

**NATHALIE DE SOUZA KAPPKE**

**LITTLE WOMEN BECOMING WRITERS: FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN IN  
ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* AND FERRANTE'S *NEAPOLITAN SERIES***

**PORTO ALEGRE  
2022**

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS  
ÁREA DE ESTUDOS DE LITERATURA/ LITERATURAS DE LÍNGUA INGLESA  
LINHA DE PESQUISA: SOCIEDADE (INTER)TEXTOS LITERÁRIOS E TRADUÇÃO NAS  
LITERATURAS ESTRANGEIRAS MODERNAS

**LITTLE WOMEN BECOMING WRITERS: FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN IN  
ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* AND FERRANTE'S *NEAPOLITAN SERIES***

**AUTORA: NATHALIE DE SOUZA KAPPKE**

**ORIENTADORA: SANDRA SIRANGELO MAGGIO**

Dissertação de Mestrado em Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras.

**Porto Alegre,**

**Abril de 2022**

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

REITOR  
Carlos Bulhões

VICE-REITORA  
Patrícia Pranke

DIRETORA DO INSTITUTO DE LETRAS  
Carmen Luci Costa e Silva

VICE-DIRETORA DO INSTITUTO DE LETRAS  
Márcia Montenegro Velho

CHEFE DA BIBLIOTECA DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS E HUMANIDADES  
Fabiana Hennies Brigidí

CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Kappke, Nathalie de Souza  
LITTLE WOMEN BECOMING WRITERS: FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN  
IN ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN AND FERRANTE'S NEAPOLITAN  
SERIES / Nathalie de Souza Kappke. -- 2022.  
80 f.  
Orientadora: Sandra Sirangelo Maggio.

Dissertação (Mestrado) -- Universidade Federal do  
Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de  
Pós-Graduação em Letras, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2022.

1. Literatura Estadunidense. 2. Literatura  
Italiana. 3. Louisa May Alcott. 4. Elena Ferrante. 5.  
Romance de Artista. I. Sirangelo Maggio, Sandra,  
orient. II. Título.

Elaborada pelo Sistema de Geração Automática de Ficha Catalográfica da UFRGS com os  
dados fornecidos pelo(a) autor(a).

**NATHALIE DE SOUZA KAPPKE**

**LITTLE WOMEN BECOMING WRITERS: FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN IN  
ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* AND FERRANTE'S *NEAPOLITAN SERIES***

Dissertação de Mestrado apresentada ao Instituto de Letras da UFRGS como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Porto Alegre, 25 de abril de 2022.

Resultado obtido: Aprovado

**BANCA EXAMINADORA:**

---

Profa. Dra. Aline Fogaça dos Santos Reis e Silva  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

---

Profa. Dra. Jaqueline Bohn Donada  
Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná (UTFPR)

---

Profa. Dra. Monica Chagas da Costa  
Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF)

---

Profa. Dra. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio (Orientadora)  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

**For my grandmothers,  
my mothers,  
my sisters,  
and my daughter**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank God for all the several great opportunities I have had since I entered University.

I am a lucky person to have such a big, lively family – they are the ones who celebrate all of my achievements and who I can always count on.

I'm grateful for my attentive, supportive husband, who always knows how to calm me down when I feel out of sorts.

I thank my mother for all the support from school days up to graduate studies.

I also thank my mother-in-law for all the tips and support during the writing of this thesis.

I would like to thank my little brother for all the worries when I study or work too much, he is always the one who brings me back to the real meaning of life. To my sister Manuela, who is made of light.

Many thanks to all my co-workers, who have helped me whenever I would need some schedule changes in order to take the mandatory courses of the program. I am also thankful for all the sharing we have had throughout the years. Making education is such a great challenge.

I would like to thank my brilliant and loving supervisor, Sandra Maggio for all the partnership and trust.

I thank Regina Zilberman, who helped me reshape my research.

I thank Professors Aline, Jaqueline and Monica for accepting to read my work and to form the Committee.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my baby Angeline, for being such a good girl in Mommy's womb and allowing me to work peacefully.



*Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture [...]. Il faut que la femme se mette au texte – comme au monde et à l'histoire –, de son propre mouvement.*

Hélène Cixous, *La Rire de la Méduse*

## RESUMO

O presente trabalho traz uma análise das obras *Mulherzinhas* (1868), de Louisa May Alcott e *A Amiga Genial* (2015) e *História do Novo Sobrenome* (2016) – os romances iniciais da *Série Napolitana* de Elena Ferrante – enquanto *Künstlerromane*, ou seja, romances de artista. Para tanto, serão comparadas as trajetórias das personagens femininas Jo, em *Mulherzinhas*, e Lila e Lenù, nos dois primeiros livros da série, a partir de conceitualizações apresentadas por Lago (2017) – mais especificamente com respeito ao *Künstlerroman Feminino* – acrescidas de contribuições de Langston (2004), Muiño (2017) e Baerdemaeker (2011). O ponto de encontro entre as obras é o fato de as protagonistas da *Série Napolitana*, de Ferrante, se encantarem com o mundo das letras após a leitura de *Mulherzinhas*, de Alcott, quando passam a sonhar com o dia em que se tornarão escritoras. Explorando os caminhos de autodescoberta que as três personagens perpassam, na posição de jovens/meninas que desejam se tornar escritoras, examinaremos também questões referentes à escrita e autoria feminina. O objetivo da pesquisa é investigar a construção das obras escolhidas enquanto romances de artista femininos, atentando para os contextos históricos conflituosos nos quais se desenrolam as histórias: em *Mulherzinhas*, a Guerra Civil Americana; e nos livros de Ferrante, a Itália do Pós-guerra, nas décadas de 50 e 60. Enfim, este trabalho se destina a investigar a representação da mulher artista na literatura de Alcott e Ferrante, visando contribuir para os estudos do gênero *Künstlerroman*.

**Palavras-chave:** Literatura estadunidense. Louisa May Alcott. Literatura italiana. Elena Ferrante. Romance de artista. Autoria feminina.

## ABSTRACT

The present work purposes an analysis of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and *My Brilliant Friend* (2012) and *The Story of a New Name* (2013) – the first and second novels of the *Neapolitan Series*, by Elena Ferrante – as Künstlerromane, in other words, artist novels. In order to do so, the trajectories of the female characters will be contrasted (Jo, in *Little Women*, and Lila and Lenù, in the two first volumes of Neapolitan series) with the contributions of Lago (2019), concerning the concept of Künstlerroman, Muiño (2017) and Baerdemaeker's (2011) regarding the Female Künstlerroman. There is an interesting link between the works: the protagonists of Ferrante's Neapolitan series feel amused with the world of writing after they read *Little Women*, from then on they dream of the day they will become writers. Through exploring the characters' path of self-discovery, as young girls who pursue the goal of becoming writers, questions related to writing and female authorship are also taken into account. This research aims to investigate the constitution of the chosen works, as novels which portray the women artists, also observing details such as the conflictual historical context, in which the stories occur: American Civil War in *Little Women* and Post-War Italy in Ferrante's books (especially the 50's and 60's). Finally, this work targets at discussing the representation of the woman artist in the literature made by Alcott and Ferrante, aiming at contributing for studies of Künstlerroman as a genre.

**Keywords:** American Literature. Louisa May Alcott. Italian Literature. Elena Ferrante. Female Authorship; Artist Novel.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1. ON THE KÜNSTLERROMAN TRADITION.....</b>	<b>19</b>
1.1 A Word on the Bildungsroman.....	19
1.2 The Concept of Künstlerroman.....	21
1.3 The Female Künstlerroman.....	26
1.4 Bildungsroman or Künstlerroman?.....	31
<b>2. FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN IN <i>LITTLE WOMEN</i> AND IN THE NEAPOLITAN NOVELS</b>	
<b>2.1 Blooming at a time of war.....</b>	<b>33</b>
2.1.1 On <i>Little Women</i> and Louisa May Alcott.....	34
2.1.2 On the <i>Neapolitan Novels</i> and Elena Ferrante .....	37
<b>2.2 The Importance of Space.....</b>	<b>40</b>
2.2.1 The Space in <i>Little Women</i> .....	43
2.2.2 The Space in Neapolitan Novels.....	45
2.2.3 The Artist's Travel.....	49
<b>2.3 The artist heroine and her path.....</b>	<b>51</b>
2.3.1 Jo: the character who inspired generations of women.....	51
2.3.2 Jo's writer's path .....	54
2.3.3 Lenù and Lila: from reading <i>Little Women</i> to creating "The Blue Fairy" .....	60
2.3.3.1. Lila's story about the shoes.....	64
2.3.3.2 Lenù's Self-discovery as writer.....	67
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>77</b>

## INTRODUCTION

“Write something for us, and never mind the rest of the world. Try it. I’m sure it would do you good, and please us very much.”

Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*

Reading novels written by women has intrigued me since day one. Having access to other women's experiences – around the world and through the centuries – while reading literature has broadened my perspectives. During my undergraduate years I was much interested in understanding the path acknowledged women writers had taken. I wondered why some women could get a spot in the literary world while others could not. I also questioned why few women writers' names appear in the canon or in the syllabus of literature disciplines. In general, the main issue that caught me was why have women not received a more egalitarian space in relation to men in literature.

Still as an undergraduate student, I noticed that the problem concerning women writers recurrently appeared as the topic in novels written by women. In my undergraduate monograph I investigated Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), a work that introduces Orlando, an aspirant writer, who fantastically (or metaphorically) undergoes a sex change in the middle of the story. The experiences of Orlando as a man are far different from those he has as a woman, and this is stressed in the novel. I wondered what advantages related to gender a writer could get. I still have no final answer to that. What we know is: stories about women written by women frequently expose the gender issues they have to deal with. The issues will, of course, vary according to their class, race, place of origin, or sex orientation. When we read stories written by people who have distinct experiences from ours, we grow aware of the coexistence of realities and possibilities. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (2011) remarks that women have historically been seen as the other, as people who only exists in relation to their opposite (men), to help them in their quests. Much has evolved since Beauvoir wrote her ground-breaking work, but not

for all women. In many places women are still seen as second-hand citizens. Still worldwide there is much to be improved. Thus, there lies one of the reasons why reading works by women is important. Hearing their voices, discussing their works, are ways of giving them the acknowledgement they deserve. It makes us aware of the distinct realities related to gender roles.

In July 2018, some months after I graduated, I had my first contact with Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Series*. I was at a library one day and I saw *My Brilliant Friend* (2012) on the bookshelf. It instantly caught my attention, since I had previously read *The Lost Daughter* (2008) by the same author. Even though I had a long pile of books at home waiting to be read, I took *My Brilliant Friend* with me. The novel is the first of a tetralogy which covers the story of two Neapolitan friends, Elena "Lenù" Greco, the narrator, and Raffaella "Lila" Cerullo, from their childhood up to their mature years. As I read *My Brilliant Friend*, I felt surprised by Lila's capability of creation and by Lenù's assertiveness. The treatment of friendship and rivalry between women was strong, and the novels exposed themes related to gender violence, motherhood, class struggle and social movements. The more I read, the more I wanted to read. I was interested in the environment, and in how writing seemed (idealistically) something accessible for girls of such a poor and partly helpless neighborhood.

The idea of writing is brought up by Lila, after she reads *Little Women*, on the account of her teacher, Maestra Oliviero, who lends and highly recommends her the book. Later on, Lila and Lenù share an edition of the novel. They fall in love with the story and read the book so many times that its spine gets ruined. Having access to few resources, writing (as well as studying) becomes their goal. "We thought that if we studied hard, we would be able to write books, and that the books would make us rich." (MBF, 2012 online). Undeniably, the Neapolitan girls were much inclined to ideas presented in their beloved classic.

First published in 1868, Louisa May Alcott's remarkable *Little Women* depicts the lives of four sisters (the March sisters) and their mother, while they wait for the return of the father, who is serving as a chaplain during the American Civil War. In this womanly environment, the girls undergo moments of privation and daily challenges before they reach maturity. Each of the girls is inclined to a different kind

of art. Meg, the eldest, is an actress; Jo, a tomboyish girl, spends a good amount of time writing; Beth finds comfort in music, especially when she plays the piano; Amy loves coloring and painting. However, Jo's commitment to writing stands out and is illustrated with more details.

Through the years, many authors and artists were inspired by Louisa May Alcott's Jo. In her autobiography, *Just Kids* (2012), Patti Smith reveals the importance Alcott's work played on her,

Oddly enough, it was Louisa May Alcott who provided me with a positive view of my female destiny. Jo, the tomboy of the four March sisters in *Little Women*, writes to help support her family, struggling to make ends meet during the Civil War. She fills page after page with her rebellious scrawl, later published in the local newspaper. She gave me the courage of a new goal and soon I was crafting little stories and spinning long yarns for my brother and sister. From that time on, I cherished the idea that one day I would write a book (SMITH, 2012, p.10-11)

Accounts such as this one highlight the value of Alcott's work, not only artistically, but also socially. Jo, as a character, represents a portion of girls and women who do not fit or perform femininity in a conventional way, but create their own self-discovery path. Through the March sisters, Alcott explores different possibilities for women at that time: marriage, domestic life, creating art (either painting or writing), raising children and other possibilities. Bringing this variety of roles, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is inclusive and inspiring.

To understand the portrait and the progress of women authors in literature, I chose to analyze these two series, *Little Women* and *Neapolitan Novels*, having in mind the concept of *Künstlerroman* (or the artist novel) through the contributions of Lago (2017), Huf (1983), Langston (2004), Muiño (2017) and Baerdemaeker (2011) concerning the Female *Künstlerroman*. It is pertinent to state that studies on Female *Künstlerroman* are relatively recent, so I hope that this research may contribute to the broadening of this tradition.

Another interesting trait the two series have in common is that each is composed of four books. The books in the *Little Women* series are *Little Women* (2018), *Good Wives* (2012), *Little Men* (2016) and *Jo's Boys* (1995), all of them written by Louisa May Alcott. Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels* consist of *My*

*Brilliant Friend* (2011), *The Story of a New Name* (2012), *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* (2013) and *The Story of the Lost Child* (2014).

The corpus of this research is composed by the first and the second book of each series: *My Brilliant Friend* (2011) and *The Story of a New Name* (2012), by Ferrante; and *Little Women* and *Good Wives*, by Alcott. The reason for this selection is that the books cover the period between childhood and youthful years, which are the years when the characters first express their will to write and first publish a literary work. It is important to clarify that American editions understand *Good Wives* as part of *Little Women* while the British editions see them as separate books. In this research I follow the British tradition, addressing each series as formed by four books and will distinguish passages or events mentioned by using the title of each novel.

This thesis is structured in two chapters. In the first, I discuss the *Künstlerroman* tradition, from its origins to how it is perceived nowadays; the specificities of the Female *Künstlerroman*; and the differences between *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, apprehending their evolution across the centuries. To do that, I use the concept of *Künstlerroman* proposed by Lago (2017). Some contributions by Huf (1983), Langston (2004), Muiño (2017) and Baerdemaeker (2011) on the Female *Künstlerroman* are also taken in consideration. The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the research corpus, composed by the first two novels of Louisa May Alcott's tetralogy *Little Women* and Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels*. I offer a *Künstlerromane* reading of these works and their characters, exploring the fact that both series present a historical background of conflict (American Civil War in *Little Women*, and the impacts of the Second World War in the south of Italy in the *Neapolitan Novels*) and themes such as the importance of space (and the kinds of environment which appear in the novels) and recurrent *Künstlerromane* elements, as the artist heroine, the artist path and the artist travel.

By examining the literary texts, *Little Women* and *Good Wives*, I retrace Jo's Path as a writer, as a means to understand the portrayal of women who want to pursue their careers as writers, at that time. Class and gender issues are the elements considered, especially when we take a close look at the trajectories of each March sister. To analyze these aspects, the contributions related to the



Künstlerroman presented in the previous chapter are considered, as well as Foote (2005).

Concerning the *Neapolitan Series*, the research focuses especially on *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Story of a New Name*. After a brief word on Elena Ferrante, I identify Künstlerromane elements in the literary works, focusing on which way a contemporary Künstlerroman differs from those written in the nineteenth century. The artist path of Lila and Lenù is also investigated, since one of the main goals of this thesis is to disclose the reasons why one of the friends actually becomes a writer and the other one does not. In order to achieve that, some episodes are taken into account, such as the one in which both girls read *Little Women* and it instantly becomes not only their favorite book, but an inspiration, or even an obsession. Finally, Lenù's self-discovery as a writer is examined. After all, she is the one who realizes the dream of turning into a writer.

Although biographical readings of the works analyzed here are recurrent, especially concerning *Little Women*, this research is not one of them. The novels examined are seen as objects of art, as well as they are representative of people who lived at a specific place and time. There is also a problem related to the real identity behind the pseudonym of Elena Ferrante: journalists and researchers have tried to unveil the author's real name, even creating questions about the author's gender. No speculation will be considered, as this thesis respects the choice of the writer to use a pseudonym. This thesis deals with issues regarding female experience, which is frequent in all works by Ferrante. Since the author has chosen the pseudonym "Elena Ferrante", I understand it as a female pseudonym. Even if the person behind the pen name does not identify as female, the name Elena is commonly used as a name for women. There are neutral names out there. If the author chose a female name, there is an intent behind the choice and we must respect it.

Finally, I expose my final discoveries at the conclusion section, where it is possible to trace back the ideas discussed through the three chapters, highlighting the key-points and main findings of my research. By contrasting the chosen novels, I could identify differences in the way each of the series fit the Female Künstlerroman, related to the period of time they were written and the setting they portray. I hope this

work might be useful to everyone interested in exploring themes related to Female Künstlerroman as well as to women writing.

## 1. ON THE KÜNSTLERROMAN TRADITION

In this chapter I discuss the concept of Künstlerroman, its origins and how it differs from the Bildungsroman. Besides, I unveil some of the main traits of the Female Künstlerroman, based on previous studies and also on the content of Künstler novels written by women and in which the characters are also women. This chapter paves way to the following analyses on *Little Women* and *The Neapolitan Novels (My Brilliant Friend and The Story of a New Name)*.

### 1.1 A Word on the Bildungsroman

Very popular in the nineteenth century, the Bildungsroman narratives emerged in Germany in the late eighteenth century with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796). In fact, opinions diverge on which was exactly the first novel in the genre, as some researchers argue that French literature had influenced Goethe's writing (GRAHAM, 2019, p. 5). But it is undeniable that Bildungs novels have spread in many countries around the globe after *Wilhelm Meister's* publication. In English literature, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (2012) and Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (2004) are some good examples.

Graham defines the Bildungsroman as “a novel about a young person facing the challenges of growing up” (GRAHAM, 2019, p. 1). Telling a linear story, the conventional Bildungsroman “concentrates on a protagonist striving to reconcile individual aspirations with demands of social conformity” and depicts “the journey from youth to maturity” (GRAHAM, 2019, p. 1). Much more than that, the Bildungsroman novels expose the inner conflicts of its main characters, who try to find their place in society. These issues may refer to their class, family, friendship, love affairs, secrets, etc. The genre brings up problems that are common among humans, which is something that might have been appealing to readers at the time, since they may relate with the characters or the story.

Also known as “formation novel”, the Bildungsroman reveals the psychological development of the protagonist. Moreover, it exhibits a conflict between the main

character's personal concerns and their prevailing values (GRAHAM, 2019). A considerable number of these narratives uses a first person narration in order to establish a closer bond with the reader, such is the case of Brontë's and Dickens' novels mentioned above. It is a resource that has been proven effective and is still used in the contemporary Bildungsroman.

The genre also presents some varieties such as Entwicklungsroman (an autobiographical Bildungsroman), Erziehungsroman (a Bildungsroman aiming at educating youngsters), Künstlerroman (a novel focused on the artist's journey), Meta Bildungsroman (when there is some evident kind of self-awareness in the narrative process of the Bildungsroman) and the AntiBildungsroman (in this subgenre the protagonist is a functional member of society in the beginning of the novel, but ends up feeling misplaced or lost).

Throughout the centuries, the way the Bildungsroman is perceived in society undergoes some changes. With the advent of modernism in the twentieth century, the genre is somehow reinvented. The narratives still promoted the characters' conflicts, frequently focusing on the individual self. On the other hand, there are significant changes. The stories are told in a non-linear way, daydreams and events now collide, creating a blurred timeline of the events, as in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (2020). Inner monologues are also present, philosophical ideas and reflections appear with intense depth. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* could be classified as an AntiBildungsroman, as Orlando is perfectly admired and accepted in society at the beginning of the novel and at the end, they find it difficult to fit in. Moreover, there is a sex-change in the novel, which can be read as an extraordinary happening or as a metaphor, but more than that, it goes against traditional binary values the classic formation novel portrays.

Subsequently, ironies on the Bildungsroman hero and its journey emerge in some novels, such is the case of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1991). Holden Caulfield, the narrator of the story, spends a weekend wandering in New York and despising people around him instead of trying to become a better person and find somewhere to belong. These are some of the elements which oppose the traditional Bildungsroman. Furthermore, they reveal how the genre was perceived with mockery in the twentieth century.

Alternatively, fantastic series as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1995) and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (2015) presented traits of Bildungsroman: character development from youth to maturity, struggle to accomplish social demands and linear storytelling. These series have paved away to a new meaning for the genre, which is sometimes reflected in other narratives of the twenty-first century as well. Another category of the genre, the Female Bildungsroman, (shaped after Brontë's *Jane Eyre*) beyond dealing with the challenges of growing up, it also exposes oppressions suffered by women, unveiling violent episodes and the feelings of being an outsider or excluded. These characteristics appear not only in the Female Bildungsroman, but also in the female Künstlerroman, which will be discussed in the following sections. Overall, the Bildungsroman, as a genre, has gone through distinct phases, having spread itself into different categories. In the next section, I will be examining one of its very special subgenres, the Künstlerroman, in other words, the "artist novel".

## 1.2 The Concept of Künstlerroman

A conceptual study made by Lago (2017) explores the etymology and characteristics of the genre. As she points out, the term is formed by the German words "Künstler", which means artist, and "Roman", which means novel. Lago (2017) explains that the Künstlerroman arose along with the popularization of the novels as a genre, also combined with the enthusiasm about art, as a theme. Lago defends that the genre had its peak in France, with the works "The Unknown Masterpiece" (year) by Honoré de Balzac and "The Masterpiece" (year) by Émile Zola, during the nineteenth century.

As a literary form, the Künstlerroman reflects individualities. Besides that, the subgenre provides a meeting between literature and art and acts as a metadiscourse, in other words, the writer speaking about himself. Moreover, romanticism helped spread the image of the artist as a divine, inspired worker to serve the public sphere (LAGO, 2017). Some Künstler novels have autobiographical elements in their plot, while others portray the challenges of being an artist without

clear trackable inspirations or clear mentions concerning real people or events. In this subgenre, the life of the artist protagonist must have a major role in the narrative. All the struggle to create art is portrayed, as well as trips and social events, which are also considered crucial to make the artist an artist.

Lago (2017) observes that the literary critic concerning the origins of *Künstlerroman* is divided into two branches: the first believes the first manifestation of the subgenre appeared with Wilhelm Heinse's *Ardinghello und die Glückseligen Inseln* [Ardinghello and the happy isles], first published in 1787; and the second one defends that the unfinished novel *Henri Von Ofterdingen: A Romance* (2015) by Novalis is the pioneer representation of the subgenre. However, these two groups seem to agree that, just as the *Bildungsroman*, the origin of the *Künstlerroman* is German.

There are several different terms in the English languages to refer to the subgenre, as Lago points out "portrait-of-the-artist novel, artist novel, artist self novel, autobiographical novel and art fiction" (LAGO, 2017, p.11) are used by researchers. There is also variety in other languages concerning the term. In German, "Künstlerdrama, Kunstliteratur and Malerroman" are also applicable. (LAGO, 2017, p.11) The French language, however, is the language with the biggest amount of terms related to *Künstlerroman*, as presented in this excerpt: "*roman d'art, roman sur l'art, roman de l'artiste, roman d'artiste, roman artistique, roman artiste, roman du peintre, roman du romancier, roman de l'écriture, écriture d'art, littérature artistique, écrits sur l'art, fiction de l'artiste, fiction d'art.*" (LAGO, 2017, p. 11)

It is noteworthy that some of these names are connected to a specific type of narrative or character inside the genre. For instance, "*roman du peintre*" refers to "novel of the painter" and "*roman du romancier*" means "novel of the novelist". Even though some of the mentioned terms are similar, they do not mean exactly the same. Lago proposes the following definitions, which I organize here in the table below:

<p><b>Künstlerroman (for which the terms "Artist Novel" and "Roman de l'artiste" are also used)</b></p>	<p>It has an artist hero as protagonist, who is focused on his art. This kind of novel depicts the challenges in the lives of the artist protagonist.</p>
---	---

<b>Autobiographical Novel</b>	Beyond having an artist protagonist, it retells important events from the life of the artist.
<b>Kunstliteratur (for which the terms “Art Novel” and “Roman d’art”)</b>	May or may not have an artist protagonist. However, this kind of novel searches or represents an aesthetic. It is more a novel about art than about the artist.
<b>Bildungsroman</b>	It represents the self-development journey of its protagonist, who may or may not be an artist.

(Table 1)

According to Lago, one recurrent protagonist in the Künstlerroman is the painter, followed by the writer. Musicians and sculptors are rarest as protagonists of the novels, appearing mostly as secondary characters. There is also the case of the artist who has not produced or concluded his masterpiece yet. It seems to be some kind of impossibility to materialize the work. In this case, the art precedes the artist. Lago calls it the “artist with no masterpiece” and suggests Werther, from Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1989) and Stephen Dedalus, from Joyce’s *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2003) would fit the concept. On the other hand, this kind of character presents a high sensibility to art and an evident aptitude towards it. The situation exposes a challenge the artist has to deal with, which is the conflict between imagination and technique. (LAGO, 2017)

A recurrent issue faced by the artist protagonists of the Künstler novels is the instability when interacting with the world. Many of the Künstler protagonists (as well as protagonists from Bildungsroman novels) feel as an outsider, such as Jo in Alcott’s *Little Women*, Lenù in the *Neapolitan Series*. Esperanza in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House On Mango Street* (2009) and Elaine Risley in Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988). They fail to feel like they belong to their gender (Jo), neighborhood (Lenù and Esperanza) or places of origin (Elaine Risley). Other narratives, on the other hand, go further when exploring the theme, reaching a deeply emotional or psychological level. As Lago states, in traditional Künstlerroman (usually written by men in the nineteenth century), this feeling can lead even to a tragic ending, such as madness, neurosis or death. At the end, the protagonist abandons his vocation by creative

burnout, physical death or loss of geniality. (LAGO, 2017) Thus, the positive development usually presented in Bildungsroman fails to appear in this kind of narrative, which is classified as an AntiBildungsroman.

But this is not the only problem the artist has to face: there is the opposition between income vs. artist essence. Lago reveals one recurrent issue in the Künstlerroman novels from the XIX century - the dilemma the artist (in this case, usually a painter) finds himself in. The artist has to choose between enjoying their intellectual freedom while making his art or to accept the demands from society and produce whatever the elites ask them to. If the artist chooses the first one, he may fall into economic misery. If he chooses the second alternative, on the other hand, he will be able to provide for himself and even have the benefits of comfort. (LAGO, 2017). This conflict appears in Nikolai Gogol's *The Mysterious Portrait* (2018).

The artist protagonist is portrayed as a very singular personality, someone unique and unlike others. This artist rejects an ordinary kind of life and usually is the opposite of well succeeded ones. Many times they are egocentric and hard to deal with. Moreover, the artist's indifference to social codes and daily tasks is portrayed in the novels. As Lago points out there are many paradoxes, parallels, and oppositions in the Künstler narratives. This unlikeliness of the artist character leads to the myth of the artist. Lago understands the term "myth" as the representation of a dramatic image which produces an effective, collective meaning inside of a community, besides being transmitted as truthful through generations. In this way, this repetition created an image of the artist accepted by our culture, which allows people to perceive and reflect upon the myth of the artist. Concerning the image of the artist, Lago observes it appears as an uncommon man, spotted by creativity and genius, temperamental, unstable and with a great need for isolation (in order to produce his art). The isolation needed is a tradition influenced by common sense ideas that sees creation as a divine act. In some old religions, the artist is someone closer to God and has mystic views which inspire his work. The artist is a divine being with full capacity to create. Lago associates Prometheus and Pygmalion as the primer artist figures which contributed to the myth. She also reveals that ancient tradition relates the artists to the mythical entity of Saturn, since he is contemplative, melancholy, solitaire and reflective. In this context, Lago identifies the myth of the artist as a *topoi*, in other words, a recurrent formula or theme used in literature.



The problem of creation is commonly depicted in the *Künstlerroman*. The tension around the artist and his work is exposed as a torment. The artist strives to conceive what he has in mind, generating a parallel between the masterpiece the artist imagined versus the work he was able to produce. Consequently, a feeling of impotence comes to surface and starts being expressed through episodes of anger and violence. In some *Künstler* narratives, the artist destroys his paintings, sculptures or manuscripts, after rejecting the outcomes of his work, as in Balzac's "The Unknown Masterpiece". In others, the impossibility of balancing a regular life with the making of art is explicit. Having a love relationship becomes a burden, representing an obstacle to the creation of art. Besides, real women are seen as the masterpiece's biggest rivals. When the artist chooses love he ends up incapable of making art. Otherwise if he decides to dedicate solely to his art, he still feels tormented by it. Lago explains this idea of opposition between creating art and having a life out of it comes from ancient beliefs that the artist genius must seek celibacy. The genius needs to be chaste and sleep only with his masterpiece (LAGO, 2017).

As pointed out by Lago, another recurrent event in the *Künstler* novels is the artist's voyage. In the past, it was common for artists to have their trips to cosmopolitan places which reunited artists, galleries and museums. Rome, Paris and New York are some of the acknowledged cities for an artist to visit and learn from. The opportunity of traveling to a different country or city provides the artist new sights of the world, as well meeting people and collecting contacts, which are very important for the artist to divulge his work. The trip is also a moment for the artist to explore and find out his own artistic motivations. It may also be a form of running away from a situation he has to face or the environment he lives in. However, not all artist protagonists have the chance to undergo a physical adventure. Campello (2003) mentions that in some cases the voyage can be symbolic or psychological. The most important is that the artist can go through a rich experience that may provide him to delve into the paths of creativity, expressing it all in his art.

On the structure of the *Künstlerroman*, Lago proposes the following narrative sequence, based on previous studies and the analyzed literary works, which are approximately eighty titles, including novels, novellas and short stories: 1) the introduction to the artist and his environment; 2) the artist's creation process; 3) the insertion of a challenge that harms or threatens the artists' work; 4) the reaction of

the artist towards this challenge. Lago highlights that this sequence is adaptable to the several literary forms examined in the study (novel, novella, short story) and does not necessarily appear linearly. (LAGO, 2017)

Due to its historical treatment and literary criticism, the *Künstlerroman* has been set for the masculine domain. It was not only produced by men, but also studied and defined by them (CAMPELLO, 2003). This leads to a problem concerning the category of the artist. In the traditional *Künstlerroman*, the female characters play secondary roles in the plot, being usually portrayed as muses or artists' wives. They also may bring conflicts in the artist's life, playing an evil role towards the artist's work or even his greatest masterpiece. (LAGO, 2017). As both Campello's and Lago's research point out, the complexity of the female figure in the *Künstlerroman* has been little explored by academic research.

Langston indicates a singularity in the traditional *Künstlerroman* written by men. In her words "What the typical *Künstlerroman* narrative traces, then, is the male's recognition of his singular calling or destiny, his internal struggle against this force leading to his eventual acceptance and development into an artist" (LANGSTON, 2004 p.17). Research reveals, however, that in *Female Künstlerroman* the problems surpass what is commonly explored in the traditional form of the genre. This calling does not appear frequently in the artist novels on the female domain. Besides, different kinds of issues surface in the artist's mind, such as access to education, gender violence and housework. The next section details the aspects which shape the genre and presents features which reveal the distinction between the *Female Künstlerroman* and the traditional *Künstlerroman*. Finally, the section intends to explore the particularities, adding updated observations on what the *Female Künstler* novels show, as a way of contributing for further studies on the subgenre.

### **1.3 The Female *Künstlerroman***

As pointed out in the previous section, the *Künstlerroman* is a kind of *Bildungsroman*, which portrays the journey of the main character to become an artist.

In this way, the Female Künstlerroman is also a form of Bildungsroman, being the outcome of a Bildungsroman with a female artist heroine. Thus, the subgenre is the result of previous works written by women, specially concerning the Female Bildungsroman. Whenever the female coming-of-age novel is discussed, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is mentioned. It is one of the most remarkable novels for Female literary tradition and probably the first impacting Bildungsroman that approaches recurrent challenges women undergo, depicting the story from a female perspective, guided by a first-narrator.

Just as the hero from traditional Bildungsroman, Jane feels displaced and faces challenges while growing up. On the other hand, these feelings and challenges are emphasized by her gender. Jane's experience is intensified by her loneliness and lack of protection, problems which seem to affect women in a deeper way, especially the ones who are considered physically vulnerable, as is her case. Brontë builds in *Jane Eyre* a novel that details female sufferings and self-development, paving the way to other novels and literary forms to approach women issues from women's perspective. In *A Room of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, Elaine Showalter (1977) affirms that women writers who were starting to write needed model heroines. She also defends that *Jane Eyre* changed the direction of the female tradition. Hence, the novel contributed to shaping relevant traits of female experience and how this experience is presented in literature made by women.

One of the main problems concerning the Female Künstlerroman is the reduced number of studies on the topic. In this chapter, I expose ideas presented in previous studies as I add some contributions of my own, acquired by reading and examining novels that fit the genre. Even though previous works discuss the characteristics of the genre, they fail to propose a concrete definition of the Female Künstlerroman, as they eventually explain mostly about the Künstlerroman and neglect the female distinctive trait of the genre, as a consequence. In this present research, I define the Female Künstlerroman as a novel (written by a woman) which portrays the development of a woman who is or who aspires to be an artist. As far as it is known, some nineteenth century novels were the first publications to be classified as Künstlerroman made by (and about) women, but two different wings share distinct opinions on its origins.

In her study, Baerdemaeker (2011) highlights the feminist boom from the 1970's and how it raised the interest in the Female Bildungsroman, just as many other topics related to women's studies. According to Baerdemaeker, researchers diverged on the origins of the Female Bildungsroman: Esther Labovitz defends that the female subcategory of Bildungsroman was only possible when the genre actually became a reality for women while Lorna Ellis and Penny Brown believe the genre already existed in the nineteenth and even in the eighteenth century. Sharing Ellis and Brown's perspective, I defend that the Female Künstlerroman appears in the nineteenth century, having novels such as *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and *The Awakening* (1982) by Kate Chopin as good examples of the genre.

Being a branch of Bildungsroman, the Female Künstlerroman has also undergone some changes throughout the centuries. Langston (2004) points out that in its initial phase, the female protagonists had two possibilities: to perform what has been expected for women or to despise their gender in favor of their art. For example, Jo, the artist heroine from *Little Women*, frequently rues her gender and wishes she was a man, since she is revealed to have "the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it." (ALCOTT, 2018, p.14). In opposition, more recent Female Künstlerroman novels present characters who embrace their womanhood as well as their artistry, valuing both of their sides. By recognizing and valuing all aspects that shape themselves as artists, they recreate old myths and stereotypes concerning women (muses, mothers or vindictive wives) in the traditional Künstlerroman (LANGSTON, 2004).

Considerable differences between the Female Künstlerroman and the traditional Künstlerroman (written by men) arise in the artist conflict. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (1983), Linda Huf deals with the theme of artistry, focusing on how the artist conflict is expressed differently in men and women. Huf reports that men feel split between their personal and social existence while women feel the same split plus the separation of sexual and personal identity. While men's dilemma is centered around man's life vs. artist life, women are expected to have selfless devotion to others. The artist hero has the duty of dedicating his entire existence to create his transcendental masterpiece, however the artist heroine must balance the roles of woman, artist, mother, wife, sister and friend. Langston agrees on this difference between the

genders, she asserts that while the male artist “may suffer from a feeling of internal division, the female artist must enact this division” (LANGSTON, 2004, p.19-20). In other words, in order to achieve her artistic goal, the woman artist must play a larger variety of roles than the male artist.

Some of the artist protagonists reject the idea of performing such roles. Alcott’s Jo in *Little Women* expresses not only her contempt related to her gender, but also to getting married. Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (2005) feels tormented by having so many options and exposes her disbelief with marriage and estrangement with the glimpse of having babies and taking care of them. Huf points out that female artist novels in mid-twentieth century, such as Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1994) and Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, present a “no win situation” for the characters, as they feel their life or art is pointless at the end of the novel. Moreover, the female protagonists of artist novels pit themselves because of gender conventions. On the other hand, unlike the protagonists of traditional *Künstlerroman*, they do not create male muses, as they do not idealize men (JONES, 1991).

According to Langston, the artist heroine is presented as a positive and active figure, especially in the Female *Künstlerroman* from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Besides, Huf reveals that the artist hero has conventional “feminine” traits, such as passivity, sensitivity and shyness, while the artist heroine has conventional “masculine” traits, like liveliness, strength and fearlessness, for example. The active artist heroine can be seen in Alcott’s Jo and Ferrante’s Lila, for instance. Nevertheless, these traits will be examined with more details in the further chapters.

The figure of the artist hero has dominated the literary narratives since the romantic period, as highlighted by Muiño (2017). Alternatively, the twentieth century Female *Künstlerroman* presented critics concerning the obligation of heterosexual relationships and its implications, as revealed by Baerdemaker. She also points out that elements of romantic plot are still present in the twentieth century Female *Künstlerroman*, but with the means of criticizing gender norms. This can be seen in Plath’s *The Bell Jar* and in Ferrante’s *Neapolitan Series*, whenever the narrators expose certain thoughts and feelings related to men, marriage, children and other issues that have been imposed on women throughout the centuries. Plath’s Esther Greenwood does not wish to become a wife, nor does Ferrante’s Lila, although Lila

actually gets married at some point, when there is no other escape for her. Modernist women writers engage with the figure of the woman artist and it becomes clear when we consider that at the end of Female Künstlerroman novels, the artist protagonist accomplishes her goal of being an artist, while in the Female Bildungsroman the protagonist ends up married. (MUIÑO, 2017). Baerdemaker defends that these female characters may undergo some level of spiritual and intellectual growth. However, they are exceptions in their literary context, hence they do not 'succeed in life' the same way their male equivalents do (BAERDEMAKER, 2011).

Muiño defends the idea that the artist's environment is still important in the Female Künstlerroman. Not only the places they go, but also people they interact with contribute to the artist's setting. As revealed by Muiño, the artist protagonists feel the urge to create and make art whenever they feel lonely, misunderstood or rejected. The will to materialize art comes from the human need to feel connected with others. Besides, the journey of the artist protagonist starts when she goes through a private moment of introspection, which is later documented through writing, paintings, sculptures or music.

As observed by Muiño, novels which fit the concept of Female Künstlerroman are often misclassified as Bildungsroman in literary criticism. Of course the Female Künstlerroman is a specific branch in Bildungsroman, however the lack of awareness about the subgenre may lead scholars to ignore the artist side explored in these narratives. On the other hand, Baerdemaker believes these two possibilities of reading fortify the appeal of the Female Künstlerroman, because of the novels developments "they can be read as a Female Bildungsroman, in which the female protagonist comes to terms with her identity, and as a Künstlerroman, in which the artist protagonist creates her own artistic framework" (BAERDEMAEKER, 2011, p. 21). Therefore, one thing is clear: there are multiple possibilities of reading the artist's novel.

Langston defends that the different struggles faced by the female artist affect the structure of the Künstlerroman, since it needs to be altered in order to fit the story of women artists. One interesting trait the newest Female Künstlerroman presents is the cyclic narrative. Langston reveals that these novels often begin at the present moment, being told by a senior or middle-aged woman who looks back at the past to

trace the story of her artistic development, eventually returning to the present. This feature is present in Atwood *Cat's Eye* and later appears in the *Neapolitan Series*. Another interesting finding highlighted by Langston is the fact that the artist heroines are usually the first daughters in their family. It is the case of Elaine Risley in *Cat's Eye*, Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*, Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* and Lenù in the *Neapolitan Series*.

In short, Langston proposes that *Cat's Eye* is the greatest example of the standard Female Künstlerroman, since the book presents the circular narrative (which is so often explored in the latter artist novels) of a female artist protagonist, who does not choose between being a woman or an artist, but embraces both roles. Besides, it unveils details of Elaine Risley's trajectory, focusing on the impact each episode had for her development as an artist. Moreover, Langston defends that the use of the circular model of narrative enables the female artist to take power over her story,

It is the circular narrative structure of *Cat's Eye* that allows Atwood to position Elaine as daughter developing and, simultaneously, as established artist woman figure. By anchoring the narrative in the present, where Elaine is a successful woman in middle age and a painter, Atwood is able to return to her past and chart her struggles, her setbacks, her conflicts without fear of undermining the female Künstlerroman. There can be no doubt that this narrative recovering and uncovering of the Elaine of the past is worthwhile because the Elaine of the present is an example of a complete and triumphant, yet complex, female artist. Further, through remembering her own artistic transformation, Elaine is able to take power over her own construction as woman and as artist. Through remembering she can revise. (p.23, 2004)

The importance of the female Künstlerroman goes far beyond. Women writers are able to trespass the stereotypes concerning the role of women in art when depicting them, they are "capable of capturing the inner conflict and development of their respective female characters more delicately and effectively, allowing them to connect emotively and rouse emotion in themselves and the reader indeed" (MUIÑO, 2017 p.7). The Female Künstlerroman is a genuine response to the old tradition, as it brings to light the gender-based challenges women face to follow an artistic career.

#### 1.4 Bildungsroman or Künstlerroman?

Throughout this chapter, I have mentioned several novels which can be classified as Bildungsroman or Künstlerroman. Since the Künstlerroman is a subgenre which derives from the Bildungsroman it is clear the Künstlerroman presents characteristics that were formerly seen in the Bildungsroman. However, the Künstlerroman brings some specificities in its constitution that prove it is worth its own terminology and consequently, studies. Every Künstlerroman might be classified as Bildungsroman or AntiBildungsroman, since, as Lago points out, some of the Künstlerroman novels transgresses the Bildungsroman journey on self-development. On the other hand, not every Bildungsroman is a Künstlerroman. Novels such as *Little Women*, *My Brilliant Friend* (and the whole Neapolitan series), *A House on Mango Street*, can be read both ways, for example. The construction of the story plot and its narrative makes it possible to be read through different approaches or perspectives. It is a trait rich novels PRESENT. The richer its essence as a work of art, the more reading paths the readers and scholars may take.

Overall, novels that could be classified as Künstlerroman end up being classified just as Bildungsroman because the concept of Künstlerroman is not yet as far explored as it could be. Consequently, many people are not familiar with the genre and its specificities inside the Bildungsroman. As I have pointed out in the introduction, there are considerably few investigations on the theme, which leads to the fact that the subgenre is still little known for scholars.

In the next chapter, I analyze how the Künstlerroman appears in the *Little Women* series, proposing a reading of the works as artist novels. In order to do that, I examine important aspects of the novel and revisit some of its most remarkable episodes, besides identifying traits of Female Künstlerroman in the text and applying the theories that have been reviewed so far.



## 2. FEMALE KÜNSTLERROMAN IN *LITTLE WOMEN* AND THE NEAPOLITAN NOVELS

### 2.1 Blooming at a Time of War

The following section provides information on the novels, their authors and the historical context they portray. It is notable that both series contain strong historical conflicts as their background. The protagonists face the impacts of wars in their community. While Alcott's *Little Women* deal with an absent dad during the American Civil War, Ferrante's Neapolitan girls grow up in a poor community whose remnants of Second World War are still present. These difficulties impulse the girls to pursue better lives and it is through writing that the protagonists try to make their way. As Woolf (2004) points out, paper and pencils are much more accessible resources than canvas, oil, tints and musical instruments. People do not really need expensive investments to write, except for practice and time. Alcott's Jo is inspired by the books she reads throughout the series. She is also motivated by her mother and sisters, who often listen to her stories. Almost a century later, Lila and Lenù are motivated to write after they find out about the earnings of Louisa May Alcott. And this is certainly a gathering point between the novels.

Lago exposes a general belief that sad artists create masterpieces and argues that this stereotype of the sad, depressing artist is damaging to those who try to create. She defends it is the healthy artists who are able to produce, otherwise there will not be any work done. Even though the characters from the works analyzed face hard times they do not seem to be dangerously at risk. Jo, for instance, besides living during the American Civil War, is not fighting in any combat. Lenù, who lives in a poor neighborhood in Naples, observes the violence around her, but she is not the target of this brutality. Being in this position, they are able to dedicate themselves to studies or to write, thus constructing their own path to a better life.

### 2.1.1 On *Little Women* and Louisa May Alcott

First published in 1868, *Little Women* portrays the daily life of the March family during the American Civil War. Exposing the domestic sphere women lived in at that place and time, the novel delights its readers still nowadays. The work is material for several different readings. It can be classified as children's literature as well as it is regarded as a feminist novel. It is representative of both Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman. There is the strong historical background involving the plot, and besides these facts, there is undeniably Christian influence in the characters' speeches and even attitudes. All these elements combined guaranteed a huge success for the book and its author, who became acknowledged for her work.

One year later, Alcott published the second half of the novel, also considered the second book of the series, entitled *Good Wives*. The sequence is a result of the good sales of *Little Women's* first volume. *Little men*, the third book, was first published in 1871 and the latest, *Jo's Boys*, was published only in 1886, fifteen years after its preceding novel. The two last volumes did not reach the same amount of readers as the previous works. However, the sales of *Little Women* granted Louisa May Alcott and her family a comfortable life. As pointed out in Alcott's letter and journals (2011), she was able to pay for May's studies (her younger sister) abroad. Alcott's success has inspired other women writers throughout the centuries, being Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, J.K. Rowling, Zadie Smith and Jhumpa Lahiri among them (ROZZO, 2018). Furthermore, the novels have received dozens of cinematic and literary adaptations. All these facts confirm the relevance and impact of Alcott's masterpiece.

Alcott's letters and journals reveal details about her childhood and youthful years. Before she could make a living of writing, she would teach, sew and write many stories and poems. Alcott also opened a Kindergarten school, in 1862, as suggested by Elizabeth Peabody. Besides she enjoyed the idea of being a teacher at first, she found out she did not like teaching and earned more with her writing. After a few months she abandons the idea of teaching and decides to focus on her writing, as she felt it was her truthful vocation. (ALCOTT, 2011). Years later, as a result, she publishes her most famous work: *Little Women*.

Many autobiographical readings of her works have been done throughout the years, such as Fetterley (1983) and Gutierrez (2021). It happens due to the fact that the Alcott family resembles the March family in numbers and names. Both families are composed of a couple with four daughters, who faced similar challenges, such as an absent father during the war period and scarce financial resources. Louisa May was the second daughter of Amos Bronson Alcott and Abba May, having Anna Bronson Alcott (the oldest), Elizabeth Sewall Alcott and Abba May Alcott as her sisters. Moreover, her journals reveal her sisters shared identical personality traits with the series' characters. There are occurrences described in Alcott's diaries which seem to have inspired events portrayed in her novels. Although autobiographical analysis on Alcott's work have been proven worthwhile, the novels transcend the limit of one sole kind of reading.

The *Little Women* series and other works by Alcott are often classified as children's literature. Because of Jo's commitment to her own dreams, others read the work as a feminist novel, as Eiselein (2000) and Desmawati (2018), for example. Furthermore, the protagonist frequently questions the way she is supposed to behave in order to perform femininity. Many other issues concerning topics that are relevant and decisive for women appear in the novel, such as marriage, class, friendship and family ties. Conversely, Christian references often appear in the work, having almost each chapter present a moral lesson. *Pilgrim's Progress* (2003) by John Bunyan, a book full of Christian allegories is not only mentioned and read by the March family, but also inspires their children's games. All these elements enrich Alcott's books, making distinct readings possible. Hence, the works provide material for several different studies.

Foot (2005) emphasizes the novel is based on women's domestic experience during the American Civil War. Since most men seem to have gone to war and considering the Marches is a family of women, the only possible masculine influence for the girls are their next-door neighbors, the Lawrences. These two families live very distinct realities: while the March family is big and has few resources, the Lawrences are few and live in abundance. Composed by Mr. Lawrence, an elderly man, and his grandson, Theodore 'Laurie', the next-door family surely provides a great contrast, if compared with the Marches. These opposite features do not result in rivalry or a bad relationship: the families seem to complement each other, instead.

More details on the bonds between these families are examined in the next section. It is possible to observe, however, that men play secondary characters in the novel and the men who receive a little bit more of the spotlight, such as Laurie, present a high level of instruction, they do not behave brutally and prefer politeness to roughness.

Foote defends that *Little Women* can be read in three different ways. It can be read as the story of Jo, the tomboyish girl who achieves her dream to become a writer; the story of Meg, the most conventional of the sisters, the one who marries an honest man and have children; and it can also be comprehended as the story of Amy, the sister who pursues her goal of becoming a painter and marries her friend, Laurie. Foote explains it is not possible to read *Little Women* as the story of Beth, as she dies young because of scarlet fever.

Furthermore, Foote points out a very interesting aspect in the novel concerning the social wanderings: the Marches interact with the poorer and also the richer. Maybe it happens due to the fact they live in a war context, which demands union from the community. On the other hand, the girls go through episodes of social exclusion, such as Amy's episode with the limes<sup>1</sup> and Meg's humiliation at the Moffats<sup>2</sup>. Foote argues that "their contact with the greater world emphasizes their material poverty" (p. 65). The March family was once wealthy and now has to deal with financial problems. It gives the Marches an ambiguous class feeling. Meg still has her memories of better times, so she is the one who had to adapt to a more humble kind of life. Complaints about her circumstances are not rare in the novel,

"Where's the use of looking nice, when no one sees me but those cross midgets, and no one cares whether I'm pretty or not? I shall have to toil and moil all my days, with only little bits of fun now and then, and get old and ugly and sour, because I'm poor and can't enjoy my life as other girls do. It's a shame!"(ALCOTT, 2018, p. 60)

---

<sup>1</sup> At Amy's school bringing picked limes to share with the class is a common thing to do. The wealthier students often do it. When Amy decides it is her turn to bring the limes, she is humiliated by the teacher and ends up being grounded.

<sup>2</sup> Meg spends her vacation with the Moffats, a wealthy family, whose daughter she is friends with. During this period, she experiences a wealthy life, letting herself be dressed by the family (as she has only one ball gown). She overhears conversation about her financial conditions between the Moffats and other wealthy people. She is also led to change her name to "Daisy", since "Meg" is not considered a nice name. She is seen by Laurie and feels uncomfortable about the whole situation.

These episodes lead the girls to momentary states of dissatisfaction and unhappiness about their situation. On the other hand, they give them the impulse to go after positive changes. In order to provide for the family, all the girls work. Meg is a governess at King's (a rich family); Jo works as a companion for Aunt March; homely Beth helps with the housework; and Amy does not work yet, but goes to school. Although all the works have their occupation, the way they perceive themselves as workers is unclear (FOOTE, 2005).

Another meaningful element in the novel is that every March girl is talented towards a different kind of art: Meg is great at acting; Jo is passionate about writing; Beth loves music and her piano more than anything else and; Amy is keen on painting. Even the girls' deepest wishes are related to it. Undoubtedly, art plays a great role in *Little Women*. Moreover, the novel brings several mentions and references to literary masterpieces such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (2020) and Charles Dickens' works. Besides being most connected to one specific kind of art, the girls enjoy every opportunity to appreciate art in all its possible forms. They take the opportunity of going to the theater, if they can (except for Beth, who is too shy); they join Beth, around the piano, and sing all together; they listen to Jo's poems or short stories and motivate Amy's first attempts at drawing and painting. It is in this supporting environment the girls develop their artistic skills. They may face financial problems and social exclusion at times, but one cannot say they are sad during the making of their art. They are happy to write, happy to act, happy to play and happy to paint. It confirms Lago's theory that, in fact, it is the happy artist who is able to create.

### 2.1.2 On the *Neapolitan Novels* and Elena Ferrante

It may be still a mystery who is behind the pseudonym Elena Ferrante. Many readers and people involved in literary circles tried to figure out who the person actually is. The author only accepts to participate in a few interviews — and only through writing. In *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey* (2016), a compiled work consisting of letters, interviews, essays and other writings, the writer shares some of the reasons why she has chosen to adopt a pseudonym. She defends the idea that anonymity gives her more freedom to produce her works: “[...]writing with the

knowledge that I don't have to appear produces a space of absolute creative freedom. It's a corner of my own that I intend to defend, now that I've tried it. If I were deprived of it, I would feel abruptly impoverished."(FERRANTE, 2016 LOC 700) declares Ferrante. That being said, this research understands Ferrante's anonymity as a choice and a right that must be protected. Besides, it has to do with respecting the creative space of the author. Ferrante reveals she wants her "novel to go as far as possible precisely so that it can present its novelistic truth and not the accidental scraps - which it nevertheless contains - of autobiography." (FERRANTE, 2016, LOC 682). Even though the author might use autobiographical elements in her literary pieces, her works are not solely an account of a real occurring, they go far beyond that: they are the outcome of her experiences plus her well developed writing skills.

Mixing moments of friendship and rivalry, Ferrante builds a long narrative, consisting of four books: *My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* and *The Lost Daughter*. Written to be one sole, big novel, the series ended up being separated into four books for editorial reasons. These books became best-sellers and soon were translated to several languages. Ferrante has received worldwide acclaim for her works. As a result of its success, the series received an homonymous adaptation to television, streamed by HBO. It already has three seasons and has been renewed to the last and fourth season. This is not the first of her works to have an adaptation. The first one was *Troubling Love*, released in 1995. Recently, *The Lost Daughter* (2021) received its filmic version directed by Maggie Gyllenhaal. These recent productions reinforce the growing interest in Ferrante's works.

In the *Neapolitan Novels*, Elena Ferrante tells the story of Elena Greco (Lenù) and Raffaella Cerullo's (Lila) friendship from the age of six to sixty-six. Born and raised in a poor neighborhood of Naples, the girls learn to deal with challenges from a very young age. They watch episodes of violence towards women who live next door and hear of murderings caused by debts or revenge. Lenù, the narrator and protagonist of the story, brings several accounts of brutality throughout the narrative: "We lived in a world in which children and adults were often wounded, blood flowed from the wounds, they festered, and sometimes people died." (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE) Besides the poverty and violent conflicts, there were still some other remnants of the second world war in their neighborhood: "Giannino, who was in

fourth grade when we were in first, had died one day because he had come across a bomb and touched it.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE).

Mullenneaux (2016) points out that the situation of Post War Naples was desolating. There were people running away, going to other cities. People were in desperate need, selling goods to eat. Some mothers would even sell their daughters' virtue. Prostitution was common, having one-third of Neapolitans forced to it in order to survive. After the war, Naples Port became a navy military base, also being a venue for emigration. At the time, the city was left at the hands of corrupts and was totally devastated. This explains the environment portrayed in Ferrate's novels. As Lenù remarks: “Our world was like that, full of words that killed: croup, tetanus, typhus, gas, war, lathe, rubble, work, bombardment, bomb, tuberculosis, infection. With these words and those years I bring back the many fears that accompanied me all my life.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE) Growing up in this fearful environment, the girls see school as an opportunity to have higher achievements than the rest of their community.

The girls meet during childhood and start interacting after they see each other at school. Their friendship is marked by rivalry - each of the girls try to keep up with the other's progress concerning studies, challenging themselves to do better and be the best of the class. To Lenù, Lila always seems to be ahead in class. She taught herself to read impresses the class and the teacher very much because of that. Besides, as the time flies by, Lila is able to enjoy long, classic novels while her classmates read simple books. Because of that, the teacher lends Lila an edition of *Little Women*, which she reads and rereads. When Lila and Lenù earn some money from Don Achille, after having lost their dolls in his old building, they decide to buy *Little Women*, as Lila says it is a beautiful book. They read together until the book is a bit wrenched. It is Lenù who keeps the book, as Lila's family will not be happy to see her with it. The friends find out Louisa May Alcott made a fortune after publishing the novel and decide they want to follow this very same path. This is the most evident connection between *Little Women* and the Neapolitan series, but there is more in common to be explored in the next sections. Not only do the girls dream of becoming writers, they want to write together and change their lives through that.

Even though Lila is a brilliant student, she does not receive her family's support to continue studying and does not go to Middle School, since it would require investment from her parents. Lenù's family, on the other hand, makes financial efforts to send her to school. From that moment on, the girls follow different paths: Lenù spends more and more time studying, while Lila starts working at her father's shoe shop. When Lenù goes to High School, Lila is about to get married. While Lila raises her son, Lenù takes an undergraduate degree at the University of Pisa. However, their friendship grows stronger, except for some moments of conflict. They undergo adolescence, adulthood and mature years and manage to keep in contact, even if they are distant for some periods. Besides having distinct personalities and a smooth competition between them, the friends complement each other. Lila projects in Lenù a future she was not able to follow and Lenù sees in Lila a geniality she believes she does not have. At many times throughout the series they benefit from this relationship, each of them using their best feature in cooperation to achieve something bigger.

In the next section, relevant concepts related to space will be discussed, considering how they may be applied in the works studied. Relevant places to the story are examined, as well as their description and possible meanings for the plot. Moreover, episodes involving trips are also analyzed, as they are an important aspect presented in the *Künstlerroman*. Overall, issues concerning space (or its lack) expose recurrent challenges the characters of *Female Künstlerroman* have to deal with. Besides, the places the characters inhabit or interact with contribute to the artist's formation and their path. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate the topic.

## **2.2 The Importance of Space**

In the acknowledged essay "A Room of One's Own" (2004), Virginia Woolf claims space and financial conditions for women to be able to produce literature. She defends the idea by stating that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (WOOLF, 2004, p. 4). As she explains her point, she tries to recollect information on women's history to understand the conditions they were



given to be artists, more specifically, authors. She finds out women were given less access to education, besides having to deal with housework and children. These elements combined made it challenging for women to write, because they did not have enough time to sharpen their skills. Woolf analyzes the cases of famous writers, such as Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters and realizes women's writing (at the time) was much influenced by the domestic atmosphere, since women had to balance writing and housework. The result is that familiar conflicts were often explored in literature made by women, while men brought accounts on their trips and war, which is the case of Jules Verne and Leon Tolstoy, for instance.

Woolf points out to the fact that paper, pens and pencils are much more affordable than a canva and tints or any other musical instrument and concludes that writing was one of the first possibilities for a woman to explore. Writing was one of the first professions open for women and although it is a fact, the women's path to write was not less difficult. Even though there are always exceptional cases, at the time Woolf lived professions that involved technology seemed to be closed for women. And this is something Woolf expresses grief about and hope for future changes.

Woolf highlights the fact that throughout history many literary pieces were published anonymously. She asserts that she "would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." (WOOLF, 2004, p.57). As Woolf considers the possibility she assumes the chance that a number of these works might have got their authors' names erased. The Brontë sisters and George Eliot decided to publish their works under a masculine pseudonym. Mary Shelley first published her acclaimed *Frankenstein* (2015) anonymously, having the credits to her work only in the second edition. In some situations, it was the condition to have your work published, as is the case of Mary Shelley. Beyond that, a considerable amount of women chose to publish under a masculine pseudonym, in order to free themselves from judgements or assumptions of what a book written by women should look like.

In *Professions for women* (1974), Woolf exposes an important issue concerning female writing. It is the stereotype of angelic women she calls the "Angel in The House". Based on Coventry Patmore's homonymous poem, Woolf defines the

“Angel in The House” as an enchanting, charismatic woman, who is also selfless and very good when dealing with family life. The “Angel in The House” would work as a kind of judging shadow, bothering women authors at their writing moment. This angel would appear each time women try to free themselves from conventionalities and think for themselves, expressing their own ideas on issues men would consider inappropriate for women. Woolf believes this to be “a very common experience with women writers – they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex” (WOOLF, 1974, p.17). The solution to the problem, however, would be killing the “Angel In The House”. This way, women would be closer to achieve the same amount of intellectual freedom as men do.

If Virginia Woolf has reflected on the condition of women to produce literature and realized they were not given the same space as men, other scholars have studied the question of space through different lenses. Gaston Bachelard, for instance, reflects on the metaphors and hidden meanings of elements present in the domestic space. In *The Poetics of Space*, (1994) the scholar brings several considerations on the meaning of the houses. According to Bachelard, our houses give us the illusion of protection. They recall our childhood memories and intimacy, working as a shelter. Past, present and future are different dynamics that involve the house. For all these reasons, Bachelard asserts that “our house is our corner of the world. [...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 4). Indeed, our house is the place we become aware of things. It is the place that provides some of our first interactions. It expresses much of our roots, being able to define our early notions of hierarchy. Besides, the house hosts meaningful memories of our infancy that will long live,

Thus, the house is not experienced day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasure of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Imemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. [...] Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 5-6)

These images keep living in our minds and will walk with us wherever we go. They are transferred to other homes and set the pattern to future comparisons. It is clear in Bachelard's ideas that the house goes beyond her physical proportion. It transcends time and becomes the place we recur to for comfort, the place we mentally visit to recollect our early memoirs. These ideas on space are considered in the following analyses on how it appears on the selected series. Since the space is highly important for the artists in the *Künstlerroman* novels (Lago, 2018), it is fair enough we look closely at the places presented in *Little Women* and in the *Neapolitan Series*.

### 2.2.1 The space in *Little Women*

One of the most remarkable spaces in *Little Women* is the house of the Marches. It is described as a happy, lively, cozy (although modest) place where the family strives to spend their time during war. Despite its simplicity, there is a fireplace in it, for the wood needed is mentioned throughout the novel. This place is setting to some moments of union and joy for the family, when the sisters sing or perform an act together. Their house contrasts the luxurious house of the Laurences, the rich neighbors who live nextdoor,

On one side was an old, brown house, looking rather bare and shabby, robbed of the vines that in summer covered its walls and the flowers, which then surrounded it. On the other side was a stately stone mansion, plainly betokening every sort of comfort and luxury, from the big coach house and well-kept grounds to the conservatory and the glimpses of lovely things one caught between the rich curtains. Yet it seemed a lonely, lifeless sort of house, for no children frolicked on the lawn, no motherly face ever smiled at the windows, and few people went in and out, except the old gentleman and his grandson. To Jo's lively fancy, this fine house seemed a kind of enchanted palace, full of splendors and delights which no one enjoyed. She had long wanted to behold these hidden glories, and to know the Laurence boy, who looked as if he would like to be known, if he only knew how to begin. (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 78-79)

It is interesting how the clear opposition of these houses is depicted. Although they differ in colors, material and size, these differences do not carry a meaning of

“good” and “bad”, but portray distinct realities instead. The house of the Marches is crowded with the girls, their mother and their servant, Hannah. Therefore it is full of life. The house of the Lawrences resembles silence, space and emptiness, for it hosts only the grandfather, his grandson and few servants, with whom they are not so acquainted. The Lawrence’s house, on the contrary, seems to be lacking people. However, this place awakens Jo’s curiosity, as it is full of artistic items and has plenty of space to be enjoyed. Moreover, as an aspirant to writer, Jo appreciates space and silence for her to enjoy her readings. The following passage, where Jo is “wrapped up in a comforter on an old three-legged sofa by the sunny window.” (p. 43), confirms the argument: "This was Jo's favorite refuge, and here she loved to retire with half a dozen russets and a nice book, to enjoy the quiet and the society of a pet rat who lived near by and didn't mind her a particle." (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 43). Not only useful for reading, this kind of space plays an important role upon creation (writing, in this case).

A very praised place by Jo is the library. In *Little Women*, she visits Aunt March’s library. There is a “real attraction” for this “large library of fine books, which was left to dust and spiders since Uncle March died.” (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 65). Aunt March’s library is described as a “dim, dusty room, with the busts staring down from the tall bookcases, the cozy chairs, the globes, and best of all, the wilderness of books in which she (Jo) could wander where she liked, made the library a region of bliss to her.” (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 65) The description shows how enchanted she feels when she is surrounded by books. However, unfortunately she could enjoy the place for a relatively short time each visit, as it is only at the moment of Aunt March’s nap she is able to hurry to “this quiet place, curling herself up in the easy chair” to devour “poetry, romance, history, travels, and pictures like a regular bookworm.” (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 65) Another library she fancies is the Lawrences’. “It was lined with books, and there were pictures and statues, and distracting little cabinets full of coins and curiosities, and Sleepy Hollow chairs, and queer tables, and bronzes, and best of all, a great open fireplace with quaint tiles all round it.” (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 87). As soon as Jo has a glimpse of the place, she feels “delighted”, clapping her hands and prancing, as she expresses her excitement. The libraries presented in the novels are regarded as special spaces, which offer many reading possibilities, besides providing comfort for readers. All these places she visits and all the art she has contact to

compose her experience as an artist. They are all part of becoming an artist and improving their artistic skills (LAGO, 2018).

Similarly, the house of the Marches is a place of great interest for Theodore “Laurie” Lawrence. The boy confesses to Jo that he sneaks at the March’s house and describes it as “like looking at a picture to see the fire”, besides the family “always seem to be having such good times” (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 84). Amazed by Jo’s family, he affirms that “a fellow can’t live on books”(ALCOTT, 2018, p. 88). It is curious how the friendship of Jo and Laurie benefit both ways: the lonely boy can interact with a happy family while the girl is able to have contact to a world she could not afford, such as she has when going to theater, talking to Laurie’s foreign friends or appreciating the art pieces of his home.

Other spaces are explored in *Little Women*, such as a short visit to Longmeadow and New York in *Good Wives* section. These are places Jo visits and surely contribute to her formation as an artist. Also, the house of the Moffats (friends of Meg) appears as a remarkable space in the novel. The mansion is part of a scenery which feeds the class conflict presented in the novel. However, these places in question will be examined more closely in the further chapters. For in this chapter, important spaces for the writer’s blooming were taken into account.

### 2.2.2 The space in *Neapolitan Series*

In the *Neapolitan Series*, space is also a question. Both Lila and Lenù live in small apartments with their respective families. While Lenù has to share her space with her three noisy siblings, Lila needs to cope with one caring older brother and a demanding, harsh father. When Lenù is challenged to study in a crowded room, Lila hides her books from her father, who will not allow her to study. Their neighborhood is depicted as dusty and dirty. Its streets are the setting of several violent episodes. Lenù reveals: “I feel no nostalgia for our childhood: it was full of violence. Every sort of thing happened, at home and outside, every day, but I don’t recall having ever thought that the life we had there was particularly bad. Life was like that, that’s all,”

(FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). It is in this context that the little girls dream of achieving better life conditions.

One of the central places at the beginning of the story is the school Lila and Lenù study at. It is through the school the girls get to know each other more closely and create a bond. “Right away, from the first day, school had seemed to me a much nicer place than home. It was the place in the neighborhood where I felt safest, I went there with excitement.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE) confesses Lenù. In this passage, the important role the school played in Lenù’s life is clear. It is a place of safety, besides being where she learns and interacts with other children. There is also an episode in which Lenù, who is now in Middle School, returns to the old school for a short visit. She reveals: “I felt a strong emotion, I recognized the smell, which brought with it a sensation of comfort, a sense of myself that I no longer had.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE) Therefore, it is clear the girls’ first school has the power of recalling memories and good sensations it is expected for “the house” to bring.

Later on, in *The Story of a New Name*, Lenù has to deal with lack of motivation to keep on studying. She is in High School and needs to improve her grades and performances in the classes. Besides, she faces a moment of confusion concerning her feelings about her boyfriend, Antonio and Nino, her everlasting crush. Because of this problem, she emphasizes how difficult it was for her to study at home, revealing the challenge she has always gone through to keep up with the classes,

Even at home I couldn’t study. Added to my confusing thoughts about Antonio, about Nino, about the future was my mother’s irritability, as she yelled at me to do this or that, and my siblings, who came one by one to have me look at their homework. That permanent turmoil wasn’t new, I had always studied in disorder. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

Not able to have “a room of her own”, Lenù is invited to explore Lila’s new apartment, as she is now married and has her own, actually her husband’s, house. Although Lila moves “through the apartment as if her house were alien to her and she herself felt like a visitor”, Lila is welcoming and offers Lenù a room in which she can study during the afternoons. Moreover, Lila offers Lenù silence and snacks, motivating her to continue studying and do her best. “Day by day my friend’s house

charmed me more, it became a magical place where I could have everything, far from the wretched gray of the old buildings where we had grown up, the flaking walls, the scratched doors, the same objects always, dented and chipped.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE) Lenù reveals. Lila’s apartment becomes more than a refuge, it is a dreamy place where Lenù can have access to specific food, comfort and technology. It represents a possibility of life change, even if by marriage rather than by writing or studying, as well as it provides Lenù the chance to enjoy some kind of luxury for the first time. Indeed, Lila and Stefano’s apartment is depicted as wealthy and innovative in contrast to other housing in the neighborhood,

[...] the rooms had a smell of plaster and fresh paint mixed with the vaguely alcoholic scent that emanated from the new furniture in the dining room, the table, the sideboard with a mirror framed by dark-wood foliage, the silver chest full of silver, the plates, glasses, and bottles of colored liquors. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

The sophisticated image of Lila’s new home collides with the dusty and poor environment around the stradone. Also, most houses are barely described throughout the novels. The details are saved to describe the places which most impact the narrator. There is emotion involved, the craving to overcome poverty. It has to do with the dream of writing to create a better life condition. The passage below exposes the issue,

Maybe the wealth we wanted as children is this, I thought: not strongboxes full of diamonds and gold coins but a bathtub, to immerse yourself like this every day, to eat bread, salami, prosciutto, to have a lot of space even in the bathroom, to have a telephone, a pantry and icebox full of food, a photograph in a silver frame on the sideboard that shows you in your wedding dress—to have this entire house, with the kitchen, the bedroom, the dining room, the two balconies, and the little room where I am studying, and where, even though Lila hasn’t said so, soon, when it comes, a baby will sleep. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

All these resources help Lenù to regain confidence about her studies and keep on with her former plan to finish school. Lila’s apartment gives her the very first opportunities to experiment what it feels like to have a house of her own. The luxury of Lila’s apartment diverges with the spaces she later lives in, such as the cramped apartment at San Giovanni a Teduccio. However, the most shocking place Lila finds herself in is Bruno Soccavo’s factory, which produces sausages. After her divorce, Lila needs to provide for her son and herself and takes a job at the factory. Lenù

describes how she felt about Lila's workplace: "I was assailed by a warmth that made the odor of fat even more nauseating. The place was big, there were tubs full of a milky, steaming water in which dark bodies floated, stirred by slow, bent silhouettes, workers immersed up to their hips." (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). Besides all of this lugubrious atmosphere, the workers face long work hours and are harassed. It hurts Lenù to see Lila in such a state of exploitation. It is the opposite kind of life Lila had experienced at the beginning of her marriage: a comfortable home, frequent trips to the beach coast, abundance of food and plenty of time to relax. Nevertheless, it proves Lila's adaptability to diverse kinds of situations, a feature that will be discussed in next sections.

Interestingly, the houses inhabited by Lenù are not described with many details. The reader only knows a bit about it when there is some kind of commentary or conflict involving the space. Throughout the novels Lenù lives in her family's apartment, a student dormitory, apartments she shares with her partners subsequently in Florence and Naples, and finally an apartment all hers. After she decides to move away from her last partner, she returns to her old neighborhood to live in a simple apartment above Lila's, where "you could see both the stradone and the courtyard" through the windows. Although the place is constituted by "floors of uneven tiles", it remarks a new phase in Lenù's life, when she is finally able to make amends with her origins,

The new house was dark and repainting the rooms didn't help brighten it. But, contrary to what I had thought since I returned to Naples, this didn't bother me; in fact the dusty light that had always struggled to penetrate the windows had the effect on me of an evocative childhood memory. (FERRANTE, 2015, ONLINE)

This house represents a return to the old memories observed by Bachelard. It has a positive impact in Lenù's writing career, as it enables her to be closer to the most impacting of themes she writes about: her neighborhood. This house gives the stradone a new meaning. Furthermore, it reshapes the relationship she had with the environment in which she grew up, making her somehow proud of her roots. This new bond is indispensable to Lenù's growth as a writer. It is through this connection she evolves into a more acknowledged author in Italy, as well as she becomes more respected by her community.



### 2.2.3 The Artist's Travel

As pointed out by Lago (2018) and discussed in the previous chapter, travelling is a recurrent issue in the *Künstlerroman*. The artist has their needs to meet people and have different encounters. These experiences are part of the character's constitution as an artist. Besides, through travelling, the artist can exchange contacts and find new ways of divulging their art. In both series examined, a decisive trip happens in the second novel, which is a curious fact, although there are minor trips and hangouts being depicted in the first novel.

In *Good Wives*, Jo decides to move to New York for a short period of time, where she spends around six months. She works as a governess at a boarding house of a friend of her Marmee. At this place, Jo develops more of her working skills. She also interacts with people from different countries, such as France and Germany, who live at the boarding house. "I'm cheerful all the time now, work with a will, and take more interest in other people than I used to, which is satisfactory." (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 323). All these interactions bring joy to Jo. Moreover, being in this cosmopolitan environment, she learns more about society. It is also the place where she meets Mr. Bhaer, her future husband, who gives her feedback on her writing. Although during the stay in New York she ends up writing for money, the experiences acquired make her wiser, beyond providing her reflections about the real intent of her art, which is decisive for the path she decides to take afterwards.

Jo is not the only March sister to travel in *Good Wives*. Amy is chosen as a companion to Aunt March for her Europe trip. There, Amy manages to visit London, Paris and Heidelberg. There she has the opportunity of going to parties and interacting with high-society people. She meets Frank and Fred Vaughn, two wealthy Englishmen who are friends with Laurie. Fred Vaughn even proposes to her at some point, but she refuses and takes Laurie as a husband, instead. During her stay in Europe, Amy visits museums, galleries and landmarks. All these experiences delight her very much, as she describes her adventures through letters to her sisters. Another relevant element of her trip is that she keeps practicing and enhancing her painting skills, as she wants to be "great, or nothing". (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 381). On

the whole, the time Amy spends abroad is not only decisive in her formation as an artist, but also as a person. The trip provides her time to explore more about the world and also about herself. It is a moment where she undergoes her maturation process and, as a consequence, gets prepared for future challenges. It is, undeniably, an important stage for her artistic formation.

In *The Story of a New Name*, Lenù spends her college years at Pisa University, where she takes a teaching degree. In this environment, she learns new perspectives and deepens her knowledge of theories (such as marxism) as she interacts with students from other parts of the country. Besides, she has contact with rich and influential people: Franco Mari, her second boyfriend, who helps her by providing her money, short trips, winter coats and, Pietro Airola, the son of intellectuals and who she gets married to. These contacts are decisive in her permanence at the University and also in her first novel's publication process.

The trips to the coast of Ischia are highly relevant to Lenù, since they provide her material for writing. Her first novel retells an event which she calls "Ischia's episode". However, this episode will be examined closely in further sections, where Lenù's writing process is analyzed. The trip to Ischia also benefits Lila, as it is in the trip her interest in books and studies return. Before the trip, Lila, who is just married, is also too tied up in the neighborhood. Busy with chores concerning her husband's business and other problems involving the neighborhood, Lila is closed to the external world. It is through this trip that she is able to reconnect with some previous interests as she explores other sides of herself.

Overall, to the artist, trips are a way of interacting with the outside world. They provide them cultural exchange, new life experiences and personal improvements. Moreover, they offer opportunities to increase the number of contacts and get a chance to spread the artistic pieces around. Jo and Lenù's major travels are related to self-development, since Jo becomes more self-reliant as she sells more of her writings and Lenù concludes her formal studies at an undergraduate level, as well as she writes her first novel. Minor trips, however, contribute to their interaction with different people and cultures, learning new interests or tendencies from these people and their environment.

## 2.3 The Artist Heroine and Her Path

In this section, the constitution of the artist heroines in the novels is discussed, considering the theory explored in chapter one. Moreover, the artist path is analyzed, based on excerpts and events from the novels. Concerning *Little Women* series, as mentioned above: there are many ways of reading the novel. It also impacts the possibilities of Künstlerromane readings of the works. The story of two artists can be apprehended from the works: Jo, the writer; and Amy, the painter. Both readings are valid and worthwhile. However, this study is centered on female characters who aim to become writers. For this reason, Amy's artist path is not investigated.

In the section regarding the *Neapolitan Novels*, the trajectories of Lila and Lenù are examined, in order to comprehend why one of the friends became a writer and the other did not. Furthermore, there are occasions in which Lila participates in Lenù's writing process, either by giving her feedback or helping her reshape her texts. This way, Lila's perception on Lenù's works impact directly on how she writes. Because of that, it is impossible to scrutinize Lenù's process to become a writer without discussing her partnership with Lila.

### 2.3.1 Jo: the character who inspired generations of women

It is no secret by now that Jo has inspired several women authors all over the world. The character breaks up with conventional behaviors that were expected for women at the time. Jo biggest's aspiration is to become a writer in order to support her family, especially financially. Unlike the heroines of bildungsroman from the nineteenth century, she does not wait for a marriage to save the finances of the family. She does not dream of being a wife. Instead, she affirms throughout *Little Women* that she is never going to get married. Jo is an active heroine, she does what she can to help her family. Besides, she demonstrates what Langston calls conventional masculine traits, such as strength and fearlessness, for example.

Also, Jo claims her right to remain a child as long as possible: “Don’t try to make me grow up before my time, Meg [...] Let me be a little girl as long as I can.” (ALCOTT, 2018. p. 247), she vindicates. Jo wants to enjoy the rest of her childhood while she still can. She is fifteen years old at the beginning of the novel and undergoes body changes common at puberty. Interestingly, she is not excited about growing up, but uncomfortable with the whole situation, as one may realize in the passage below,

Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a flyaway look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it. (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 14)

It is possible to notice she has difficulty recognizing herself in her growing body. She is still trying to absorb the changes of her big limbs. It is also undeniable Jo feels a deep connection with boys, even feeling like one of them. She constantly verbalizes her dissatisfaction quite often in the first half of the novel: “It’s bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy’s games and work and manners! I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it’s worse than ever now, for I’m dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!” (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 12). As one can see, Jo manifests her will to fight in war combats in this passage. It is one more reason why she pities her gender. As an active human being, it is a challenge for her to wait on news and do nothing to stop the war.

She then assumes she must make up for her father’s absence and take his role: “I’m the man of the family now Papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers, for he told me to take special care of mother while he was gone.” (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 15) She seems to believe she is responsible for providing for her younger sisters, helping the family to overcome this delicate moment. Jo plays a variety of roles, which is quite common in the Female Künstlerroman. The artist heroine must adapt to different situations and perform several parts in order to achieve her goals. Besides writing, Jo works as a companion for Aunt March, she works as a governess during her New York and even teaches. She is also a great friend and sister, being the one

to take care of Beth, when she is sick. All these tasks and works she performs need to be conciliated until she is able to dedicate herself solely to her true passion.

Unlike other literary characters, Jo denies a marriage proposal from her wealthy friend, Laurie. She knew she could improve her family situation concerning finances if she had accepted. However, she keeps true to her own beliefs and affirms: "I don't believe that I shall ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man". (ALCOTT, 2012 p. 342). In many moments Jo expresses her will to stay single her whole life, to chase her writing career and find happiness in other possibilities which do not involve a relationship. Such ideas seem groundbreaking for that time. Differently from some Jane Austen or Brontë's characters who do not oppose to marriage, Jo does not take interest in it. Even though she gets married at the end, Jo only does it for love and real interest in Mr. Bhaer (a German intellectual who has once been a professor, but works as a tutor in America). After all, if she works from a young age and seeks her independence, she will not marry for comfort or wealth, she does get married, but it is motivated due to her genuine feelings.

Another interesting observation about Jo is her tendency to prefer playing the male parts "to her heart's content" while she and her sisters perform some act. (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 33) Jo is not attached to her gender. In fact, she fails to perform femininity in usual tasks. She is not able to keep her gloves or ball gowns in a good state, nor can she curl her sister's hair properly, as she burns it by accident. Besides, she keeps her own hair in a ponytail, in a way it will not stop her from running or bother her while she is doing her daily activities. She prefers simple pieces of clothing, which allow her to feel herself. When questioned by Meg about her outfit, Jo answers "I don't mind being a guy if I am comfortable" (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 197). Through this passage, one may see that Jo does not care about following fashion and fitting a pattern. Jo does not care if she is mistaken by a boy or labeled by her tomboyish ways. She questions why she should watch the way she speaks (she frequently uses slang and expressions current in boy's speech) and behave ladylike. In this way, the character vindicates freedom to break from a sole pattern of femininity.

### 2.3.2 Jo's writer's path

From the very first chapter of *Little Women*, the reader is exposed to Jo's passion for books and her ambition to make a life through writing. She appreciates being surrounded by books and considers herself a bookworm. Jo spends most of her free time writing or reading and her references go from Shakespeare to Dickens. As mentioned beforehand, Jo reads or recalls the name of literary works that were influential during those times. She and her sisters create a "Pickwick Club" for themselves, where each of the girls is a character from Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (2000). They adapt Shakesperian plays and create a performative game based on John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. These are some of the works referenced in the novels and they are not simply recalled, but are still present in the girls' lives. This fact itself shows that the March family values books and literature, for they are able to reach an intense level of involvement with the stories they read. Besides, they appreciate music, plays and paintings, as well.

It is from a poor, but knowledgeable family Jo arises. In every opportunity to discuss her dreams for the future, Jo makes it clear that writing is her goal. "I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous: that would suit me, so that is my favourite dream" (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 230) She is always firm in her intention to develop her skills and sell her stories. On the other hand, it is interesting that she often mentions money and her will to ascend, financially, through writing. Therefore, one may conclude it is not only sympathy to the books or vocation that lead her to the will of becoming a writer: as not many professions were open to women at the time, writing means also a real possibility of providing for her family. The passage below illustrates Jo's intentions,

Jo's ambition was to do something very splendid. What it was, she had no idea as yet, but left it for time to tell her, and meanwhile, found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn't read, run, and ride as much as she liked. A quick temper, sharp tongue, and restless spirit were always getting her into scrapes, and her life was a series of ups and downs, which were both comic and pathetic. But the training she received at Aunt March's was just what she needed, and the thought that she was doing something to support herself made her happy in spite of the perpetual "Josy-phine!" (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 66)

Inexperienced and fueled by the desire to create art, Jo knows she wants to do something, but is still in the exploring phase. She is also aware that writing might provide her money to bring her financial independence and help her family. Jo does not exactly want to be working as a companion for Aunt March, however, she recognizes the importance of her work, as it helps her to support herself. Jo is also known for her difficult temper, as the passage exposes, a trait that is recurrent in artist characters. It is during this exploration time she experiments and writes for fun when she plays literary characters with her sisters. She writes a poem for a cat that passed away and another one named “Anniversary ode”, written to celebrate the anniversary of the “Pickwick Club”. Below, a small fragment of the poem,

Again we meet to celebrate,  
With badge and solemn rite,  
Our fifty-second anniversary,  
In Pickwick Hall, tonight.  
(ALCOTT, 2018, p. 164)

The entire text, presented in the tenth chapter of *Little Women*, proves Jo knows how to structure a coherent poem, being careful with the stanzas and rhyme. This poem is solely built in quatrain and fetes the club and its members. As it is part of their “Pickwick Club” publication, it is signed by A. Snodgrass, the Pickwick character to whom Jo is more connected. All the girls sign their texts using the names of different Pickwick members. Although Jo declares she wants to sell her stories and write books (probably novels), her skills concerning other literary genres show off. Jo’s poem reveals her writing aptitude is developing in a way it is not attached to only one type of text, but rather, it is versatile. Therefore, it confirms she explores her writing in more than one form.

After weeks of disciplined writing, Jo is finally over with her first book. She intended to conclude it before her father returned to war and feels satisfied she could do so. However, a disagreement<sup>3</sup> with Amy leads her to lose all of her work. This occurring can be classified as the third stage of the narrative sequence, concerning the Künstlerroman structure, proposed by Lago – the insertion of a challenge that

---

<sup>3</sup> Meg and Jo are invited to go to the theater with Laurie. Amy wants to go too and insists on going, but Jo refuses to take her. Amy, angered by Jo’s words towards her, decides to burn Jo’s book.

harms or threatens the artists' work. The passage below describes the pain Jo feels about it,

Jo's book was the pride of her heart, and was regarded by her family as a literary sprout of great promise. It was only half a dozen little fairy tales, but Jo had worked over them patiently, putting her whole heart into her work, hoping to make something good enough to print. She had just copied them with great care, and had destroyed the old manuscript, so that Amy's bonfire had consumed the loving work of several years. It seemed a small loss to others, but to Jo it was a dreadful calamity, and she felt that it never could be made up to her. (ALCOTT, 2018 p. 124)

Besides all the anger and deception, Jo manages to recover from her loss. At first, she ignores Amy completely, even to the point of refusing to help her during an accident while she and Laurie go ice-skating. Jo changes her mind, though, when she realizes Amy's life is at risk. They all go home and Marmee gives them a lesson, in which she preaches about love and forgiveness. The events discussed in this paragraph are part of the fourth narrative stage – the reaction of the artist towards the challenge. Fortunately, Jo recovers from the incident and does not give up on her dream of becoming a writer. Instead, she keeps on practicing and creating her stories. It is in the fourteenth chapter she is finally able to publish her first stories. Her writing process is depicted in the excerpt:

For two or three hours the sun lay warmly in the high window, showing Jo seated on the old sofa, writing busily, with her papers spread out upon a trunk before her, while Scrabble, the pet rat, promenaded the beams overhead, accompanied by his oldest son, a fine young fellow, who was evidently very proud of his whiskers. Quite absorbed in her work, Jo scribbled away till the last page was filled, when she signed her name with a flourish and threw down her pen, exclaiming..“There, I've done my best! If this won't suit, I shall have to wait till I can do better”. (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 237)

An interesting point to observe is the place where she is creating her work - the old sofa by the window. It is the same place where she is portrayed to be reading at the beginning of the novel, more specifically, in the third chapter. This is the place she considers her “refuge”. It is a space where she can produce without being bothered. Besides, it allows sunlight to come in, which physically can provide her light and a little bit of heat. Therefore, this environment provides her comfort and peace for her to write. As a consequence, she is able to dedicate herself to the task and do her



best. As soon as Jo finishes her work, she reviews the manuscript and goes to town, secretly, with the means of getting a publication at the newspaper, where she leaves two stories to be analyzed. Her friend, Laurie, is the first one to know about her attempt, as he meets her at the city center by chance. Two weeks afterwards, she gets a positive answer and explains to her sisters how it all happened,

"So I let him have the two stories, and today this was sent to me, and Laurie caught me with it and insisted on seeing it, so I let him. And he said it was good, and I shall write more, and he's going to get the next paid for, and I am so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls." (ALCOTT, 2018, p. 251)

Jo's publication process involves hard work and courage. As an active heroine, Jo is fearless. Her autonomy is clear as she decides herself to go after the newspaper. Moreover, she does not mind the risk of having a no as an answer. Her actions show she will not give up until she reaches her goal. If that is not enough, she will wait till she can do better. She does not get any previous feedback from her sisters, mother or friends. Instead, she surprises her family with her first stories published in the newspapers. It is through this first attempt she opens way to more publications in the future. Besides, she earns money that will help with her family's support. Therefore, Jo has found another means of making money, which is an alternative to the governess or companion work the girls usually do.

As the time goes by, in *Good Wives*, Jo keeps developing her writing skills. She publishes her stories in distinct newspapers, such as *Weekly Volcano* and *The Spread Eagle*. However, somewhere in the way, she ends up focusing her writing to shape sensational, best-selling stories. Although Jo does not appreciate her current pieces of writing, she feels empowered by the money it brings as a result. "As long as *The Spread Eagle* paid her a dollar a column for her 'rubbish', as she called it, Jo felt herself a woman of means, and spun her little romances diligently." (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 224) On the other hand, it is important to remember Jo is a poor young lady trying to help with her family's income by writing. Furthermore, she is living through the American Civil War. Even though she does not take active part in the conflicts, she feels the economical impacts of war, and a concrete example is her working to make amends while her father is away. She worries about her family's situation and feels the urge to do something. Consequently, Jo becomes more inclined to fit the needs of

the newspapers, which intended to furnish cheap distraction to their readers. At a time of war, people did not want to hear more sad or dramatic stories, they simply wanted to be entertained, the newspaper editors would affirm. Furthermore, she had “the dream of filling home with comforts” (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 374). Hence, Jo accepts to write such stories, after all she is earning money and nourishes her dream of publishing a whole book.

When Jo discovers the newspaper is giving a \$100 prize on the best sensationalist story, she decides to write something of her own and submit. As a result, she wins and uses the money to take her sister Beth, who is going through a fragile moment concerning her health, to the beach. Enjoying a wave of fortune, Jo keeps writing and publishing her sensational stories, being able to provide more and more for her family and also to herself. “Jo enjoyed a taste of this satisfaction, and ceased to envy richer girls, taking great comfort in the knowledge that she could supply her own wants, and need ask no one for a penny.” (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 253). At this point, she can heal the resentful feelings about her class, as she is able to slowly promote financial changes in her household.

She goes after a new challenge and decides to finish the book she had been writing, which is a novel. Encouraged by the selling of her sensational stories, she resolves “to make a bold stroke for fame and fortune” and submits her novel to three publishers, but not before having read it to her “confidential friends”. (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 253). She is told that she might have the publication, except for the following conditions: to cut the novel down one third and omit all of Jo’s favorite parts. “Now I must either bundle it back in to my tin kitchen to mold, pay for printing it myself, or chop it up to suit purchasers and get what I can for it. Fame is a very good thing to have in the house, but cash is more convenient” (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 253), it is Jo’s conclusion, as she calls her family for a council. The opinions diverge. Her father tells her the idea is well developed and advises her to wait and let the book ripen. Conversely, her mother suggests her to have the cuts instead of waiting, and she also believes Jo might be able to do better next time. Other people share their thoughts on the topic, but at the end, she decides to cut it down and publish, as “not being a genius” (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 255) will not kill her. She is comforted by the funny jokes she has created by observing real life and hopes to find another chance of publishing when she feels ready.

In spite of her earnings, Jo starts feeling ashamed of her stories soon after. Her usual feelings of joy and satisfaction related to her writing achievements slowly start to vanish. "Any mention of her 'works' always had a bad effect upon Jo, who either grew rigid and looked offended, or changed the subject with a brusque remark, as now. "Sorry you could find nothing better to read. I write that rubbish because it sells, and ordinary people like it." (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 274) The girl who would happily read her own poems and stories to her family now is embarrassed by her pieces of writing. However, she tries to conceal these bad feelings with the money she makes. Therefore, Jo keeps working, writing, and following her plans.

During her stay in New York, Jo conciliates her job as a governess with her writing. She is still that "poor and ambitious girl" who realized "that money conferred power" and "the means she took to gain her end were not the best." (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 324). Wishing "more than enough" in order to give her family comfort, Jo realizes she has deviated from her truthful purpose, but continues writing what she considers to be rubbish. It is only when she receives honest feedback from Mr. Bhaer, the German tutor she admires, that she takes the decision to stop writing such sensational stories. She refrains herself from minding on the money, as she had never had only one earning source. Jo agrees to aim "her highest" (ALCOTT, 2012 p.252) and takes a break. She returns to her town and spends joyful time with her family, until she finds her balance again. When she finally writes her new stories, her Marmee tells her,

"There is truth in it, Jo, that's the secret. Humor and pathos make it alive, and you have found your style at last. You wrote with no thoughts of fame and money, and put your heart into it, my daughter. You have had the bitter, now comes the sweet. Do your best, and grow as happy as we are in your success." (ALCOTT, 2012 p. 410)

Undergoing this process of "love and sorrow", Jo changes the way she perceives her stories. Creating once again, she sends her tales to publications, which were welcomed and brought her pay. As the second novel approaches to an end, is positive about her work and ideals: "I haven't given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I'm sure it will be all the better" (ALCOTT, 2012, p. 459), she says. Overall, Jo perseveres to make her own writing path. She demonstrates autonomy and bravery to go after publications. Moreover, after her

dissatisfaction with her writings she is able to change her techniques to give her stories a new meaning. Jo is strong and versatile. These are some of the reasons why Jo's path as a writer has inspired many characters in fiction and authors in real life. Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan girls are some of the most remarkable examples. In the next section, their paths are analyzed and contrasted to Jo's, an unique and pioneer artist heroine in Female Künstlerroman.

### 2.3.2 Lenù and Lila: from reading *Little Women* to creating "The Blue Fairy"

As presented previously, *Little Women* plays a part in the Neapolitan Novels – it is the novel that nourishes a dream in Lila and Lenù, the dream of becoming writers and being able to support themselves and their family, just as Jo did. Lila reads the novel first, as Maestra Oliviero lends her the book. In the meantime, Lenù strives to read *Heart* (2021), by Edmondo de Amicis. At the end of the school year, all the smarter girls in the class received books to read. It was a usual practice by their teacher. Lenù reveals "Lila had received *Little Women*, along with the following comment: "This is for older girls, but it will be good for you," (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). Surprisingly, Lila ends up reading both *Little Women* and *Heart* and affirms *Little Women* is wonderful. She grieves she does not have time to reread the book before returning it to Maestro Oliviero, a fact that teases Lenù's curiosity. They purchase *Little Women* soon after, with the money they get from Don Achille<sup>4</sup>. It all happens in the following way,

So one morning she made up her mind. She called me from the street, we went to the ponds, to the place where we had buried the money from Don Achille, in a metal box, took it out, and went to ask Iolanda the stationer, who had had displayed in her window forever a copy of *Little Women*, yellowed by the sun, if it was enough. It was. As soon as we became owners of the book we began to meet in the courtyard to read it, either silently, one next to the other, or aloud. We read it for months, so many times that the book became tattered and sweat-stained, it lost its spine,

---

<sup>4</sup> One day, the girls lose their dolls in Don Achille's basement, after throwing them down there while playing. Don Achille is famous for being a dangerous loan shark in the neighborhood. Fearful, the girls look for the dolls, but they magically seem to have vanished. Therefore, the girls accuse Don Achille of having stolen their dolls. He denies he had taken the dolls, however he gives them some money so that they can buy new ones.

came unthreaded, sections fell apart. But it was our book, we loved it dearly. (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE)

Through Lenù's narration of the event, the reader may notice that Lila has an active role while deciding about the money and also by buying the book. She is confident in her attitude and Lenù trusts her decision. As Mullenneaux points out, Elena is drawn towards Lila's natural leadership (Mullenneaux, 2016, Loc 649). Moreover, the book becomes a good they share, it brings them union and consolidates their friendship. The girls meet to read and discuss the novel, thus strengthening their bonds. Besides, they learn from these practices, as they switch their reading strategies: they read silently, one after the other and also aloud. They reread it so many times and the book gets damaged. All these details reveal they spent a considerable amount of time studying Louisa May Alcott's most famous work. As a consequence, they learn about the life of the author and realize Alcott had made a good fortune out of her writing. Soon they start planning to write a book together, as they imagine it would have the potential to change their situation of scarcity and make them rich,

In that last year of elementary school, wealth became our obsession. We talked about it the way characters in novels talk about searching for treasure. We said, when we're rich we'll do this, we'll do that. To listen to us, you might think that the wealth was hidden somewhere in the neighborhood, in treasure chests that, when opened, would be gleaming with gold, and were waiting only for us to find them. Then, I don't know why, things changed and we began to link school to wealth. We thought that if we studied hard we would be able to write books and that the books would make us rich. Wealth was still the glitter of gold coins stored in countless chests, but to get there all you had to do was go to school and write a book. (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE)

Although in this passage Lenù does not clearly associate the idea of writing and becoming wealth with Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, she considers the possibility afterwards "Maybe the idea took root when she discovered that the author of *Little Women* had made so much money that she had given some of it to her family." (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). It is interesting how writing can be accessible even in times of war, as all material resources one needs are paper and pens or pencils. Alcott's characters also undergo moments of deprivation and even feel sorrow and resentment about their class in some events. Unlike the March girls, who live in a friendly community where families help each other, Ferrante's characters are inserted in a violent environment, where they fear their own neighbors and see

fatalities all around. Even though the girls may not be the targets of violence during childhood, their situation slowly changes as they grow up.

Having read *Little Women* they realize there is another possibility of life that could be available to them. A path that does not mean to get married and undergo the episodes of violence most women from the stradone have to face. They recognize the importance of formal studies to get them somewhere else. It is also through studying that they will be able to write their books. Lenù feels joyful after Lila proposes a literary collaboration between the two. Meanwhile they plan to write a book, they are preparing to take the admission exams to enter Middle School. It is at this moment their families have to choose whether they will continue studying or not. The investment required is hard for both families to afford. However, Lenù's father, who has studied elementary school (an exception in the neighborhood) knows about the importance of studies and how it helped him to have a decent job at the city hall. He decides to make an effort to keep Lenù studying, but with one condition: she has to be the best student. Lila does not have the same fortune. Her father, Fernando, awaits her to start helping at the family's shoe shop. Many attempts of intervention, from both her brother Rino and Maestra Oliviero, to keep her school, were not sufficient to make Fernando change his mind. And this is, unfortunately, when the girls start tracing very different paths, which is something decisive for the story.

In the meantime of this conflict, Lila does not wait for Lenù and writes a book herself. Lila shares it with Lenù, who feels disappointed, as she wanted to take part in the creation, too. Lenù does not express her frustration to her friend, though. On the other side, she is delighted and impressed by Lila's work. This is one of the earliest episodes in which Lenù exposes her mixed feelings towards Lila and her achievements. Throughout the series, these events become recurrent and more complex. There seems to be a mixture of jealousy and admiration between the girls, as it is presented in the passage below,

I was hurt when she brought it to me to read, but I didn't say anything. In fact, I held in check my disappointment and was full of congratulations. There were ten sheets of graph paper, folded and held together with a dressmaker's pin. It had a cover drawn in pastels, and the title, I remember, was *The Blue Fairy*. How exciting it was, how many difficult words there were. (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE)

Amused by “The Blue Fairy”, Lenù convinces Lila to let Maestra Oliviero read what she wrote. At first, Lila did not consent to, but after Lenù insisted she agreed. Contrary to Lenù’s expectations, Maestra Oliviero does not express enthusiasm about Lila’s writing. She acts coldly and says Lila should study to get a diploma, instead. However, Maestra Oliviero keeps Lila’s little book for years, a fact that is only discovered by Lenù when the teacher is extremely sick on her deathbed. Moreover, there were compliments, notes and highlights made by the teacher in the original text. The teacher’s reaction may be read as a result of her frustration when Lila’s family determined they could not afford further education for the girl. Another possibility of reading this resentful feeling has to do with Lila’s geniality - owing skills so well developed that could even provoke jealousy in Maestra Oliviero, the mentor the little girls profoundly admired.

Throughout the story, there are other episodes in which Maestra Oliviero acts distant towards Lila, such as when they occasionally meet in the street and the teacher treats her former student with contempt. Whenever Lenù tells Maestra Oliviero about Lila’s married life and achievements, the teacher changes the course of conversation or makes a mean comment. These negative reactions contrast with all the praise Lila had received in her first years of school. Mullenneaux (2016) highlights the fact that soon after Lila enters the school, she replaces Lenù as the teacher's favorite girl. (Mullenneaux, 2016, Loc 649). This change impacts Lenù immensely, who starts feeling behind and, consequently, reshaping herself in order to compete with Lila.

Lenù herself reveals: “I was the smartest in the class, I could recognize all the letters, I knew how to say one two three four and so on, I was constantly praised for my handwriting, I won the tricolor cockades that the teacher sewed.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). It is possible to perceive, in this passage, that all the praise plays an important role for Lenù development. Besides, she appreciates pleasing and being pleased. When Lila starts being in the spotlight, because she taught herself to read. new and complex feelings emerge inside Lenù. The girl admits: “what that demotion caused inside me I don’t know, I find it difficult to say, today, faithfully and clearly what I felt. Perhaps nothing at first, some jealousy, like everyone else. But surely it was then that a worry began to take shape.” (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). These are

some of the initial events that contribute to the rivalry between the friends. Even though they like each other, they seem to be competing at many moments. Moreover, Lenù decides she needs to follow Lila's rhythm in order to be good. "Something convinced me, then, that if I kept up with her, at her pace, my mother's limp [...] would stop threatening me. I decided that I had to model myself on that girl, never let her out of my sight, even if she got annoyed and chased me away." (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). By doing so, she believes she will be able to mend her faults, not only intellectually, but also physically. Furthermore this assumption impacts on Lenù's writing process, which will be examined in the next sections.

### 2.3.2.1. Lila's story about the shoes

Lila comes from a family of shoemakers. As her family is poor, all help is welcome, even that of a child. When the preparation for the admission tests for Middle School start, Lila is hopeful she will be able to convince her family to invest in her studies. At first, her brother supports the idea, even though he did not get the chance to study as far as that. Lila's father, Fernando, on the other hand, is strongly opposed to the idea of spending money on her daughter's studies. After all, she was supposed to help in the household. It is relevant to highlight that the community still felt the economical impacts of the Second World War, especially the poorer. It was not uncommon that children would help their families by performing some kind of work. Besides, Lila is a girl and as Woolf herself states in *A Room of One's Own* that women have historically received less investment and support to study than men have. Many have had to fight for an education and that is what Lila attempts to do.

Unfortunately, during a fight with her father, Lila is thrown out of the window and has her arm broken. Fernando regrets this violent episode and allows Lila to study at another school, which offers technician courses. Lila does not get excited about the idea, but goes to school anyway. Lamentably, she catches an intense flu and has intermittent fever. She feels sick for several weeks and consequently needs to miss the classes in order to recover. These adverse events demotivate Lila to keep her plans of socially ascending through studies and becoming a writer. As a result, she fails the course and decides to quit school.



Therefore, Lila starts helping with housework and also at her father's shoe shop. Since she cannot dream of becoming a writer, Lila finds a new passion for herself – creating shoes. As she spends time with her brother and father and observes their work, her interest in learning the occupation grows bigger and bigger. At first, she draws shoes, a variety of models and their colors. Then, she crafts the shoes, but keeping it a secret, as her father would not allow her to spend such material just to learn. Disappointed with studies, Lila starts developing her artistic abilities in the shoemaking field. Lila dreams high, she has the idea of creating and selling their own shoes on request. Her creations reach an aesthetic and innovative level, as described by Lenù,

Once she showed me the designs for shoes that she wanted to make with her brother, both men's and women's. They were beautiful designs, drawn on graph paper, rich in precisely colored details, as if she had had a chance to examine shoes like that close up in some world parallel to ours and then had fixed them on paper. In reality she had invented them in their entirety and in every part, as she had done in elementary school when she drew princesses, so that, although they were normal shoes, they didn't resemble any that were seen in the neighborhood, or even those of the actresses in the photo novels. (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE)

Lila sets herself a new goal: to convince her father and brother to manufacture new shoes. She believes in the expansion of the neighborhood as a reason to invest in business. As she reveals to Lenù: "Now," she explained, "to become truly rich you need a business." (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE). Lila considers that if they become rich, they will be able to defend themselves from the violence in the neighborhood, especially from the Solara brothers, the camorristi. Behind her will to own money there is also the need of protection it may bring. Lila knows she will have more freedom and independence to act and live in the neighborhood if she is regarded with respect, and money can help her with that. As the Solara family runs the main capital in the neighborhood, they are also the more powerful family and are said to chase their oppositors. Many people in the neighborhood fear facing a conflict with the camorristi. During their childhood, the girls see several episodes of violence in which the camorristi and their enemies are involved. Having money and a career of their own may be a way of mobility and escape from the (at many times wild) environment they live in. Lila does not believe in writing as a powerful tool anymore, therefore she draws a new plan, which is detailed by Lenù in the passage below,

So she thought of starting with a single pair of shoes, just to demonstrate to her father how beautiful and comfortable they were; then, once Fernando was convinced, production would start: two pairs of shoes today, four tomorrow, thirty in a month, four hundred in a year, so that, within a short time, they, she, her father, Rino, her mother, her other siblings, would set up a shoe factory, with machines and at least fifty workers: the Cerullo shoe factory. (FERRANTE, 2012, ONLINE)

Unable to keep her formal studies to invest in her writing skills, Lila directs her artistic abilities to shoe-making. Unfortunately, Lila ends up disappointed again. She starts dating Stefano, who is interested in her idea and has money to make things happen. Stefano convinces her father, Fernando, and her brother, Rino, to transform their shoe shop into a luxurious store, with exclusive pairs of shoes, also made on request. Indeed, Stefano does provide for the change, but the project reveals itself to be impractical in the neighborhood, as most people are poor and cannot spend great money on a pair of shoes. However, the Solara brothers observe that the store would be an interesting novelty in richer regions of the town. This would be a feasible solution for the problem. They propose a partnership to Stefano, Fernando and Rino, who accept with neither Lila's approval or knowledge about it. In the meantime, Lila is engaged with Stefano and planning their wedding. As she finds out about the partnership only in the honeymoon, she cannot do much, but change the way she sees and treats Stefano. Therefore, her marriage is ruined and results in a divorce, years later.

Throughout the Neapolitan Novels, Lila is able to reinvent herself and explore her skills in very different ways. She invests in learning maths and programming, so she can work with technology. She proves to be a versatile, talented, character and has the potential to succeed in distinct areas. With a steady and linear routine of night studies with her friend (and then, second husband), Enzo, she achieves success and earns money in the field, creating even her own company, named Basic Sight. In many episodes Lila helps Lenù to study or to write, even by sharing her ideas or giving feedback on Lenù's pieces of writing. Moreover, Lila has always been a great inspiration and role model of geniality to Lenù, as revealed by some passages analyzed above.

Although Lila refuses to write something of her own besides her diaries, she presents many traits of the artist heroine. Unlike Lenù, she is an active character,

expressing strength and fearlessness in her actions<sup>5</sup>, which are considered masculine traits. She also performs a great variety of roles, such as friend, mother, sister, worker (in more than one scenario) and she also becomes relevant in the neighborhood, being the person people go to whenever they have problems. As Mullenneaux points out, Lila is forced to adapt herself to the laws of the neighborhood, while Lenù plans her own escape. (Mullenneaux, 2016, Loc 664) Lila seems to control her fate, as she controls her business and other people in the neighborhood. For that reason, she is both feared and admired. She also refuses to care about people's opinions and goes for what she believes in. On the other hand, Lila is stopped from continuing her studies, as well as she undergoes situations of violence in her household as a child, in her marriage with Stefano Caracci and in Bruno Solara's factory. These episodes confirm that yet Lila may have some adaptability, she cannot control her destiny but how she reacts to the challenges she faces in life. However, from the first to the third novel, Lila overcomes most adversities in her way. As well as Jo, Lila has proven to be a remarkable character and possibly may have some kind of impact on future artists.

### 2.3.2.2 Lenù's Self-discovery as writer

Lenù's artistic path is much more linear than Lila's. As mentioned in previous sections, at the beginning of the first volume, *My Brilliant Friend*, the narrator depicts the brutal environment they live in. In order to escape the violence, Lila and Lenù aim at studying. This way, they would be able to write books, as Louisa May Alcott did, and become rich. Lenù is the friend who somehow managed to have the opportunity to study. At many times, her parents question themselves if they would really be able to afford her studies and if the effort would be worthwhile. Being one of Maestra Oliviero's favorite students, Lenù receives her support and influence to convince her parents to invest in her studies. Whenever Lenù has difficulties learning about the subjects, she counts on Lila's help, as her friend is a fast learner. Moreover, these

---

<sup>5</sup> In many episodes, Lila hits the boys during childhood and responds to the attacks of the Solara brothers with violence. Moreover, when she gets physically hurt, she does not express her pain.

moments of help evolve to feedback on Lenù's writing, reaching the point where the friends collaborate in the writing of articles. All these experiences compose Lenù's formation as a writer and as a person.

In order to study, Lenù faces too many challenges. She studies hard to keep up with her studies. She dedicates plenty of her time to learn, abdicating moments of fun with her friend. When she is in Middle School, she is one of the only girls in the class. She undergoes moments where she feels as an outsider, because of her gender or her social class, but she keeps focused on her objective and reaches it. Due to her access to education, Lenù can interact with people from other neighborhoods and cities, as she grows up. When she enters college, at Pisa, she also gets the chance to meet intellectuals. As a consequence, she gets engaged (and then, married) to a prestigious intellectual, Pietro Airola, who comes from an influential family of scholars. While Lenù can transit through different places and interact well with prestigious classes, Lila is attached to the *stradone*, and except for her trips to the beach, she never leaves Naples and its peripheral regions. Even when she lives in San Giovanni a Teduccio, she soon returns to the old neighborhood, as if there was some kind of magnet bringing her back.

It is during a trip to Ischia Lenù lives a new experience that will be one of the main topics of her first novel. It is the loss of her virginity to an older man, Donato Sarratore. Lenù is seventeen at the time and is close to finishing High School. Donato Sarratore is the father of Nino, her school crush. Besides, he is married and has three other children. Because of this reason, Lenù cannot trust this story to anyone. She tries to ignore the incident and follow her life as if nothing had happened. Months later, she is accepted at the University of Pisa, where she takes an undergraduate degree to teach (also known as *Normale*). There, she enhances her skills and meets people from other parts of Italy, being one of them her boyfriend Franco Mari, who takes her on short trips to Paris and other cities. Moreover, he provides coats, glasses and other means she needs to study. He is expelled from the University and they lose contact. All these experiences contribute to her artistic process, as the trips and interactions with others are relevant tools for the artist in the *Künsterroman* novels.

At the University, Lenù does her best to have a great academic performance. Moreover, she realizes she has to adapt to the social conventions in order to be accepted and have harmonious communication with her classmates. “I began to struggle to correct myself. I knew almost nothing about etiquette, I spoke in a loud voice, I chewed noisily; I became aware of other people’s embarrassment and tried to restrain myself.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). From that moment on, she tries to adjust her ways by acting distant and restrained, but friendly. She reshapes herself in order to fit into the University: “I learned to subdue my voice and gestures. I assimilated rules of behavior, written and unwritten. I kept my Neapolitan accent as much under control as possible.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). All her efforts result in the respect she gains of others: “I began to distinguish myself and gradually became liked. Students male and female, janitors, professors liked me, and though it might have appeared effortless, in fact I worked hard.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). Furthermore, due to her commitment, she makes excellent progress in the course. The passage below illustrates how much she praises the idea of studying and improving her abilities,

I took the exams as scheduled, studying with my usual fierce self-discipline. I was terrified by the idea of failing, of losing what immediately seemed to me, in spite of the difficulties, paradise on earth: a space of my own, a bed of my own, a desk, a chair, books and more books, a city a world away from the neighborhood and Naples, around me only people who studied and who tended to discuss what they studied. I applied myself with such diligence that no professor ever gave me less than an A, and within a year I became one of the most promising students, whose polite greetings could be met with kindness. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

As expressed in the passage, it is the first time Lenù has a “space of her own” and she values it very much. Having good conditions to study has always been one of her greatest aspirations. The idea of having a room of her own, where she could study without being bothered subtly appears when she enjoys the spaces of Lila’s new apartment. It is also in this space she is able to finally write her first book. As the deadline to deliver her thesis approaches, Lenù starts feeling overwhelmed. She also feels shaded by her boyfriend, Pietro Airota, another promising student: “I saw that Pietro was treated as if he already had a professorship, I as a normal brilliant student.[...] I soon grasped that Pietro Airota had a future and I didn’t.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). She feels hurt about it, as she believes she is being treated with

inferiority. As a consequence, Lenù reinvents her project, in order to show her worth: “So I undid my work, I started again, I pursued an idea that seemed to me original. When I returned to the professor I was listened to, yes, I was praised, but without seriousness, as if my struggle were only a game well played.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). These episodes not only demotivate Lenù, but also reveal the way gender and class impact in the way students are perceived at University. This kind of criticism (especially related to gender problems) is a recurring feature in novels that fit the Female Künstlerroman, as a genre.

It is during this complex moment Lenù feels blocked and unable to finish her work: “For a while I couldn’t work on my thesis, I looked at the pages of the books without seeing the lines of type. I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, I interrogated myself on what to do.” (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). She also recalls the episode of Ischia, as she has news from Lila and the association of ideas make her remember what she has gone through:

I hadn’t thought of the summer on Ischia for a long time: and it made me realize that the happy phase of that vacation had faded, while its unpleasant side had expanded. I discovered that every sound from that time, every scent was repugnant to me, but what in memory, surprisingly, seemed most insupportable, and caused me long crying spells, was the night at the Maronti with Donato Sarratore. Only my suffering for what was happening between Lila and Nino<sup>6</sup> could have driven me to consider it pleasurable. At this distance I understood that that first experience of penetration, in the dark, on the cold sand, with that banal man who was the father of the person I loved had been degrading. I was ashamed of it and that shame was added to other shames, of a different nature, that I was experiencing. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

Her feelings reach a higher level of complexity, as her many kinds of shame get mixed. What at first was described as a pleasurable moment arises in her mind through a different perspective. Probably because of this torment, she starts exploring, through writing, that episode she has ignored for so long. In the excerpt below, she details her writing process,

One morning I bought a graph-paper notebook and began to write, in the third person, about what had happened to me that night on the beach near Barano. Then, still in the third person, I wrote what had happened to me on Ischia. Then I wrote a little about Naples and the neighborhood. Then I

---

<sup>6</sup> During the trip to Ischia, Lila has an affair with Nino, Lenù’s ever longing crush.

changed names and places and situations. Then I imagined a dark force crouching in the life of the protagonist, an entity that had the capacity to weld the world around her, with the colors of the flame of a blowtorch: a blue-violet dome where everything went well for her, shooting sparks, but that soon came apart, breaking up into meaningless gray fragments. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

On the whole, Lenù spends twenty days writing her first novel. She remarks that she saw no one in this period and only left the room to eat. These facts reveal she focused and determined during the creative moment. It's interesting to observe how Lenù feels after writing: "Finally I reread some pages, I didn't like them, and I forgot about it. But I found that I was calmer, as if the shame had passed from me to the notebook. I went back into the world, I quickly finished my thesis, I saw Pietro again." (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE). At first, she does not appreciate her work, however, the process feels almost as a therapeutic exercise, as it is able to relieve her tension and erase her shame. Indeed, this kind of exercise is commonly used in some forms of therapy, as pointed out by Louise DeSalvo, in *Writing as a way of Healing: How telling our stories transform our lives* (1999), where she reveals many experiments point out that writing can be an effective resource to deal with situations that involve some kind of trauma. In order to identify if Lenù's experience was traumatic, a study with a different approach needs to be conducted. This research, however, is detained to analyze the features concerning the Female Künstlerroman presented in the novels.

Lenù's process of publication of the work happens in a distinct way than that of Jo's. During a dinner with Pietro, Lenù gives him the manuscript of her book and declares: "It's a novel," I said, "a one of a kind: only copy, only attempt, only capitulation. I'll never write another one." I added, laughing, "There are even some rather racy parts." (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE) Surprisingly, he gives his manuscript to her mother, who enjoys it very much and sends it to a publisher. The editors approve the text and decide to publish it. That becomes the first official publication of something Lenù writes. It is important to highlight that Pietro's mother, Adele, is an influential intellectual. Therefore, it sets a favorable context for the recognition of the text. However, during the waiting process, another ghost haunts Lenù. She visits Maestra's Oliviero house and finds *The Blue Fairy* there. She rereads it and has the following realization,

I began to read *The Blue Fairy* from the beginning, racing over the pale ink, the handwriting so similar to mine of that time. But already at the first page I began to feel sick to my stomach and soon I was covered with sweat. Only at the end, however, did I admit what I had understood after a few lines. Lila's childish pages were the secret heart of my book. Anyone who wanted to know what gave it warmth and what the origin was of the strong but invisible thread that joined the sentences would have had to go back to that child's packet, ten notebook pages, the rusty pin, the brightly colored cover, the title, and not even a signature. (FERRANTE, 2013, ONLINE)

It is interesting to notice the effect that Lila's piece of writing plays upon her. Even though Lenù is about to have her first novel published, she credits all of her creation to her friend's talent. Although written by Lila during childhood, *The Blue Fairy* acts as a model and great inspiration to Lenù, even in an unconscious way. The impact the friendship with Lila has over Lenù's literary production is only dissolved when both of them reach their elderly years, in the fourth book of the series.

In the third book of the series, *Those Who Live and Those Who Stay*, Lenù experiences a collaboration with Lila, as they write articles to a newspaper, *L'Unità*. In these articles, they denounce the situation of exploitation of the workers of Bruno Soccavo's factory. However, Lila never allows her name to appear on her writings, she agrees only on sharing her ideas, revising and giving feedback on Lenù's writing. Lenù uses her role as a writer to speak out and consequently, gets a bit more famous for that. As an artist heroine, Lenù also faces challenges to produce, as she becomes a wife and a mother, and has to balance all of these roles. Lenù advances on her career, as she writes an essay book, inspired by feminist ideas. On the other hand, all her struggles to write during pregnancy and while taking care of her children are portrayed. She also writes a book inspired by violent episodes which took place in their neighborhood, but it ends up being rejected. Years later, surprisingly, in *The Story of The Lost Child*, the same book is acclaimed by the editors and is published. In the meantime, Lenù recognizes herself as Neapolitan and realizes the neighborhood is actually her great topic to write about. She finally is able to make amends with her origins, as one can see in the passage: "Suddenly I began to look at the city and especially at the neighborhood as an important part of my life; not only should I not dismiss it but it was essential to the success of my work. (FERRANTE, 2015, ONLINE)"



Lenù decides to move back to her neighborhood and embraces her identity, feeling positive about it: “It was a sudden leap, going from distrust to a joyful sense of myself. What I had felt as a precipice not only acquired literary nobility but seemed to me a determined choice of a cultural and political arena.” (FERRANTE, 2015, ONLINE). As a consequence, she perceives the importance she plays in the neighborhood. She is the one who tells the stories for those who do not have a voice. Lenù acts as a speaker for those who cannot express themselves, being even a vehicle to Lila’s ideas, as her friend did not have the same opportunities as she had.

## CONCLUSION

“Nowhere is it written that you can’t do it.”  
Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*

In this research, I have discussed the concept of Künstlerroman, in other words, the Artist Novel. In this subgenre, which is a variety of the Bildungsroman (formation novel), the trajectory of an artist is described. As highlighted by Lago, there are many variations on the Künstlerroman, they can explore the path of a painter, a writer or a musician, being the last one the least common in the narratives. This study centralized itself on comprehending the Künstlerroman that portrays the women writers’ path. In order to do that, I defined the Female Künstlerroman as the outcome of a Bildungsroman with a female artist heroine. There are several differences in the structure and approach of the Female Künstlerroman, if compared to those written by man. While the traditional Künstlerroman portrays the artist's inner conflicts and their process of creation, the Female Künstlerroman goes further and exposes issues concerning gender and class that sometimes work as impediments to the development of the artist heroine.

Moreover, as pointed out by Linda Huf, there are also distinct features between the artist hero, who is portrayed as passive, sensitive and shy (usually seen as feminine traits); and the artist heroine, depicted as active, strong, fearless (usually considered masculine traits). It is possible to identify these masculine traits in Jo, from *Little Women*, and Lila, from the *Neapolitan Novels*. However, these traits may be depicted in a more balanced form, as they do appear in Lenù, who tries to maintain stability and harmony through actions. Overall, the three artist heroines in the novels analyzed play versatile roles (daughter, sister, friend, mother, artist, entrepreneur), adapting themselves to face life challenges.

Lago proposes the following stages for the Künstlerroman narratives: 1) the introduction to the artist and his environment; 2) the artist’s creation process; 3) the insertion of a challenge that harms or threatens the artists’ work; 4) the reaction of the artist towards this challenge. It is possible to identify all these phases in *Little Women*

and *Good Wives*, since the novels present a linear-narrative. Unlike *Little Women*, the stages of the *Künstlerroman* are not presented linearly in the *Neapolitan Novels*. While the narrator, Elena Greco, recalls the story of her friendship with Raffaella Cerullo (Lila), she builds her narrative from fragments and memories that come and go, sometimes mixing the accounting of events with her own reflections. Moreover, as the novels portray the realities of a handful of families, it is a challenge to identify only one conflict at a time, as they seem to be several and to happen simultaneously. It also may be understood as a consequence on how the genre *Bildungsroman* is explored in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Because of these features, I consider that the Female *Künstlerromane* novels from the nineteenth century present a more formal and linear structure, similar to the traditional *Künstlerroman*. The Female *Künstlerroman* from the twentieth and twenty-first century, on the other hand, tends to present a non-linear and innovative structure. As in recent times, the *Bildungsroman* novels (being the *Künstlerroman* included) portray the challenges of people who usually would not have a voice or a means to tell their stories.

The question of space is proven to have an important role in the *Künstlerroman*, as it is necessary for the artist's creations. Libraries and schools are much valued in both series analyzed, because they provide the girls opportunities to explore different worlds through the books. Furthermore, they represent a kind of home, as they feel safe and comfortable around this kind of environment. Both Jo and Lenù undergo trips and a stay at a different city, where they become more mature and prepared for other life challenges. During the time they spend in big cities, away from their family, they benefit from a room of their own and (at some point) are able to produce their literature. There, they meet their future husbands and get acquainted with more people, which may be of help in their writing career.

As Woolf (2004) highlights in *A Room of One's Own*, writing is cheap, if contrasted to painting or playing an instrument. Pens and papers are affordable and accessible items. Even though the girls live in historical moments of conflicts, which result in poverty and scarcity of resources, they do manage to have notebooks to write. Because of that, they see writing as a way to make money. This way they would be able to provide for themselves and their families, being able to experience material comforts (the cases of Jo and Lenù), besides the money can furnish some kind of protection from the neighborhood's violence and camorristas (Lila's case).

It is still worthy to highlight that characters of both works have undergone challenging times: Alcott's little women face the impacts of the American Civil War and Ferrante's Neapolitan girls grow up in a poor and violent environment, with a strong desire to change their situation. Because of that both Jo and Lenù, at many times, write for the money. Having a father in the war and a diseased sister, Jo feels it is her duty to do something to help maintain her family. Having dedicated all her life to studies, Lenù sees no other choice beyond writing and tries to do her best to deliver sellable works when she goes through a financial challenge after she puts an end to her relationship with Nino. While men artists are much preoccupied with the quality of their work, women are worried with income, which has to do with their survival. The Künstlerroman novels examined in this study portray this dilemma women writers go through: write to sell vs. write for the sake of making art. Writing has been one of the first professions open for women, as Woolf points out, and the characters from the works analyzed realize this possibility and seek to make a life on it. This is especially the case of the Ferrante's Neapolitan girls, as they become aware of Louisa May Alcott's life, a concrete example that writing can change a woman's financial situation. At the setting of 1950, much more women had ventured themselves in writing and succeeded, while in the mid-nineteenth century the examples of women authors were fewer. Some very important names were starting to pop out, such as the Brontë sisters, but like Jo, the authors used the resource of a male pen name in order to have their work published. In this way, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* started to open paths for future writers to be, as Patti Smith, J.K. Rowling, Simone de Beauvoir and Elena Ferrante.

## REFERENCES

- ALCOTT, Louisa May. *Good Wives* (1869) in: *Little Women*. San Diego: Word Cloud Classics, 2012.
- ALCOTT, Louisa May. *Jo's Boys*. New York: Bentam Classics, 1995.
- ALCOTT, Louisa May. *Little Men*. London: Puffin Books, 2016.
- ALCOTT, Louisa May. *Little Women*. London: Wordsworth, 2018.
- ALCOTT, Louisa May. *Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, and Journals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- AMICIS, Edmondo de. *Heart*. Translated by Isabel Florence Hapgood. eBook Kindle, 2021
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.
- BACHELARD, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- BAERDEMAEKER, Ine D. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The 20th-Century Development of the Female Künstlerroman*. M.A. Thesis. Faculty of Arts and Philosophy Ghent University. Gent, p.108, 2011
- BARKER, Deborah. *Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature Portraits of the Woman Artist*. London: Bucknell University Press, 2000.
- BALZAC, Honoré. *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Translated by Arthur Coleman Danto. New York: New York Review of Books, 2000.
- BEAUVOIR, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by: Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevalier. New York: Vintage, 2011. [ePub Edition.]
- BRONTË, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 2012
- BUNYAN, John. *Pilgrim's Progress*. New York: Dover Publications, 2003.
- CAMPELLO, Eliane T. A. *O Künstlerroman de Autoria Feminina: A Poética da Artista em Atwood, Tyler, Piñon e Valenzuela*. Rio Grande: Editora da FURG, 2003.
- CHOPIN, Kate. *The Awakening*. New York: Avon Books, 1982
- CISNEROS, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Paperback, 2009.
- DESMAWATI, Eka, "Analysis of Feminism in the novel of Little Women by Louisa May Alcott." *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol.6. (2), 2018, p.91-96

DESALVO, Louise. *Writing as a way of Healing: How telling our stories transform our lives*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

DICKENS, Charles. *The Pickwick Papers*. London: Penguin classics, 2000.

DICKENS, Charles. *David Copperfield*. London: Penguin, 2004.

EISELEIN, Gregory. "Reading a Feminist Romance: Literary Critics and *Little Women*." *Children's Literature*, vol. 28, 2000, pp. 238-244.

ENGEL, Manfred. "Variants of the Romantic 'Bildungsroman' (With a Short Note on the 'Artist Novel')." In: *Romantic Prose Fiction*. Org: GILLESPIE, ENGEL, DIERTELE. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2008). p. 263-295.

FERRANTE, Elena. *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2016.

FERRANTE, Elena. *My Brilliant Friend*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2012.

FERRANTE, Elena. *The Lost Daughter*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2008.

FERRANTE, Elena. *The Story of a New Name*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2013.

FERRANTE, Elena. *The Story of the Lost Child*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2015.

FERRANTE, Elena. *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa, 2014.

FERREIRA, Milena V. S. "Olhar-se no Espelho: O Ethos Narrativo em *A Amiga Genial*, de Elena Ferrante". In: *Circulação, Tramas e Sentidos na Literatura*, 2018. XVI CONGRESSO INTERNACIONAL ABRALIC, 2018.

FETTERLEY, Judith. "Impersonating "little women": The radicalism of Alcott's *behind a mask*", *Women's Studies* Vol.10:1 p.1-14, 1983.

FOOTE, Stephanie. "Resentful Little Women: Gender and Class Feeling in Louisa May Alcott." *Critical Essay*, v.:32 n.:1 p. 63, 2005.

GOETHE, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Translated by Michael Hulse. London: Penguin, 1989.

GOETHE, Johann Wolfgang von. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Translated by Thomas Carlyle. New York: A.L. Burt, 2011.

GOGOL, Nikolai. *The Mysterious Portrait*. Translator Unidentified. Moscow: Dodo Press, 2018

GRAHAM, Sarah. *A History of the Bildungsroman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

GUTIERREZ, Vanessa C. *"I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy": Jo March's deconstruction of "The Cult of True Womanhood" and her quest for self-determination in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*. B.A dissertation. Departament De Filologia Anglesa I De Germanística, Universitat Autònoma De Barcelona. Barcelona, 57 p., 2021.

HEINSE, Wilhelm. *Ardinghella und die glückseligen Inseln*. Norderstedt: Hansebooks, 2017.

HUF, Linda. *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Woman: The Writer as a Heroine in American Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983.

JOYCE, James. *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Penguin, 2003.

JONNES, Suzanne W. *Writing the Woman Artist: Essays on Poetics, Politics, and Portraiture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

LAGO, Izabela B. *Do Künstlerroman às Narrativas de Artista: Um Estudo Conceitual*. M. A. thesis. Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo. São Paulo, 195 p., 2017.

LANGSTON, Jessica. *Writing Herself In: Mother Fiction and the Female Künstlerroman*. M.A. Thesis, English Department, McGill University. Montreal, 98p., 2004.

MUIÑO, Elena C. *Creative Muse: The Young Female Artist and The Role of Arts in Women's Künstlerromans*. M.A. Thesis Departamento de Filoloxía Inglesa, Universidade da Coruña. Coruña, 66p., 2017

MULLENNEAUX, Lisa. *Naples' Little Women: The fiction of Elena Ferrante*. eBook Kindle, 2016.

NOVALIS. *Henry Von Ofterdingen: A Romance*. New York: Dover, 2015.

PATMORE, Coventry. "The Angel in The House". The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2014. URL. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4099/4099-h/4099-h.htm>. Access on March 13th, 2022.

PENNEBAKER, J; BEALL, S. *Confronting a Traumatic Event: Toward an Understanding of Inhibition and Disease*. In: Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 1986.

PLATH, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005.

PROUST, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time*. New York: Big Cheese Books. Translated by Terence Kilmartin and C. K. Scott Moncrieff, 2020

ROZZO, Mark. "Little Women at 150: How Louisa May Alcott's Masterpiece Fostered Y.A. Literature and Inspired Endless Adaptations". *Vanity Fair*, 2018. Available at: <<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/09/little-women-at-150-how-louisa-may-alcott-fostered-ya-literature>> Access on Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter: The Complete Collection (1-7)*. London: Pottermore Publishing, 2015.

SALINGER, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little Brown Company, 1991.

SHAKESPEARE, William. *Hamlet*. Dois irmãos: Clube de Literatura Clássica, 2020.

SHELLY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2015.

SHOWALTER, Elaine. *A Room of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1977.

SMITH, Patti. *Just Kids*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.

STEWART, Grace. *A New Mythos: The Novel of The Artist as a Heroine, 1877 - 1977*. St. Alban's, Vt.: Eden Press, 1979.

*The Lost Daughter*. Dir: Maggie Gyllenhaal, 2021

*Troubling Love*. Dir: Mario Martone, 1995

TOLKIEN, J. R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. New York: Harper Collings, 1995

WOOLF, Virginia. "Professions for Women" In: *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. (1931) Ebooks Adelaide. University of Adelaide. 2015.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin, 2004.

WOOLF, Virginia. *Orlando*. London: Collins Classics, 2014.

WOOLF, Virginia. *Professions for Women*. In: *Death of the Moth, and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1974.

WOOLF, Virginia. *To the lighthouse*. London: Wordsworth, 1994.

YOUNG, Elizabeth. "A Wound of One's Own: Louisa May Alcott's Civil War Fiction." *American Quarterly*, v.:48 n.:3 p.:439, 1996.

ZOLA, Émile. *The Masterpiece*. Translated by Thomas Walton. New York: Oxford World Press, 2008.