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**JO MARCH'S COMING-OF-AGE JOURNEY
IN *LITTLE WOMEN*, BY LOUISA MAY ALCOTT**

**CAMPINA GRANDE
2022**

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Artigo) apresentado ao Departamento de Letras e Artes da Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Licenciatura em Letras-Inglês.

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Valécio Irineu Barros.

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Aos meus pais e meu marido, por
todo apoio e incentivo, dedico.

“I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship.”

Louisa May Alcott

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Image 1 – The hero’s journey model	13
Image 2 – The heroine’s journey model	15

SUMÁRIO

1 INTRODUCTION	8
2 CONTEXTUALIZATION	8
2.1 The author: Louisa May Alcott	8
2.2 The historical context: American Civil War	9
2.3 The religious and literary context: The Pilgrim's Progress	10
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	11
3.1 Bildungsroman	11
3.2 The Hero's journey	12
3.3 The Heroine's Journey In Louisa May Alcott's Little Women	14
4 FINAL THOUGHTS	22
REFERENCES	23

JO MARCH'S COMING-OF-AGE JOURNEY IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*

Gilmara Barbosa Viana¹

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to analyze the classic work of North American literature *Little Women*, based on the model of the Heroine's Journey, a model that was developed by the psychotherapist and author Maureen Murdock and that is present in several narratives with a female protagonist. Based on this model, we analyzed the trajectory of the character Jo March's maturation from childhood to becoming an adult woman, pointing out the stages of the Heroine's journey present throughout this narrative and its main characteristics. To contextualize this research, we show how the historical events and religious beliefs of the time influenced the construction of this novel. In addition, we also talk about the Bildungsroman, its concept, main characteristics and the difficulty in finding female protagonists in the narratives over time, in contrast to the male Bildungsroman. We also presented some aspects of the Hero's journey, a model developed by Joseph Campbell (1949) that motivated Murdock to create a female version of this model, the Heroine's Journey.

Keywords: coming-of-age; *bildungsroman*; heroine's journey; little women.

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como principal objetivo analisar a clássica obra da literatura norte-americana *Little Women* (*Mulherzinhas*) com base no modelo da jornada da heroína, desenvolvido pela psicoterapeuta e autora Maureen Murdock e que está presente em várias narrativas onde se tem uma protagonista feminina. Com base nesse modelo, analisamos a trajetória de amadurecimento da personagem Jo March desde a infância até se tornar uma mulher adulta, apontando os estágios da jornada da heroína presentes ao longo dessa narrativa e suas principais características. Para contextualizar esta pesquisa, mostramos como os eventos históricos e as crenças religiosas da época influenciaram na construção desse romance. Além disso, também falamos sobre o *Bildungsroman*, seu conceito, principais características e a dificuldade em encontrar protagonistas femininas nas narrativas ao longo do tempo, em contraste com o *Bildungsroman* masculino. Apresentamos também alguns aspectos da Jornada do Herói, modelo desenvolvido por Joseph Campbell que motivou Murdock a criar uma versão feminina deste modelo, a Jornada da Heroína.

Palavras-chave: *bildungsroman*; jornada da heroína; mulherzinhas.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Little Women is a classic of North American Literature that was published in 1868, by Louisa May Alcott. Inspired by the author's life, the book is an autobiography. The story is set against the backdrop of the Civil War that took place in the United States between 1861 and 1865, it is in this context that we follow the story of the March family, especially the four sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy.

Throughout the book, in each of the chapters we follow the maturation journey of the March girls, the problems they face, situations of difficulty and discouragement, but also of overcoming and maturing, from childhood to becoming adult women. Each sister plays an important role in the unfolding of the story, but the main character is the one who was based on the book's author, Jo, a tomboy girl with a strong temper who dreams of becoming a famous writer and who loves her family more than anything. Jo always gets into trouble and never knows how to behave as society at the time expects a girl to behave.

Throughout the story, we see Jo's constant process of maturation, she faces hard trials that were of fundamental importance for the formation of her character, she fulfills dreams and also gives up some things for the greater good. She regrets her mistakes and seeks to improve.

Jo's journey of maturation is a good example of *Bildungsroman* and also of a narrative where the Heroine's Journey is present, for throughout the story we can find passages that characterize the stages of the Heroine's Journey. The aim of this bibliographic article is to analyze the issue of *Bildungsroman* and the historical context of the novel *Little Women*; and specifically analyze the journey of maturation of the character Jo March by applying the model of the Heroine's Journey developed by Maureen Murdock (1990).

2 CONTEXTUALIZATION

2.1 The author: Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott was a North American author, she was born on November 29, 1832 in the city of Germantown, now part of Philadelphia, New England. She lived with her parents Amos Bronson Alcott and Abby May, and with her three sisters Anna Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott and Abigail May Alcott; Louisa was the second eldest of them. In her early life she was a tomboy, she had boyish habits and did not like to follow some social rules that were imposed on women by society at the time.

Alcott was part of a transcendentalist family. Transcendentalism was a movement that was gaining notable strength at that time in New England. It was a philosophical and poetic movement that developed in North America in the beginning of the 19th century. The adherents of this movement exalted the individual and nature, they believed in the innate goodness of man, the rising to enlightenment through solitude and living in contact with nature. The transcendentalists also claimed that the spirit was the center of the universe and for this reason, the spiritual things were above the material ones.

Alcott's father was a member of a group of transcendentalists along with writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, authors of the essay "Self-Reliance" (1841) and of the autobiographical memoir *Walden* (1854),

which became books of huge success. Louisa was raised in the context of this philosophical and poetic movement and received great influence and instructions from these and other authors who were family friends.

When Alcott was fifteen years old, her family went through some financial difficulties, which made her start working outside as a teacher, housekeeper, seamstress, governess and writer to help the family. Louisa loved her family and was very attached to her sisters. She suffered a lot as she felt that sisterhood would never be the same when her elder sister, Anna, was getting ready to get married and also when her beloved sister Elizabeth Sewall died at the age of 22.

During the American Civil War period, Alcott served for a time as a nurse in Georgetown, D.C. between 1862 and 1863. After this period of war, she spent time traveling in Europe and when she came back to the United States, she started writing a book for girls that would later become her most successful work, *Little women* or *Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*. The story of the book is semi-autobiographical, the author wrote the book based on her own life, on the experiences she lived with her sisters from childhood to adulthood, showing the journey of maturation and development of each of them.

The book was written in 1868 and in the same year it was first published by Robert Brothers Publishing. *Little Women* quickly became a top seller among girls of all ages, making Louisa May Alcott a famous author. When we compare the plot of the protagonist of *Little Women* and the author's life, we can see how similar they are. Each one of the March sisters were inspired by the Alcott sisters and also many situations they lived through. Jo March, the heroine is based on the author herself, they have the same characteristics and goals.

Louisa never married, something she also planned to do with the character Jo. The author's wish was to leave Jo March without a romantic partner, which was one of the reasons why she didn't marry Laurie. However, under pressure from the publisher, Alcott had to create a romantic match for Jo, against her will, as the publishers at the time did not accept or publish books in which they had a woman as the main character, and she did not get married in the story. Despite this, the publisher liked the idea of the book, a good moral book for young girls.

In 1888, at the age of fifty, Louisa May Alcott died in Boston. She had been facing some illnesses for a few years and died of a stroke two days after her father's demise. After her death, her book remained a great success, the story of the March sisters has been passed on from generation to generation and has gained numerous adaptations for the movies and television since then. As part of this legacy, one of the houses her family lived in became a museum.

2.2 The historical context: American Civil War

The American Civil War began in 1861 and its main cause was slavery in the country. Also known as the Secession War, it was a conflict that divided the United States into two parts: the North side that was Republican and the South side in which most of the population was Democrat. Republicans, led by President Abraham Lincoln, defended a free country, without slavery and with equal rights for white and black people. On the other hand, the southern states were against the end of the slave system upon which their economy was based.

Before the war broke out, this conflict was already happening and was being debated between politicians since the beginning of the 19th century. In 1860 there were presidential elections, and it was the republican candidate Abraham Lincoln

who had the victory over the southern candidate. Some months later, the southern states got united and created the Confederate States of America or Confederacy, with the intention of becoming an independent nation separating from the northern side, also known as The Union States.

The war began on April 12, 1861, when the Confederate States, led by their President Jefferson Davis, attacked Fort Sumter, which belonged to the republican side, soon the northern side counterattacked, starting a series of battles that would result in the hugest armed conflict in the American continent. The Civil war was one of the first industrial wars, it had the technological and industrial support for arms development, including the use of warships.

However, as the war progressed some states that are on the border between the north and south sides, like Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland preferred not to take sides and avoided participating in the conflict, because despite supporting the slave system, these states did not support the division between north and south (secession). At first this made it difficult to advance the war to a direct confrontation between the two sides, but when realizing that the border states would not allow the passage of armies, both sides violently invaded these states and crossed the border. With invasion of the army from both sides and the advance of the war, the border states that were avoiding the conflict, had to give in and join the Confederacy.

In 1863 in the city of Gettysburg, in one of the bloodiest battles of the civil war, where thousands of soldiers died, the union army managed to win the battle and this changed the course of the war. Soon the Union conquered more territories and consequently won the war against the Confederates in 1865. During the period of the war more than one and a half million people died, both civilians and soldiers, even the president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, died during the war, in 1865 when he was in a theater, a man called John Wilkes Booth entered his cabin and shot him in the head. Several cities were completely destroyed after the war, which broke the country's economy.

The war was a traumatizing period in US history and marked the lives of millions of people. This moment served as inspiration in the literary context, many works were written having the Civil War as background. One of them was *Little Women*. Since its author lived during this period, she even worked as a nurse during battles. Louisa May Alcott illustrated the difficulties of living during the Civil War period in her novel.

2.3 The religious and literary context: *The Pilgrim's Progress*

The novel was heavily marked by Alcott's family's philosophy and the religious context of her hometown. Most colonists of New England were Puritans - Members of a reform movement who desired to "purify" the Church of England from its Roman Catholic traditions and were known for their spiritual and moral earnestness.

Alcott based the maturation journey of the March sisters as a female equivalent to the *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). The book written by John Bunyan accompanies Christian, a resident of the City of Destruction, who discovers the damnation imposed on the city and leaves it to find the Celestial City. The book is an allegory of the Christian life and its difficulties and pleasures, and the March sisters have their share of unfortunate events.

Right at the beginning of the novel we can see clear references to Bunyan's work, even in the titles of some chapters: "Playing pilgrims" and then we have "Beth finds the palace beautiful", "Amy's valley of humiliation", "Jo meets Apollyon", "Meg

goes to vanity fair”; all these names refer to moments in the journey of Christian in the book written by Bunyan.

The author draws a parallel between Christian's journey and the March sisters' journey of maturation in *Little Women*. In the beginning of the novel, we can see that to help and encourage the girls in this process of maturation, Ms. March reminds them of a game they liked to play when they were younger where they played pilgrims. This game consisted of each participant carrying a bag on their back pretending it was a burden and passing through various obstacles scattered around the house, in order to get to the roof where they would get rid of their heavy burdens, they would complete the quest and get their reward in the “City of Heaven”.

Mrs. March tells the girls: “Our burdens are here,” she says, “our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 12), as a clear reference to the Pilgrim's objective. She teaches her daughters to treat the others as you would like others to treat you, a famous Christian teaching also known as The Golden Rule and which can be found in the Bible: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (BIBLE, Matthew 7, 12. English Standard Version).

Throughout the story we see the journey of each sister from childhood to maturity, facing challenges and difficulties that shape their characters and teach them moral lessons, until they reach their main goal: the "Celestial City" just like it happened to Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Bildungsroman

The term "Bildungsroman" comes from the German word "Bildung" which indicates formation, education and culture with the word "Roman" which comes from romance. Bildungsroman can be translated as “novel of learning” or “of development”. Therefore, it narrates the character's formative years and his/her evolution by facing circumstances that make him/her go through countless difficulties which enable physical, psychological, emotional and moral growth, making this character come to maturity. Flavio Quintale Neto describes Bildungsroman as “the means by which the eternal movement back and forth from reflection to action, from action to reflection, is exposed, which would make man conscious of himself, as a finite being that recognizes himself as absolute, and conscious of life as activity”² (QUINTALE NETO, 2005, p. 203).

Generally, Bildungsroman shows the trajectory of a character from childhood to adolescence or youth, seeking to emphasize how external situations affected the protagonist's private life, but that all of them were necessary for him/her to reach the level of maturity he/she has attained. It shows the character's gradual maturation journey. For Katie Trumpener (2020, p. 5), “The Bildungsroman might appear to have a different kind of hero, an ever more vital, complex, ramified person, followed from

² “O Bildungsroman seria, portanto, o meio pelo qual se expõe o eterno movimento de ida e volta da reflexão à ação, da ação à reflexão, que tornaria o homem consciente de si, como finito que se reconhece como absoluto, e consciente da vida como atividade” (QUINTALE NETO, F. 2005). (Tradução livre)

his early childhood impressions and molding until the moment he begins to seize and grasp his own vocation.”

Evelyn Mello (*apud* Pinto, 2016) says that, for a long time, studies related to *Bildungsroman* were exclusive to male characters. Since the women's maturation process was limited to preparing for marriage and motherhood, they were surrounded only by domestic limits, which did not give opportunity for other achievements in their journey, “since the world was up to male conquests”.

In addition, Christy Rishoi (2003) talks about coming-of-age female narratives, where she says that the female *Bildungsroman* has different characteristics and purposes from the male *Bildungsroman*, as in these narratives, “Manhood is associated with self-sufficiency, while womanhood is associated with continuing interdependence” (RISHOI, 2003, p. 65). Therefore, it was up to men to have heroism and protagonism both in the stories and in the studies made about these stories.

As Rishoi says, “women, minorities, and the poor traditionally have been excluded or pathologized in major discourses of adolescence — historical, psychological, and literary — which described and valorized white male experience” (RISHOI, 2003, p. 49). For her, the female *Bildungsroman* and the male *Bildungsroman* are very different, since they have different traditional definitions, for this reason she characterizes this genre as coming-of-age narratives.

The Brazilian author Cristina Ferreira Pinto (1990) proposes the expression “female *Bildungsroman*” for the narratives that value the journeys of women. However, especially before the 1990s, there was a great lack of female protagonism. Nowadays, we can find more examples of stories in which women play an important role, even if they are very shy. Regarding female *Bildungsroman*, as already mentioned, it is common to find this journey based on preparation for marriage and motherhood. However, it is important to remember the historical context of women in past times, when they were treated as inferior beings and had procreation as their main and almost exclusive function.

Knowing the numerous difficulties that women face to achieve protagonism, we find in *Little Women* relevant questions raised about the development of women, as this novel brings female protagonism, which allows it to be characterized as a female *Bildungsroman*, even though it was written at a time when male protagonism prevailed.

Having women as its main characters – one of them being Mrs. March as a central figure, who always uses her voice to bring important lessons to her daughters: Margareth, Josephine, Elizabeth and Amy – *Little Women* is different from what was expected of women at that time, because the Girls' training does not have as its main focus the achievement of a good marriage, but rather their moral and character formation. Each of the girls, like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, has a “burden” that represents their flaws. Their maturation happens when they face difficulties and failures until they reach a state of self-improvement.

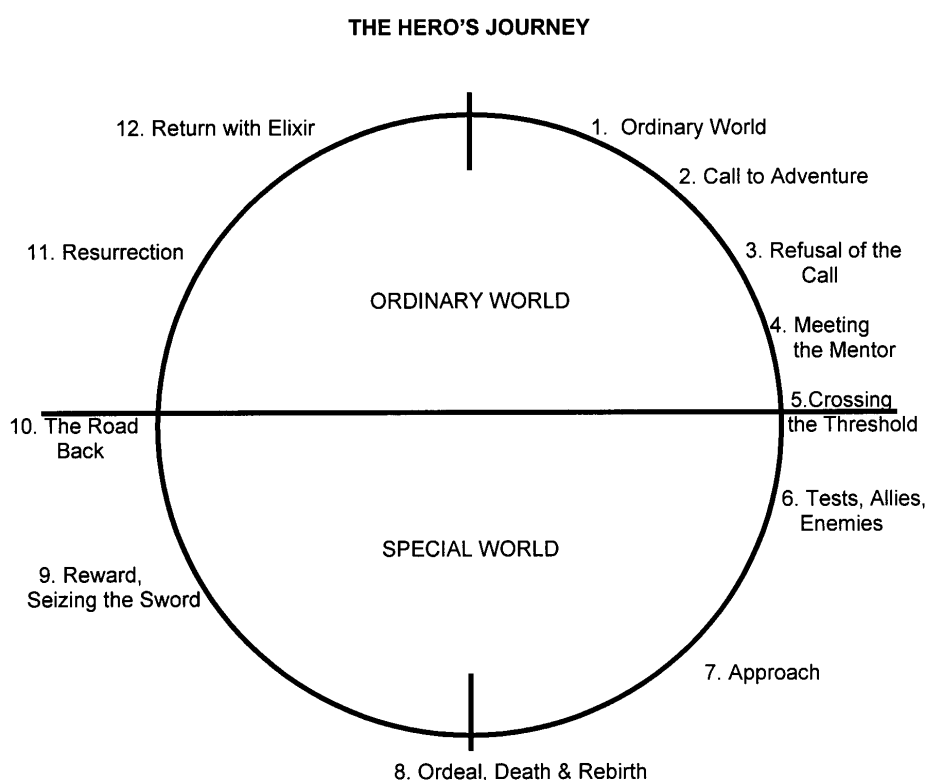
3.2 The Hero's journey

The Hero's Journey is a storytelling model developed by Joseph Campbell in 1949 in his book *The hero with a thousand faces*. Joseph Campbell was a writer, who studied mythology, and dedicated his studies to researching and delving into the essence of myths and mythical heroes from different cultures and civilizations throughout the history of the world.

Through these studies, and using psychoanalysis, based on Jung's archetypes, Campbell concluded that there was a pattern in all the narratives he analyzed. They all had in common certain characteristics. In all of them there is a journey that the hero has to take and at the end of this journey he is different from what he was at the beginning, there is the psychological and/or physical maturation of the hero throughout the course of the story.

Campbell called this scheme The hero's journey, also known as monomyth. It is a cyclical model consisting of twelve stages that are present in the process of maturing and developing a character within a narrative.

Image one - The hero's journey model.



“FONTE:

<https://septembercfawkes.tumblr.com/post/190495196043/the-heros-journey-explained-the-middle>
2020” Google images

The first step of the journey is the Ordinary World, here is where we meet the hero. He is living his everyday, ordinary life, but an opportunity for adventure arises, an unexpected journey far from his comfort zone. Then we have the Call to Adventure. Something happens that shakes the hero's ordinary life and from this event the call to adventure originates, it is a crucial moment of the journey.

The next stage is Refusal of the Call, where the hero has to face a great challenge that awaits him, he feels fear and insecurity. It is not known for sure what he will face on this journey. After that, it's time for Meeting the Mentor. Once the hero accepts his calling, he soon finds a wise mentor, someone who will guide him along the journey. The fifth stage is Crossing the First Threshold; after leaving the known world, the hero faces his first challenge.

The sixth one is Tests, Allies, Enemies, this stage is marked by the meeting of helping figures or beings. During the journey the hero faces many difficulties and

enemies, but he also finds friends and allies that will be of great importance along the journey. Following, comes the Approach to the Inmost Cave, this period precedes the final confrontation of the journey and brings back the fears and insecurities that the hero felt at the beginning of the journey. At that moment the hero prepares to face his greatest challenge.

The next step is called Ordeal, this is the climax of the journey. The biggest challenge that the hero has to face so far and that it is his duty to live through. Such a challenge marks an important point in the hero's psychological transformation and character formation. After this great challenge comes the Reward (Seizing the Sword). After successfully passing the ultimate ordeal and fulfilling the objective of the journey, the hero feels rewarded for having managed to overcome obstacles and fears. Almost finished with the journey, now the hero takes The Road Back. At this point of the journey, the hero starts his way back to the ordinary world, but he may find one last ordeal yet.

The next stage is Resurrection: Before returning to ordinary life, the hero faces a final challenge when the enemy resurfaces for a final conflict, at which point the hero will be able to put into practice what he has learned along the way. Finally, the last stage is the Return with the Elixir. At that moment, after having completed the journey, the hero returns to ordinary life, but now he is different from what he was at the beginning. Every step of the journey has transformed him both physically and psychologically.

3.3 The Heroine's Journey In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

Maureen Murdock is a psychotherapist and author. When studying Joseph Campbell's work, she noticed some flaws in his hero's journey model; she raised a question about the fact that the hero's journey does not include stages that are specifically gone through by women. Joseph Campbell relegates women to passivity, he stated that the woman does not need to go through the journey because

In the whole mythological tradition the woman is there. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male.³

From this questioning, Murdock created her own scheme that encompasses all the steps a female character takes in her maturation process. She presented her model, as a response to Campbell, in her book *The Heroine's journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, published in 1990.

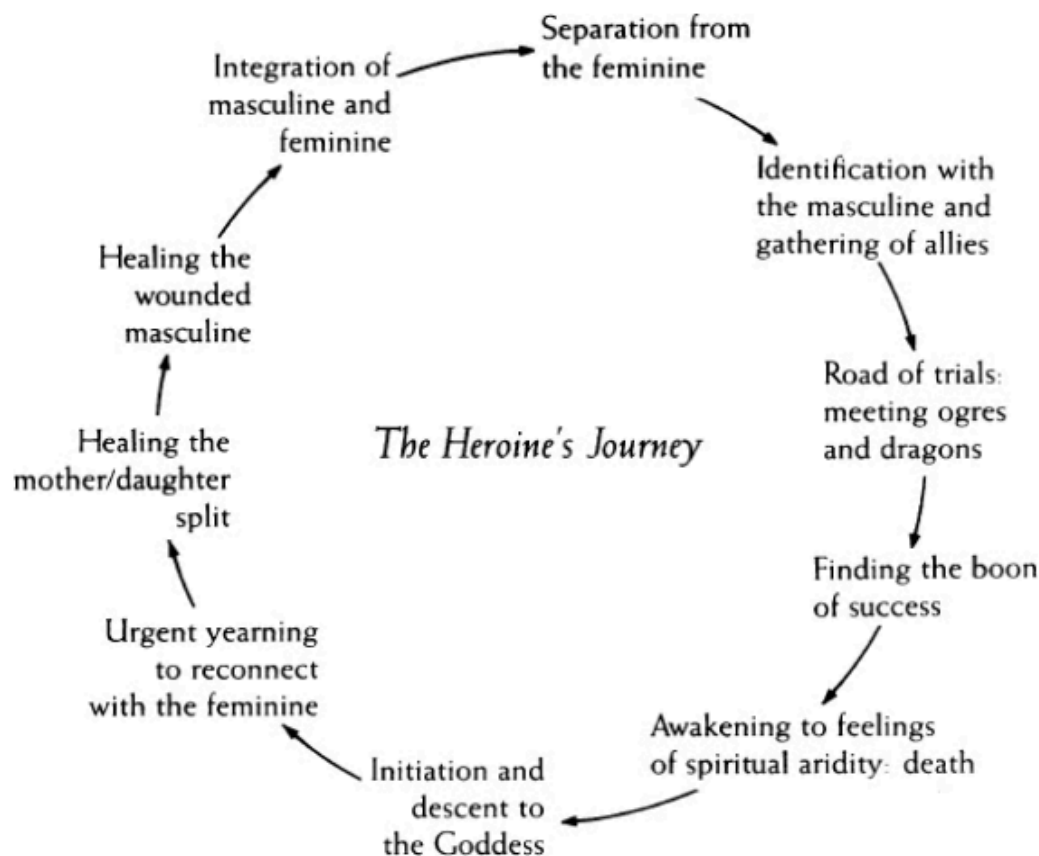
The Heroine's journey, differently from The Hero's journey monomyth, involves ten steps that only women face during their inner journey of psychological transformation and maturation in order to achieve some self-fulfillment. "The model of the heroine's journey is derived in part from Campbell's model of the heroic quest. The language of the stages, however, is particular to women, and the visual model appeared to me in a very feminine way." (MURDOCK, 1990)

Murdock also develops this model in a cyclical way, where she shows each of the stages that a female character goes through. These steps can be observed in several narratives where there is a woman as protagonist. In *Little women*, for

³ Joseph Campbell, interview with author (Maureen Murdock), New York, 15 September 1981.

example, we can find some of these stages in the March sisters' journey of maturation, especially in Jo's.

Image two - The heroine's journey model.



FONTE: MURDOCK; MAUREEN (1990, p. 9)

1. Separation from the feminine

The heroine's journey begins with the protagonist's rupture of feminine values in a patriarchal society. This somehow involves a separation from the person who most represents feminine values, which in most cases is the mother.

The degree to which a woman's mother represents the status quo, the restrictive context of sexual roles, and the deep-seated sense of female inferiority within a patriarchal society determines the degree to which a woman will seek to separate herself from her mother. (MURDOCK, 1990, p. 18).

In *Little women* we can see this stage in the very first chapters of the book. Despite the relationship between Jo March and her mother being very stable, we see that the fact that Jo is a tomboy somehow distances her from her sisters, Meg and Amy, who piously follow the standard of femininity imposed on women at that time. This difference causes some friction between them throughout the story.

In a dialogue from the first chapter, we can see the conflict between the sisters Jo and Amy because of their different personalities, soon Meg intervenes trying to calm the younger sisters and lectures Jo to behave more like a girl:

'I detest rude, unladylike girls!' - Amy
'I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!' - Jo'

'Really, girls, you are both to be blamed," said Meg, beginning to lecture in her elder-sisterly fashion. "You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady. - Meg'; (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 5);

In "Little Women," the theme of separation from the feminine, exemplified through Jo March's tomboyish nature and societal expectations, sets the stage for a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

2. Identification with the masculine and gathering of allies

In this stage of the journey, after the break with the feminine the heroine starts to identify herself more with masculine aspects that are influenced by a male father figure and develop aspects and characteristics that come from this male influence. As Murdock said,

A young girl's relationship with her father helps her to see the world through his eyes and to see herself reflected by him. As she seeks his approval and acceptance, she measures her own competence, intelligence, and self-worth in relation to him and to other men. Approval and encouragement by a girl's father lead to positive ego development (MURDOCK, 1990, p. 33).

We can clearly see this stage of the journey in Jo, she identifies more with masculine than feminine aspects. Even though she lives in a house with four other women, the father figure exerts a great influence on the development of her personality.

She expresses her desire to be able to be in the war fighting alongside her father and other soldiers:

'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, 2005, p. 5-6).

She also sees herself as responsible for the household while he is not present - Jo: '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, 2005, p. 7)

3. Road of trials meeting ogres and dragons

This stage is where the adventure begins, the heroine leaves her comfort zone in the search for self-knowledge and finds several obstacles, fears and difficulties; or as Murdock says, dragons and ogres that can bring doubts, insecurities and female inferiority; and test her abilities and strength. These adversaries appear throughout the journey and are very important for personal development because these difficulties shape the heroine's character.

Analyzing Jo's trajectory, in various parts of the book we see several adversities that she had to face, whether in the family environment, at work, in her romantic life and especially with her internal problems, such as her strong temper, which is something she struggles with throughout the novel.

A specific situation that was very impacting for Jo and served as a moral lesson for her, was what happened in the eighth chapter entitled "Jo meets Apollyon", the name of the chapter itself refers to the character mentioned in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Apollyon means "destroyer"; in Bunyan's allegory he is a merciless demon who fights with Christian; this is one of the most difficult moments in Christian's journey.

The chapter bears this name because it relates the moment of adversity that Jo faced to what Christian faced. After a major conflict between Jo and Amy, her younger sister; Jo treats her sister with indifference and this behavior causes an accident happen that almost takes Amy's life. This episode happened right after a quarrel between the two sisters. Amy, angry with Jo for not taking her to the theater, wanted revenge and burned the whole book that Jo was writing. Jo got angry and inconsolable for having lost all the hard work she had done and stopped talking to Amy, ignoring her completely.

A few days later, Amy, wanting to reconcile with Jo, followed her as she went ice skating with Laurie, but the older sister continued to treat her with indifference. Amy started to skate but the ice broke and she sank into the frozen lake, Jo and Laurie acted fast and managed to prevent the girl from drowning. After this situation, Jo felt guilty for what happened to Amy and for treating her with indifference, she felt fear just for imagining that she could have lost her little sister and would feel guilty for the rest of her life; after that, they were able to forgive each other and reconciled

This situation made Jo regret her selfish behavior and she promised herself that she would do her best to control her temper and fight her own demons, or dragons as Murdock says. 'It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it, I think I have, and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, Mother, what shall I do? What shall I do?' cried poor Jo, in despair" (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 90)

4. Finding the boon of success

At this stage of the journey, the heroine is much more developed and independent than she was in the previous stages, she has already achieved some goals even through trials; and she increasingly seeks success and her own growth. The heroine has reached a point where she feels fulfilled, at the height of her success. According to Murdock, the heroine "feels strong within herself, knows her capabilities, and has found the treasure of her seeking [...] She has achieved the power, recognition, and success in the outer world that her mother only dreamed of. She has arrived" (1990, p. 60).

However, at this moment she begins to reflect on how she managed to achieve this success and everything she had to give up to get where she is. She realizes that this success is just an illusion, she still needs to face several obstacles and starts to wonder if this is really worth it. As Murdock says, "No matter how successful she is, she still has to deal with the fact that the outer world is hostile to her choices." (1990, p.61)

In *Little women*, Jo also goes through this stage. From the moment she begins publishing her stories, she quickly earns money from them and starts to feel independent and successful, "Fortune suddenly smiled upon Jo, and dropped a good

luck penny in her path. Not a golden penny, exactly, but I doubt if half a million would have given more real happiness than did the little sum that came to her in this wise.” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 311). Elaborating on this feeling the narrator adds:

A prouder young woman was seldom seen than she, when, having composed herself, she electrified the family by appearing before them with the letter in one hand, the check in the other, announcing that she had won the prize. Of course, there was a great jubilee, and when the story came everyone read and praised it... (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 314).

Jo enjoyed the taste of the satisfaction, she was no longer jealous of richer girls, now she feels the comfort of being able to meet her needs and have what she wants without having to ask for a penny (2005, p. 315). But when she decides that she will publish her book and sends it to the publisher for evaluation, she receives so much criticism and cuts in various parts of the story this makes her frustrated to the point of considering giving up her career as a writer. “Well, it was printed, and she got three hundred dollars for it, likewise plenty of praise and blame, both so much greater than she expected that she was thrown into a state of bewilderment from which it took her some time to recover” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 317).

5. Awakening to feelings of spiritual aridity

After the successful moment, the heroine begins to realize that fame is nothing but an illusion, she has a sense of loss and betrayal, so she enters a phase of disillusionment, the phase of spiritual aridity. “Yes, she gained success, independence, and autonomy, but she may have lost a piece of her heart and soul in the process” (MURDOCK, 1990, p. 72).

At this point, it seems that all the achievements she sacrificed herself for were not worth it and her expectations were frustrated. This discourages the heroine to the point that she thinks about giving up. Commenting on this stage, Murdock (1990, p. 72) explains: “Such a woman will feel a betrayal by both the personal as well as the cultural mind that told her if she trusted goal-oriented masculine thinking she would be rewarded”.

This stage is closely linked to the previous one. We can point out that Jo went through this stage when she saw her hard work being devalued by critics, which made her rethink if being a famous writer was really something she wanted and doubt if she would ever be able to achieve that goal. “...It was a hard time for sensitive, high-spirited Jo, who meant so well and had apparently done so ill” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 318).

6. Initiation and descent to the Goddess

This stage is characterized by being the darkest of the journey. At this moment, the heroine goes through a huge ordeal like never before, as Murdock says, she descends to the underworld. This dark moment may come from the death of a loved one, a sudden change; something that brings a deep sadness to the heroine to the point that she feels helpless and abandoned. “It is usually precipitated by a life-changing loss. Experiencing the death of one’s child, parent, or spouse with whom one’s life and identity has been closely intertwined may mark the beginning of the journey to the underworld” (MURDOCK, 1990, p. 84).

It is in this moment of grief that the heroine begins to connect with parts of herself that she left behind at the beginning of the journey, she begins to connect with her feminine principles and finally finds herself as a real woman.

In *Little Women* we can clearly see Jo going through this moment of loss and grief, descending to the underworld when her dear sister Beth dies. The death of her sister was a dark moment for Jo, both because she was her closest sister and also because Jo somehow blamed herself for Beth having contracted the disease that weakened her health and consequently caused her premature death. "...it's my fault she is sick. I told Mother I'd do the errands, and I haven't," said Jo decidedly." (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 209).

In her last moments of life, Beth makes a request to Jo: that she take care of their parents when she is gone:

"You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I'm gone. They will turn to you, don't fail them, and if it's hard to work alone, remember that I don't forget you, and that you'll be happier in doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world, for love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the end so easy" (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 484).

Beth's death made Jo rethink her personal goals in order to fulfill her sister's last request, and that makes Jo return to the feminine aspects of her personality that she had left behind. "I'll try, Beth." and then and there Jo renounced her old ambition, pledged herself to a new and better one, acknowledging the poverty of other desires, and feeling the blessed solace of a belief in the immortality of love" (ALCOTT, 2005, p.484)

It's important to highlight that Beth's request is not for Jo to give up on her dreams of being a successful writer, once Beth was one of the biggest supporters of Jo's writing. Jo was lost in her own illusions, despising all the things that are important to her to fulfill just one wish among countless desires and affections she has. Beth's request was to get her heart back on track and balance her dreams with the things that she already owns and was forgetting to take care of.

7. Urgent yearning to reconnect with the feminine

After the trials faced in the previous stage, the heroine is finally able to reconnect with her feminine self. During this stage, the heroine realizes that her dreams and goals are not as meaningful as she had imagined. Now she tries to regain her feminine and achieve success in a different way from the elusive way she once pursued. "The world is not what she thought it would be; she has been betrayed" (MURDOCK, 1990, p. 72).

In *Little Women* we find this stage right after Beth's death, when Jo tries her best to fulfill her sister's last request, which is to take care of their parents in her place when she's gone. Despite the difficulties, the attempt to keep the promise made to her sister shows a reconnection of Jo with her feminine aspects, she tries to be homely and selfless like her sister was.

At one point after several attempts, Jo realizes that keeping the promise is more difficult than she thought, it's not in her nature to be self-abnegated and homely like Beth, and she is disappointed and discontent that she can't fulfill this task:

Jo found her promise very hard to keep. How could she 'comfort Father and Mother' when her own heart ached with a ceaseless

longing for her sister, how could she 'make the house cheerful' when all its light and warmth and beauty seemed to have deserted it when Beth left the old home for the new, and where in all the world could she 'find some useful, happy work to do', that would take the place of the loving service which had been its own reward? (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 501).

At that moment, Jo realizes that Meg, her older sister, is facing the grief better than she is. Jo wonders if she also couldn't find happiness in having her own family, just like Meg who had a husband and two babies. Jo asks her sister if this isn't what she's been missing, something that would bring purpose and happiness to her life.

The direction that Jo seeks from her older sister, being her an example of femininity to which Jo has always been the opposite, and the fact of considering marriage shows a change in attitude on the part of the younger sister that reveals a reconnection of Jo with the lost feminine personified in the person of Meg. During a dialogue, Jo says:

"Marriage is an excellent thing, after all. I wonder if I should blossom out half as well as you have, if I tried it?" To which Meg replies: "It's just what you need to bring out the tender womanly half of your nature, Jo... Love will make you show your heart one day, and then the rough burr will fall off" (ALCOTT, 2005, p.503-504).

This moment of doubt that Jo shares with her sister shows her feminine side, a change of mind and a coming of age. Further on we see that when Jo opens up to love, she really blossoms even more alongside her journey companion. I emphasize that despite this, it is not just marriage and domestic life that fulfills Jo; unlike her sister, Jo has her own ambitions in life.

8. Healing the mother/daughter split

At this stage of the journey, which is linked to the previous stage, the heroine connects with her lost feminine, she returns to the feminine example from which she once separated.

In Jo's case, she has her older sister, Meg, as a great female reference. Since childhood, Jo has a certain aversion to Meg because they are totally different from each other, while Meg is very feminine, Jo is tomboy.

As already mentioned in the previous topic, we see Jo connect with the feminine when she seeks her sister's advice after a difficult time in her life, where she felt aimless and questioned if being like Meg would bring her happiness. This makes the bonds between the sisters grow tighter, reducing the distance between them. Also, the fact that Jo started to consider the idea of getting married and starting a family also exemplifies this connection with feminine principles.

9. Healing the wounded masculine

In the ninth step of the journey, the heroine begins to see man in a different way, and no longer as something negative and toxic. She starts to relate to something positive so that she manages to balance the feminine and the masculine within herself, retaining only the positive parts of this masculine. Commenting on this step of the heroine's journey, Murdock uses a poem: "Your inner man and inner woman / have been at war / they are both wounded / tired / and in need of care / it is time / to put down the sword / that divides them in two" (1990, p. 145).

In *Little Women* we can find this step when Jo stops writing sensationalist stories that pleased the editors and gave her great prestige, but at the cost of running away from her moral principles and going against the will and approval of her parents. She starts writing stories with morals and values that she herself believed in, regardless of the criticism of publishers and the patriarchal society. After the period of mourning, Jo returns to writing:

"Why don't you write? That always used to make you happy," said her mother once, when the desponding fit over-shadowed Jo.

"I've no heart to write, and if I had, nobody cares for my things."

"We do. Write something for us, and never mind the rest of the world. Try it, dear. I'm sure it would do you good, and please us very much."

"Don't believe I can." But Jo got out her desk and began to overhaul her half-finished manuscripts.

(...) "I don't understand it. What can there be in a simple little story like that to make people praise it so?" she (Jo) said, quite bewildered.

"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."

"If there is anything good or true in what I write, it isn't mine. I owe it all to you and Mother and Beth," said Jo, more touched by her father's words than by any amount of praise from the world. (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 505-506).

Jo's journey in "Little Women" exemplifies the healing of the wounded masculine, as she transitions from seeking external validation to embracing her inner convictions and values. By prioritizing integrity over acclaim and reconnecting with her true passion for writing, Jo demonstrates a shift towards a balanced integration of feminine and masculine qualities within herself.

10. Integration of masculine and feminine

The tenth and last step of the journey finally shows a balance point, the heroine carries her feminine characteristics which are enough to achieve success and in addition, she also has some masculine characteristics acquired along the journey, which she believes that are good and that will serve to achieve success without neglecting her feminine essence, principles and values. The heroine is above duality, above the stereotypical view of female and male, they are finally in balance. Elaborating on this stage, Murdock affirms:

The task of today's heroine as we approach the millenium is to mine the silver and gold within herself. She must develop a positive relationship with her inner Man with Heart and find the voice of her Woman of Wisdom to heal her estrangement from the sacred feminine. As she honors her body and soul as well as her mind, she heals the split within herself and the culture (1990, p. 182).

In *Little women* Jo comes to this last stage of the journey at the moment when she admits that she loves Teacher Bhaer and agrees to marry him, accepting being “under his umbrella” this exemplifies her feminine nature as it is something she has repudiated since the beginning of the journey and now she lets her feminine side come out. “Jo trudged beside him, feeling as if her place had always been there, and wondering how she ever could have chosen any other lot” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 551-552).

Through her marriage with the teacher, Jo also decides to open a school for boys in the house she inherited from her aunt. Jo held a leadership position managing the house and school, this expresses her masculine side as it shows her spirit of leadership and for going against the patriarchal ideal of the time where the exclusive and main activity of a woman was to be a mother and a housewife. “Yes, I know I can, for we love one another, and that makes all the rest easy to bear. I have my duty, also, and my work. **I couldn't enjoy myself if I neglected them even for you...**” (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 558 – our emphasis)

Through her marriage and also her new job running the school, Jo finally feels a complete and successful woman, she finds a balance between her feminine and masculine and feels whole that way. The heroine realizes that she doesn't have to give up her feminine nature to be successful, the story still tells that Jo had her own children that increased her happiness even more, this shows her feminine side even stronger and her own growth during her maturation journey.

Yes, Jo was a very happy woman there, in spite of hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world, for now she told no stories except to her flock of enthusiastic believers and admirers. As the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness... (ALCOTT, 2005, p. 564).

In the journey's culmination, exemplified by Jo in “Little Women,” we witness a harmonious balance achieved through self-discovery and acceptance. Jo embraces her feminine essence while integrating positive masculine attributes. Murdock's insight echoes as Jo realizes that love and duty can coexist, marrying Teacher Bhaer and leading a school. Through this union, Jo finds fulfillment, affirming that success need not compromise authenticity.

4 FINAL THOUGHTS

In this article we analyzed the novel *Little Women* based on Maureen Murdock's model of the heroine's journey. Initially, a brief contextualization was made about the author Louisa May Alcott, the historical moment in which the narrative takes place and the religious context which informs it. We pointed out aspects of the author's life that influenced the book, her personal experiences and the influences that served as inspiration for the writing of the novel.

We also talked about the historical context of the time, *Little Women* has as its background the American Civil War that took place from 1861 to 1865, in addition to being present in the book, it was also a moment which the author faced and that consequently affected her life and served as inspiration for the construction of *Little Women*.

Still in the contextualization section, we saw the religious and literary context in *Little Women*. We pointed out the importance and influence of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the construction of the story of the March sisters, as Alcott used several references from this classic in her book. This emphasizes how the author was greatly influenced by Puritanism, as she was born and raised in the New England region

In the theoretical foundation part, we explained the concept of *Bildungsroman* based on the writings of authors such as Quintale Neto (2005), Trumpener (2020), Evelyn Mello (PINTO, 2016) and also the Brazilian author Cristina Ferreira Pinto (1990). In this topic we also discussed maturation narratives according to Christy Rishoi's (2003) book *From girl to woman* and also pointed out the differences between male and female *Bildungsroman* in literature.

Continuing the theoretical foundation, we made a brief explanation about the hero's journey, its characteristics and each of its stages; then we came to the topic of the heroine's journey where we presented its origin, main motivations, and explained each of its stages and its characteristics at the same time as we made an analysis of *Little women*, showing where each of the steps was in the story of maturation of the protagonist Jo March.

We can see the separation with the feminine with Jo's opposition to her older sister, who is a great feminine reference in the narrative. As for Jo's boyish ways, it shows her identification with the masculine. Throughout the narrative she faces many trials, finds success but also disillusion that consequently makes her tend to return to the previously broken connection with the feminine and finally find the balance between the feminine and the masculine sides of herself.

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