harbors negative feelings towards her. She is still envious of Edith and clutches to the bitterness that she feels towards her.

Through the use of the overly romanticised style, Louisa May Alcott weakly portrayed the theme of inheritance, while the lack of dimension within the characters did not allow the readers to engage with the piece to better understand it.

Work Cited

Alcott, Louisa May. *The Inheritance*. Dutton Books, 1997.