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# Undergraduate Dissertation

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019): A Feminist  
Reinterpretation of a Classic

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# 1. ABSTRACT

## 1.1. Abstract (English)

This dissertation focuses on the film *Little Women* (2019), directed by Greta Gerwig, and proposes a close analysis of it from the perspective of contemporary feminism. The innovations introduced in this latest adaptation enable a comparison with previous versions of the original novel. This dissertation carries out an analysis of the narrative techniques employed by the film, as well as of the representation of the main female characters from a feminist perspective. In this way, the analysis delves into Gerwig's new contributions to a well-known nineteenth-century novel and its various film adaptations.

**Key words:** *Little Women*, Greta Gerwig, feminism, adaptation, narrative.

## 1.2. Resumen (Español)

Este trabajo se centra en la película *Mujercitas* (2019), dirigida por Greta Gerwig, y ofrece un análisis de esta obra cinematográfica desde el punto de vista del feminismo contemporáneo. Las innovaciones introducidas en esta reciente adaptación facilitan la comparativa con anteriores versiones de la novela original. Este trabajo realiza un análisis de las técnicas narrativas empleadas por la película y de la representación de los principales personajes femeninos desde un enfoque feminista. De esta manera, se incide en las nuevas aportaciones de la directora Greta Gerwig a una conocida novela del siglo dieciocho respecto a sus distintas adaptaciones cinematográficas.

**Palabras clave:** *Mujercitas*, Greta Gerwig, feminismo, adaptación, narrativa.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The latest version of *Little Women*, based on the book of the same title written by Louisa May Alcott and published in 1868, was directed by Greta Gerwig and released in 2019. The film revolves around the lives of the March sisters: Meg (Emma Watson), Jo (Saoirse Ronan), Beth (Eliza Scanlen) and Amy (Florence Pugh). This story explores their individual and collective fights, their aspirations and challenges in an adverse socio-cultural context after the US Civil War in Massachusetts during the nineteenth century.

Gerwig's adaptation explores questions of female independence and empowerment, bringing the story of the March sisters closer to contemporary audiences. She captures the essence of the original work while providing the narrative with her distinctive style and sensibility. Through her directional choices, including the use of non-linear storytelling and the emphasis on the sisters' individual journeys, Gerwig builds a narrative that has an impact on audiences, inviting them to re-evaluate their own ideas on gender roles and personal ambitions.

In this dissertation, I intend to explore the main themes and cinematic techniques employed by Greta Gerwig in her adaptation of *Little Women*, with a particular focus on the representation of women from a twenty-first-century feminist perspective. By analysing the different approaches to gender, sisterhood and individualism, this study seeks to uncover how Gerwig rebuilds the novel for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, this dissertation will compare the 2019 adaptation of *Little Women* with a selection of previous film adaptations, highlighting the evolution of the feminist discourse and representation of women.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1. Women in the Film Industry

*Little Women* depicts the lives of the March sisters through their adolescence and womanhood. This latest film adaptation of the nineteenth-century novel reveals a more feminist sensibility in the depiction of women, especially in comparison to previous adaptations. The confrontation between social expectations and the girls' ambitions offers a critique on the limitations imposed on women in the nineteenth century and brings these concerns closer to contemporary society.

Moreover, historical contexts condition the representation of women in films in terms of the social expectations, gender roles and cultural norms imposed on them. In the context of the first wave of feminism (late eighteenth century to late nineteenth century), women began to fight for their rights and Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* became the foundational work of the feminist movement (Varela 2019, 30). In this first wave, women mainly demanded the right to education, the right to work and marriage rights (Varela 37). *Little Women*'s novel, set in this historical context, portrays some of these rights, such as the right to education. However, it goes a step further by presenting women with diverse traits regarding their autonomy and agency (Dewi and Ishlah Medina 2021, 114).

Since the beginning of feminism in the eighteenth century, women have moved forward in their achievement of rights as individuals, building a more equal society in terms of gender. Similarly, the 2019 adaptation of *Little Women* symbolizes a step forward in female representation (Dewi and Ishlah Medina 115). Although the film's story is set in the nineteenth century, it was released during the so-called fourth wave of feminism. Accordingly, this *Little Women* adaptation portrays some of these demands

by enhancing female representation and visibility in fields dominated by men. Therefore, and in contrast with the original novel or previous adaptations, this adaptation puts the focus on the character of Jo and her ambition to become an independent female writer.

The complexity of the 2019 film adaptation of *Little Women* lies in the combination of both backgrounds: the context of the original novel and the context of the film. While the story itself is set in the nineteenth-century, the social context of this adaptation may be inserted within the fourth wave of feminism. Gerwig seeks to make a significant impact in contemporary audiences with her adaptation, achieving a balance between the two feminist waves presenting the March sisters in a different, more progressive, light than previous adaptations.

### **3.2. Greta Gerwig: A Female Filmmaker in a Male Industry**

Greta Gerwig is an influential figure in contemporary cinema who has emerged as a role model for feminism and female authorship (Warner 2023, 13). Born in Sacramento, California, Gerwig's journey into filmmaking shows her interest in issues of womanhood and female experiences. As a female filmmaker, she seeks to explore the feminine voice in a patriarchal world (Grant 2001, 116).

As a filmmaker, her debut with *Lady Bird* (2017) resonated deeply with audiences, capturing the essence of adolescent struggles, mother-daughter dynamics and the quest for identity. In this film, Gerwig deals with the female experience, providing her perspective as a woman, which allows her to connect with the characters and the story being told (Warner 9). Her most recent film, *Barbie* (2023), signified a cultural revolution, becoming the highest-grossing film in the US (\$526.3 million) by a women director according to Billboard (Grein 2023). The film intends to create a feminist

utopia that reveals the oppression suffered by contemporary women and their impossibility to fulfil society's unrealistic expectations (Yakali 2024, 201). As the character played by America Ferrara states, "It is literally impossible to be a woman." Gerwig tried to ironically transform the iconic doll into a symbol of female empowerment and modern femininity, while being aware of the stereotypes and beauty standards the doll represents (Yakali 198).

Gerwig's work reflects the essence of feminist storytelling, creating narratives that celebrate the complexities of women's lives. Her contributions to cinema serve as a model for future generations and as a testament to the power of storytelling in shaping our understanding of the world. In an industry often dominated by male perspectives, Gerwig creates rich accounts of female experiences.

## 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Narrative Structure: Building a Non-linear Temporality

The narrative structure of a film refers to its structural framework, to the way in which the story and the plot build the film (Reich 2017, 33). Briefly explained, the story consists of the events of the narrative as they occur in chronological order from beginning to end, while the plot is how the story is told, i.e. the explicitly-presented fabula events arranged in a certain order (Bordwell 1985, 49). Therefore, the narrative structure can be either linear or non-linear (Reich 33). We understand a linear structure as one in which events appear chronologically, although this does not imply that there cannot be ellipses in the story. On the other hand, in a non-linear structure, events are portrayed in a non-chronological order (Kim et al. 2018, 595). A non-linear structure implies “complex temporal disruptions” (Kim 595) which may be guided through different aspects of mise-en-scène, such as makeup, costumes, props or light.

Both the 1949 adaptation of *Little Women* directed by Mervyn LeRoy and Gillian Armstrong’s from 1994 follow a linear structure, which echoes the structure of Alcott’s novel. In contrast, Greta Gerwig’s 2019 adaptation introduces a change from previous adaptations: a non-linear plot structure. This structure not only provides depth to the character development of each of the March sisters, but also serves to focus on the creation of *Little Women* as a book because Jo’s (Saoirse Ronan) writing journey is used as the main narrative thread. Considering that *Little Women* is partly autobiographical, this structure presents a closer relation between the novel and the author’s life (Wang 2021, 44).

The film first introduces each of the sisters and their present situation individually, giving the initial impression that they may not have any relation between



them. Nevertheless, the film's non-linear narrative structure is made explicit when we reach a flashback scene starring the four young sisters together and stating that those events occurred "7 years earlier" (Figure 1). This first flashback advances the structure that the film is going to follow, as they are recurrent in the course of the film. We could say that the film has two different timelines: one for their teenage years and another for adulthood. Furthermore, flashbacks help viewers to better understand references within the film, such as the drawing Amy (Florence Pugh) makes of Laurie (Timothée Chalamet) at the beach. During the beach scene (1:07:27-1:09:05), Amy is framed drawing a picture of Laurie, and some years later she hands him this picture. Nevertheless, in the film this period of time is shortened due to the non-linear temporality, which allows to place the two scenes closer in time. With a linear narrative structure, these two scenes would not have been so close together in the narrative and it would have been harder to understand the reference.



Figure 1: First flashback scene.

In order to comprehend the construction of the different flashbacks and narrative structure of the film, we need to consider mise-en-scène, including light, colours and costumes. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines mise-en-scène as "the arrangement of actors and scenery on a stage for a theatrical production". Mise-en-scène is a French borrowing for which the literal translation would be "the action of putting onto the stage". Therefore, we may infer that nothing on stage is a coincidence but is arranged.

Gerwig's *Little Women* uses mise-en-scène to visually render the differences in temporality. Concerning costume design, it reflects the film's historical period: 1860s Massachusetts during the American Civil War. In Gerwig's adaptation, the costumes were designed by Jacqueline Durran, who captured the essence of the era and each character's individuality and socioeconomic status (Durran 2019). This is best exemplified by the March sisters, who wear modest but distinctive and colourful dresses, and the Laurence family, whose garments point to their wealthy lifestyle (Figures 2 and 3). The costumes undergo subtle changes in relation to the development of different characters, such as Jo's journey from a young dreamy girl in the flashbacks to the more refined mature woman she becomes later in life. Unlike Meg (Emma Watson) and Amy, who represent the proper married women of the period, Jo never wears a corset in the film. As Jacqueline Durran states (2019), Jo's clothes reflect her nonconformist spirit, such as her dress without corset, which provides her with freedom.



Figures 2 and 3: A comparison in terms of costumes between the March sisters (on the left) and the Laurence family (on the right).

The use of light and colours also becomes central to this adaptation. Gerwig pointed out her desire for the teenage scenes to have a “golden glow” (2019). With this, Gerwig shows her wish to make something different from previous adaptations of the novel. Accordingly, flashbacks mainly have warm colours, while the scenes on adulthood have colder hues (Figures 4 and 5). While white and blue are predominant in present-day scenes, the warmer colours, consisting mainly of yellow and orange tones,

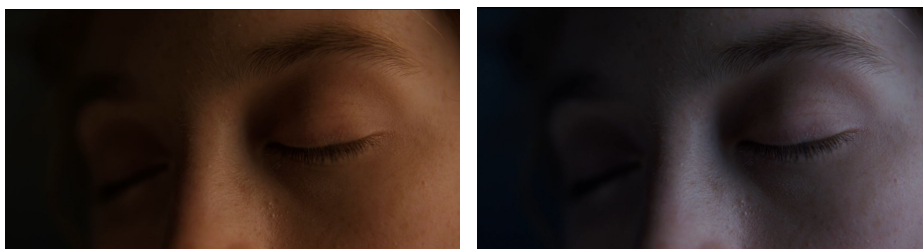
provide a warm and cosy interpretation of a past full of nostalgia. These orange scenes seem to be like memories of a golden past, which are usually “better” than the “colder” and more realistic present.



Figures 4 and 5: A comparison between the two timelines in the film, the past (left) and the present (right).

The film uses these contrasts in mise-en-scène to emphasize the differences and similarities between the storylines. One example of this contrast is when Jo wakes up after having slept next to Beth’s (Eliza Scanlen) bed for the night, which occurs twice. The first time (1:27:59-1:28:28), the sisters are still young and Beth has caught the scarlet fever. Jo wakes up worried that something has occurred to Beth, as she is not in her bed. There is a focus on her movement without any more music than the sound of her steps going downstairs to find Marmee (Laura Dern). The scene downstairs is finely composed, with Beth standing behind Marmee in the kitchen and shot from Jo’s point of view. This way, the viewers can feel Jo’s relief when she proves her sister is doing well. This composition helps viewers to connect with the story and the characters’ emotions. Jo’s relief is also emphasized by the use of music, which is melancholic and optimistic at the same time, linking this cheerful moment with their father’s arrival and the Christmas family dinner, which are the scenes right after Beth proves to be well. By contrast, the second time Jo wakes up next to Beth’s empty bed, although similar, offers a different perspective (1:29:35-1:30:33). The opening is framed in exactly the same way: a close-up of Jo’s eyes opening (Figures 6 and 7). The only manner in which they

can be differentiated is by the use of colour, since, following the style of all the flashback scenes, the former has warmer tones. Even if worried, Jo is not as anxious this time. For that reason, the noise she makes when going downstairs is not as emphasized. She seems calmer and even prepared for the reality she may have to face: Beth's death. The rhythm is much slower than in the previous scene, and the cold colour palette provides a sad overtone to the scene announcing the news that would come next. As in the previous scene, music is of great importance, as it also emphasizes the sadness in the story. If we closely compare the music in both scenes, it is the same soundtrack but slower, connecting both scenes. These two parallel scenes offer two opposite views on Beth: in the first, she is alive and, in the second, she has already died. In the flashback, the colour palette and the music announce an optimistic ending, while in the latter they advance a tragic ending.



Figures 6 and 7: A comparison between a flashback scene and a present-time scene.

The 1994 adaptation also includes these two scenes but in a rather different manner. Firstly, they are placed chronologically, and therefore many events occur in-between (55:38-56:20, 1:37:08-1:38:03). Secondly, Jo is not in the same room as Beth in the first scene, so she goes downstairs to find out if her health has improved. Hannah (Florence Paterson) is in the corridor crying, in contrast with the 2019 adaptation in which she (Jayne Houdyshell) is in the kitchen with Marmee, implying that, even if she is the maid, she is part of the family, somehow cancelling any hints of enslavement. In the 1994 film, when Jo goes to Beth's room, she finds Marmee and Meg (Emma

Watson) feeding Beth. The construction of this scene is similar to Gerwig's adaptation, as Jo goes downstairs and finds Beth sitting on a chair and eating. Nevertheless, the scene in which Jo realises Beth has died is constructed very differently in both films. In Armstrong's adaptation, this second scene does not parallel the first one visually. Jo is lying next to Beth's bed when she hears a loud noise and approaches the window. When she returns to her bed, Beth's body lies lifeless. Beth's death is thus portrayed in a more direct and cold way. By contrast, Gerwig's film deals with Beth's death in a more indirect way, as it is not revealed until the funeral, which lets viewers imagine it is Beth's. Gerwig builds these scenes without any dialogue, with music guiding viewers through the different scenes concerning Beth's death. Moreover, the use of flashbacks, as well as the use of parallel framing and the differences in colour and lighting, allows Gerwig to provide an explicit contrast between the scenes. She builds this film with a distinctive sensibility that focuses on the character's emotions and experiences, especially Jo's, as will be analysed in the following section.

#### **4.2. The March Sisters: Gerwig's Adaptation as a Feminist Manifesto**

Greta Gerwig rebuilds Alcott's novel by creating what we might call a feminist fantasy. According to Kelly Hankin, feminist films "explicitly or implicitly challenge, rather than subscribe to, dominant representations of female identity" (2007, 60), therefore differentiating themselves from traditional masculine stories, commonly directed by men. The representation of complex female characters often depends on giving female filmmakers more opportunities, as they are more inclined to feature central female characters (Kunsey 2019, 28). Moreover, the context in which a film is produced is also significant. This is the case of *Little Women*, a book of which almost every generation has received its own film adaptation.

The story of the March sisters can already feel quite daring for its portrayal of a (almost) solo-women family in the nineteenth century, at a time when female independence was heavily questioned. Nevertheless, it offers a glimpse of the lives of many women at a time when men were at war. The original novel could be understood as a manual for young women to suppress their own desires and ambitions so as to become the stereotypical Victorian wives and mothers (Hooper 2019, 421). Yet, despite focusing on family, tradition and self-reliance, it also portrays some progressive and feminist beliefs, such as the need for women to look for some sense of agency. Moreover, Gerwig's adaptation, released in the aftermath of the #MeToo Moment, commits to feminist ideals and focuses on "girl power" (Hooper 423). The March sisters are represented on screen in a manner that resonates with modern audiences, offering a portrayal of real-life women with common problems.

Meg March, played by Emma Watson, is the eldest of the four sisters. She is portrayed as a young woman with a caring nature who struggles with the sacrifices of raising a family. During childhood, she looks after her younger sisters to the point that Jo tells her that she "plays mother" (26:49-26:50). Nevertheless, domestic and family life is the life she seeks. In a way, she conforms to social expectations by becoming a wife and then a mother, but, as she claims, this is the life she desires. On her wedding day, Jo tries to persuade her to escape from marriage but Meg wants to marry John because she loves him. In contrast with Jo's anxiousness, Meg seems calm and sure about her decisions, saying "Just because my dreams are different than yours doesn't mean they are unimportant" (1:32:05-1:32:09). She refers here to how women have the right to follow different paths. Even if she chooses a rather traditional path by marrying young, she does not feel the burden of doing so for social pressure, but for love: "I want to get married [...] because I love him" (1:31:55-1:31:59), "I want a home and a family

and I'm willing to work and struggle, but I want to do it with John" (1:32:11-1:32:19). In contrast with previous adaptations, Gerwig builds a character who struggles to find her true self. For Meg, growing up is not easy, as she is surrounded either by rich girls who marry for money or by girls who are determined to pursue their artistic careers, like Jo and Amy. Yet, she never questions her decision to marry John.

As a young girl, Meg loved pretty and luxurious things, including social gatherings and parties. She loved to buy expensive goods, such as nice dresses. However, as she grows up, she switches the expensive dresses for family life. Gerwig's adaptation portrays Meg maturing from a young artist to a wife and mother. Moreover, she gives up her dream of having a rich family so as to marry for true love. During adulthood, Meg seems to struggle with life, especially in economic terms, never looking as happy as she did in her childhood. Even if she wants to buy expensive dresses, she prioritises her family and tries to do what is best for them, taking care of her children and returning home when Beth sickens. It is her caring nature, and not the social expectations placed on her, what, in the film's discourse, drives her to become a wife and a mother.

Gerwig's adaptation underlines Meg's desire for economic and personal stability, highlighting her aspirations and struggles with her family life. By contrast, previous adaptations often relegate Meg to a more traditional and domestic role. Meg's decision to marry for love rather than economic stability endows her with a certain agency and self-determination that previous adaptations lack. In the 1949 adaptation, Meg is often portrayed as more compliant and conforming to social norms, a fact that emphasizes her role as devoted daughter and wife. Although some elements of Meg's strength and resilience are also present in this adaptation, they are somehow overshadowed by a more traditional portrayal of femininity and domesticity. The 1994

adaptation also presents Meg's struggles with economic limitations and social expectations, but Gerwig's adaptation goes further by giving Meg agency and freedom in shaping her own destiny, as well as challenging stereotypes of femininity and womanhood. By comparing Meg March across different adaptations, it becomes evident that Meg's evolution reflects shifts in the feminist discourse and the exploration of women's roles and identities that are the result of the context in which each film was produced.

Jo March, played by Saoirse Ronan, is the second of the four sisters. She is portrayed as a strongwoman who fights to be heard as a female writer in a world led by men. She lives in a society which is not in accordance with her ideals of becoming an independent woman. Her determination leads her to follow her dreams and desires even if it is not what society expects from her. The nineteenth-century society wants pleasant women, wives and mothers, but she rejects these ideas to the point of rejecting her suitor, Laurie. Jo's words during Laurie's proposal reflect the love she feels for him, but as a friend: "I can't love you as you want me to" (1:37:17-1:37:19). Nevertheless, Jo's determination to be an independent woman is stronger than her emotions: "I don't believe I will ever marry. I'm happy as I am and I love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up" (1:39:01-1:39:10). In contrast with Jo, Aunt March (Meryl Streep) epitomises the traditional nineteenth-century society, the one which believed women needed to be either married or rich, as it is her case. Moreover, she truly believes that "Jo is a lost cause" (1:22:53-1:22:55) because she intends to make her own way in the world without relying on marriage. Jo does not want to become a proper lady as established by society and Aunt March's ideas. She defies the conventions expected of a woman at the time.



Nevertheless, she is persistent during the whole film, and constantly expresses her prospects of making a living through writing. Her adventurous personality takes her to New York, where she would start a new life. Moreover, producing her own art and becoming an independent woman is more valuable to her than marrying, and that is how she reveals it to Aunt March: “I intend to make my own way in the world. [...] There are precious few ways for women to make money” (35:24-35:50). At the end of the film, she achieves her dreams and gets her novel published, but having to make sacrifices: she believes that the “right ending” for her book is having an unmarried protagonist, while Mr. Dashwood (Tracy Letts), the editor, forces her to change the unconventional ending and marry the protagonist. The fact that Jo has to surrender to this requirement when publishing her book is a reference to her own life because she ends up kissing Professor Bhaer (Louis Garrel), implying that they may, indeed, get married in the end. Gerwig’s adaptation emphasizes a parallel between Jo March and Alcott herself, who was also forced to make such a change in her original *Little Women* novel (Grady 2019).

Jo is an adventurous woman who is willing to take risks, traits commonly associated with masculinity. Her change to a more masculine hair and clothes reinforces these ideas. She decides to get a haircut in order to obtain some money for her family, which can be read as a symbol of her rebellious personality. Another symbol that reinforces this idea of masculinity is her clothes. By contrast with her sisters, Jo never wears a corset in the whole film, reflecting her nonconformist spirit and her search for freedom (Durran 2019). Moreover, this choice in clothes also reflects her prospects of staying unmarried, contrasting with her sisters, who start wearing more elegant dresses as they enter adulthood.

Gerwig's adaptation portrays Jo as an independent and ambitious young woman, embodying feminist ideals in her pursuit of becoming a writer. Her desire to write and achieve independence challenges social norms and gender expectations of the time. Nevertheless, her choices drive the narrative, highlighting female empowerment. In the 1949 adaptation, Jo is portrayed as spirited and independent, but her journey is somehow softened by a more romantic view of womanhood and a focus on traditional family values. Her aspirations to become a writer are sometimes overshadowed by her relationships with male characters. In other words, the focus is on Jo's love story and not so much on her journey as a writer. The 1994 adaptation offers a more subtle portrayal of Jo's struggles and aspirations, placing greater emphasis on her writing desires and the challenges she faces as a woman in a male-dominated society. She writes but not so explicitly because her journey to get published is not shown. However, Gerwig's adaptation takes Jo's character to another level, presenting her as a modern feminist icon who stays true to herself and her ambitions. She rejects social expectations of marriage and family life in favour of her literary desires. This decision to remain single and pursue a career as a writer reflects the influence of the contemporary feminist discourse on Jo's character, highlighting her independence, self-determination and refusal to be confined to a traditional gender role. Moreover, the main focus of this adaptation is Jo's development as a writer, in a way her becoming the main protagonist of the film.

Beth March, played by Eliza Scanlen, is the third of the four sisters. She is portrayed as an innocent and introspective young woman who fights against her deathly illness. Even though she is fighting for her own survival, she does not think twice about helping others and her family. She enjoys her life at home and only wishes for her family to be together: "My wish [for Christmas] is to have us all to be together with

father and mother in this house” (26:30-26:33). Moreover, Beth is almost only shown within the house. Her character can therefore be linked with the Victorian era’s ideal of “The Angel in the House”. Virginia Woolf described these women as charming, pure, unselfish and sacrificed who “preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others” (1996 [1931], 1346). In addition, she gets sick while helping others, as she gets infected with scarlet fever. This illness becomes deathly and she will ultimately die. This death can be metaphorically interpreted as the death of the ideal of “The Angel in the House”, as a new type of woman emerges, one who seeks independence and to work outside the house.

Beth’s interests range from family life to music. At the house, Beth develops her artistic talents. Her great musical skills are portrayed in Gerwig’s adaptation in scenes where Beth plays difficult compositions on the piano. Moreover, it is thanks to this mastery that she develops a friendship with Mr. Laurence (Chris Cooper). It is only when he asks for someone to play his daughter’s piano that she steps up and stops hiding behind Hannah, the family’s maid. In a way, Beth hides behind her because Hannah feels like home for her and this is one of the few scenes in which Beth is seen outside the house, so she needs to feel safe. However, she accepts to play the piano under one condition: that no one will hear her. This acceptance is an important breakthrough because she only plays for her own family and in their family house, where she feels safe. In fact, there are various scenes along the film in which she can be seen in the background playing the piano going almost unnoticed. Therefore, accepting Mr. Laurence’s offer and following her artistic dreams seems more important to her than the embarrassment she feels because of this conversation with him.

In this adaptation of *Little Women*, Gerwig’s sensitivity to portray the complexities of the female experience is reflected in Beth. She is a gentle and

empathetic girl deeply connected to her family and music. Her illness is not sensationalized but rather serves as a narrative line that highlights love, loss and resilience. In addition, traditional feminine qualities such as empathy and emotional intelligence are emphasized, as well as Beth's artistic dreams. The 1949 adaptation portrays Beth as more fragile and passive. She represents the poor figure whose suffering brings the family together. Her kindness and selflessness are overshadowed by a more sentimental portrayal of her character. In the 1994 adaptation, Beth's love for music and the impact of her illness on her family is also explored. However, Gerwig's adaptation goes further in humanizing Beth, presenting her as a grown-up woman with dreams beyond her illness.

Amy March, played by Florence Pugh, is the youngest of the four sisters. She is portrayed as an ambitious young woman seeking to succeed when she grows up. Even if she is the youngest, her goals in life are as big as her sisters'. Since childhood, Amy is portrayed as a strong-headed girl who dreams of being the greatest artist in the world and belonging to a higher society. She is so determined to achieve her goal in life that she claims she would become "great or nothing" (1:04:01-1:04:02). In other words, she has a clear vision and plan in life to be the artist she dreams of. Both Amy and Jo know what they want in life and share an artistic passion, but the difference between them lies in the way they pursue those dreams: none of them is fond of patriarchy, but Amy uses it for her own benefit. She is embarrassed of her condition as part of a poor family, so she wants to marry a wealthy man. Not only does she want to change her condition, but she also knows she will never be able to earn a living on her own. She understands marriage as an economic transaction and takes advantage of it. By contrast, Jo prefers to fight social rules and avoid marriage, making a living on her own with hard work. Both believe that society is not fair towards women, but Amy learns to shape those

impositions to her liking so that, at the end, she stays on what society considers to be the good side.

Amy does not only want to take advantage of a wealthy marriage, so as to become a great artist, but she also takes advantage of Aunt March. Aunt March represents the voice of the traditional nineteenth-century society which wanted women to marry and be good wives and mothers. Amy does not like her aunt, but, by staying at her house, Aunt March fixes her attention on the youngest March sister. In fact, Aunt March believes she is “the family’s hope”, hope for marrying and becoming a “proper young lady” (1:22:41-1:22:51). Even if Aunt March spends time with both Jo and Amy, she considers Jo a lost cause. Therefore, as Amy seems to be more in accord with her ideals, or at least she behaves better in front of her, she becomes Aunt March’s favourite. As a result of this and Amy’s manipulation skills, Aunt March will take Amy to Europe, instead of Jo. In the end, Amy acquires everything she desires and develops into a woman with a clear ambition: she knew how wealthy and powerful her aunt was and understood the importance of being kind to her.

In this adaptation, Amy’s desires to become a great artist and secure economic stability through marriage depict her as a complex and ambitious young woman. She challenges stereotypes of women’s roles as artists, knowing that it is a hard journey for women to become artistic geniuses. She actively seeks opportunities to shape her own future and pursue her passions. Both the 1949 and 1994 adaptations portray Amy as a character with a greater focus on social status and material wealth. Her artistic desires are overshadowed by her desire for luxury and social acceptance. In general terms, she is depicted as more superficial and materialistic. Gerwig’s adaptation makes her character justice, delving deeper into Amy’s motivations and dreams. The 2019 adaptation is the only one that shows her evolution from a young girl to a more mature

and empathetic woman. In addition, her vulnerability, kindness and love for her family are also emphasized in this film.

In conclusion, the March sisters are presented as women of their period with their own traits, burdens and aspirations. Building an audiovisual adaptation of *Little Women* for almost every generation implies that new films will resonate with contemporary realities and apply to audiences' lives. *Little Women* seeks to voice women who suffer inequalities and oppression, as well as to show their economic struggles to get the same opportunities as men in terms of work. Moreover, *Little Women* celebrates the agency and individuality of women.

The 2019 adaptation stands out as a significant feminist improvement in the portrayal of the March sisters. By rebuilding Alcott's novel through a feminist view, Gerwig challenges and redefines traditional representations of female identity in films. This adaptation depicts the March sisters as women with diverse characteristics, but all of them are in the search of agency and individuality within the limitations of their time. Gerwig's emphasis on girl power and feminist ideals not only provides a new adaptation of *Little Women* for contemporary viewers but also contributes to the ongoing debate on female representation and empowerment in films. The production of this 2019 adaptation also marks a progressive step forward in showing the complexity and strength of female characters on screen.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Gerwig's adaptation of *Little Women* enables us to understand the innovations this filmmaker has introduced in order to constitute it as an inspiring adaptation for a new generation. Greta Gerwig achieves a final product where she reflects her innovative direction by introducing technical aspects such as a non-linear storytelling with its respective manipulations of colour. Additionally, Gerwig builds a narrative focusing on the sisters' individual and collective life stories in a way that they deeply resonate with modern audiences while capturing the essence of Louisa May Alcott's original work.

One of the key changes in Gerwig's adaptation lies in her cinematic choices, particularly the use of non-linear temporality and her emphasis on each sister's individual journey. This approach allows viewers to connect with the characters on a deeper level, highlighting their conflicts and the contrasts between their past and present. This film not only celebrates the strength and resilience of women in pursuit of their desires but also portrays women who challenge traditional gender norms and expectations.

Moreover, through the comparative analysis with previous film adaptations, this analysis sheds light on the evolution of the feminist discourse and the representation of women in film adaptations of *Little Women*. Gerwig's version stands out as a refreshing look at the original novel, offering a subtle exploration of gender roles, sisterhood dynamics and the pursuit of individual aspirations. By bringing these themes to scene and providing her distinctive style, Gerwig creates a film that not only honours Alcott's original novel but also offers a great insight into contemporary discourses on feminism, identity and agency.

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