# JO'S PROGENY: TRACING THE GIRL WRITER, 1868-1964

by

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# DEDICATION

To

Paul and Vasiliki Theodorou

&

Aaron Herschel Shapiro,

with gratitude and love

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the result of my five-year-long fascination with the figure of the girl writer as she appears in important works of children's literature. I have several people to thank for encouraging that fascination, including my committee members, my colleagues at Middle Tennessee State University, and my friends and family.

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# ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the positioning of the girl writer in the works of three important nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors of female and feminist *Künstlerromane*: Louisa May Alcott, Jean Webster, and Louise Fitzhugh. The *Künstlerroman* is a narrative of artistic becoming, but its application to female characters has been historically problematic, following a declension model in which the writer character must sacrifice her art in the interests of integration with the surrounding culture. Although all three authors often concede to the constraints of this form, they also work to upset and revise it. In doing so, they map alternatives not only to narrative, but also to the female subject. Ultimately, Alcott, Webster, and Fitzhugh critique the developmental approach to subjectivity in which one proceeds through a succession of provisional selves, eventually arriving at a mature and definitive identity. Unfortunately, much of the criticism focused on the authors takes this developmental arc for granted, privileging the girl writer's position at the end of the *Künstlerroman* and then interpreting the narrative in light of that position.

My dissertation takes a different approach. Drawing on structuralist, poststructuralist, postmodern, feminist, new historicist, rhetorical composition, and postcolonial theories, I argue that one may read these *Künstlerromane* non-developmentally. Read this way, each iteration of the girl writer's subjectivity is seen as a unique performance, responding to the needs of a particular rhetorical situation. What emerges from this reading is an understanding of the girl writer

as constantly in play, forever revising herself in negotiation with the socio-political and economic tensions of her moment.

My introduction, Chapter One, lays out the core tenets of this reading; Chapter Two applies it to Alcott's March trilogy (1868-86) and *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* (1872-82); Chapter Three to Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912); and Chapter Four to Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964). The conclusion, Chapter Five, discusses the implications of these writers' work for an understanding of the girl subject as articulated throughout the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Additionally, it gestures toward the future development of the *Künstlerroman*. Finally, I examine how this interpretation of subjectivity can be used in writing and literature classrooms.

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION—LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: THEORIES AND APPROACHES

When I first read Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868-9) as a girl, I was fascinated with her young protagonist, Jo March. In particular, I loved the initial scenes of writerly collaboration in which Jo leads her sisters as editor of the "Pickwick Portfolio," a shared venture inspired by Charles Dickens' work. What's more, I reveled in Jo's self-identification with "rascals" and "minxes" (36). Meg, Jo's older sister, refuses association with those terms: "Call yourself any names you like; but I am neither a rascal nor a minx, and I don't choose to be called so" (36). In response, Jo claims that she loves "good, strong words, that mean something" (36). Although Meg focuses on the consequences such words have on her identity, Jo maintains her dedication to a rich vocabulary used to create powerful images.

Unlike Meg, Jo values the creative aspect of writing, which allows her to play with words and meanings without worrying what kind of effect they may have on her personal character. This example of Jo's writing early in the text illustrates a girl writer who appropriates epithets such as "rascal" and "minx" to establish her identity as outside of the social norm. Jo revisions socially coded language in a manner at odds with the words' preferred meanings. Similar to many other fans of Alcott's book, I responded to Jo's love of words, her independent nature, and her desire to become a serious, published writer. I wanted to follow in her rebellious lead.

And yet I was crushed when Alcott seemingly wrecks the fun of her feisty protagonist by marrying her off to the much older Professor Bhaer, whom Jo meets after leaving home to work as a governess and aspiring writer in New York City. As a young reader, I saw that Jo's marriage to the professor marked a pronounced change in her character. Jo seems to transform from dreamy, passionate girl who uses powerful words that make her older sister cringe to young woman who adapts to societal conventions, marrying a man who tells her, as her father does earlier in the book, that she should stop writing those exciting, sensational stories and develop domestic tales instead (279-81).[1]

I was not alone in feeling this way about the ending of Alcott's book. Critics such as Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant see *Little Women* as a regression for the female writer, claiming that Alcott resolves "the problems and conflicts engendered by the clash of Jo's independent personality with her required role in the woman's sphere only by excising and replacing Jo's character" (10). Estes and Lant argue that Jo becomes more like Beth, the younger, more selfless March sister. Similarly, Beverly Lyon Clark concedes that by the end of the first volume of Alcott's text, Jo becomes "more object than artist, more conforming, less wildly imaginative" (88). Several important critics of

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[1] As Kathryn Manson Tomasek puts it: "With the professor, Jo's independence comes to an end . . . since in his paternal way he opposes her writing sensational stories" (238).

Alcott's text, in fact, focus on the failed nature of Jo as an artist.[2]

The problem of Jo's character falling more in line with dominant ideology as the novel progresses is not limited to Alcott's young protagonist; it is common to the female *Künstlerroman*, or the story of artistic development. Typically, the female artist begins her journey at odds with herself and her community, and she must come to terms with that difference if she hopes to reintegrate into her community. More specifically, as Grace Stewart and Linda Huf have noted in their foundational studies on nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's *Künstlerromane*—*A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature*, respectively—the artist heroine, unlike the artist hero, must choose between her art and her femaleness. According to Stewart, the heroine's acceptance of an artistic life, one that rejects traditional, societal views of appropriate womanly behavior, results in a freakish existence: the protagonist who chooses her career is punished by being ostracized, or, worse yet, facing physical deformation and/or death. As a result, more women artists in early female *Künstlerromane* choose marriage, a move that allows them to reintegrate into their communities with their womanhood intact, but a decision that may deny them an artistic career.

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[2] In *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, Roberta Seelinger Trites also comments on Jo's eventual silencing as a female artist. Critics such as Elaine Showalter, however, view Alcott's work as an attempt to create an alternate vision of the female artist that does not subscribe to the male genius model. Showalter recognizes that Jo's career is a happy one, even if it does not fit into our modern views (*Sister's Choice* 57).

This is what critics such as Estes and Lant argue Alcott has done to Jo. It is, in fact, what many critics argue has happened to a host of girl writers. The consensus is that the female *Künstlerroman* is, almost by definition, a failed narrative, in that it ends not with an artistic coming of age, but with the death or displacement of the girl writers' identities. Even if the girl writer maintains her artistic identity by the novel's end, she has still sacrificed and renegotiated that role for the sake of social responsibility.

But here is the problem. This trajectory, shaped as it is by the rhetorical constraints of narrative, tricks readers into imagining that the female artist's character arc must culminate in a fixed and unified self, thus delimiting the possible alternative versions of womanhood and writerhood. However, the problem lies not with the trajectory of the *Künstlerroman*, but with critics' acceptance of the trajectory as determinative of girl writerly identity.

In this dissertation, I argue against critics' linear reading of the girl writer, taking the position that girl writers occupy multiple writerly identities throughout any given text, and that these identities may be read as existing simultaneously, outside the narrative constraints imposed by the *Künstlerroman* genre. Such a reading may afford readers and critics a more accurate and useful understanding of female writerly identity.

My position is influenced by Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theories of language and culture open up additional avenues for analyzing the writing acts and the girl writers in any *Künstlerroman*. Barthes argues that “a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (1324). Barthes problematizes the idea of meaning consciously produced through the machinations of an all-knowing authorial figure. Rather, the author is constructed by multiple forces, including historical, social, economic, and personal ones. Recognizing the multiplicity of forces that influence a text may free readers from focusing so ardently on the image of a unified author, whether it is the image of the author outside of the text (e.g. Alcott) and/or within it (e.g. Jo).

In a similar vein, Bakhtin rebukes critics who “seek in the stylistic phenomenon a direct and unmediated expression of authorial individuality” (1082). Bakhtin upsets the myth of structural unity by pointing to the multi-voiced nature of discourse. As Michael Holquist puts it, “Bakhtin’s historical masterplot opens with a deluded perception of unity and goes on to a growing knowledge of ever-increasing difference and variety that cannot be overcome in any uniting synthesis” (76). Bakhtin’s “deluded perception of unity” challenges the New Critical practice of favoring one moment in a novel, such as the *telos* (ending), as connecting disparate literary elements, thereby producing textual harmony. His philosophy of language points to the many-voiced and simultaneous nature of dialogue, a phenomenon otherwise referred to as heteroglossia. Language, within a Bakhtinian formulation, is dialogic rather than monologic, fluid rather than static.

Applying Barthes' and Bakhtin's theories to Louisa May Alcott's March trilogy—*Little Women* (1868-9), *Little Men* (1871), and *Jo's Boys* (1886)—and *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* (1872-82), Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912), and Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964) allows me to read the girl writer unencumbered by both linear narrative and unity. Doing so reveals that the heroines in these texts—Jo March, Judy Abbott, and Harriet M. Welsch—are writers whose unique and varied performances of writerly identity speak to the fluidity of subjectivity, illustrating—some implicitly, others explicitly—that one's subject position is always in flux, revising itself in a series of improvised negotiations with a range of cultural constraints.

In many ways, Jo is Judy and Harriet's literary predecessor. Roberta Seelinger Trites credits Alcott, author of "the prototypical *künstlerroman* of the female writer" with inspiring the works of Webster and Fitzhugh (*Twain, Alcott* 146). Trites' theory has influenced my own work, confirming the connection between all three authors' works and identifying major similarities in each artist's treatment of strong female communities as essential for the girl writer's forays into reforming social institutions. I gesture at the importance of Trites' work through my dissertation title, which is derived from a section heading, "Jo March's Progeny," that appears in her book *Twain, Alcott and the Birth of the*

*Adolescent Reform Novel* (146). Even though Trites' critique is useful for understanding the web of communal relations in which the girl writer may find herself, she does not look closely enough at the actual writing practices of the girl authors she discusses, neglecting to detail how the girl writers' reform agendas, and that of their real world counterparts, plays out via a subversion of writerly conventions, most particularly via a subversion of the *Künstlerroman* narrative.

To develop the argument that Alcott, Webster, and Fitzhugh not only concede to the constraints of the *Künstlerroman* narrative, but also work to upset and revise it, I analyze the narratives and their protagonists within a nexus of complex relations both inside and outside the text. I look not only at the girl writers' many performances of writerly identity, but also at the cultural conversations, genre constraints, and autobiographical and intertextual references that situate each text within its historical moment. More specifically, I place each text in dialogue with the ideas about girl writerhood emerging from, to borrow Holquist's words, the "cacophony of different voices" speaking within each writers' cultural milieu (89). Of course, as I mentioned earlier, this reading of girl writers rests upon the tacit understanding that the subject, and thus the girl writer, is not a unified nor stable construct, but is constantly in the process of being re- and deconstructed by a plurality of voices and relations: the historical period, the constraints of genre, and the authors themselves. As a result, subjectivity cannot be approached as a thing in itself. Rather, it must be approached as a field of tensions from which a multiplicity of performances may arise. To produce such a reading of the girl writer, I consider the different tensions at work in shaping her.

As noted, this approach demands looking outside of the text, locating it within a particular moment, and reading it in light of social and political forces. In this regard, I analyze the fictional works of Alcott, Webster, and Fitzhugh in a New Historical context, placing them alongside social histories of American women writers, including Naomi Z. Sofer's *Making the "America of Art"* and Anne E. Boyd's *Writing for Immortality*. Further, because I believe that the literary and rhetorical conventions surrounding women's writerly production are also historically situated, I sometimes turn to period specific texts, including composition textbooks. That kind of text is most important when looking at Webster's *Künstlerroman*, for her novel may have been shaped by the feminist composition scholar Gertrude Buck, one of Webster's teachers, possible mentors, and a significant voice in the conversation about women's suffrage. Including these kinds of non-literary texts not only helps me to situate each author's work historically, but also supports my efforts in reclaiming some of the lost voices and perspectives that may have influenced the production of the girl writer.

In addition to considering the historical moment, I also examine the influence of the *Künstlerroman* narrative*,* since it is the formal conventions of this genre that will set the parameters of Alcott's, Webster's, and Fitzhugh's writerly negotiations. My study, therefore, will highlight how Alcott, Webster, and Fitzhugh adapt to and subvert the narrative form of the *Künstlerroman*. In doing so, I employ three works on the history of this genre. The first two, mentioned earlier, are Huf's and Stewart's studies—each of which focuses on the descending narrative arc common to the female version of the genre. The third study I have selected, Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce,* takes a broader approach. Beebe's book is one of the foundational studies on the *Künstlerroman*, tracking its emergence during the German and English Romantic periods, and tracing its development through a host of (mostly male) artist novels. In fact, Beebe claims, "the main characteristics of the artist are unchanged from the first of the artist-novels to those of our own time" (65). Beebe's history of the *Künstlerroman*, although not explicitly mentioned in my dissertation, nevertheless has been important in my understanding some of the key features of the form. Along with Huf's and Stewart's work, it is indispensible for identifying those elements that authors including Alcott, Webster, and Fitzhugh adapt, alter, or resist in their own female and feminist versions.

Finally, I contextualize each literary work within the author's biography. Although Barthes asks readers to look past authorial intent, thus privileging readerly agency, I cannot ignore the author's voice as part of the cacophony of voices interacting within the *Künstlerroman*. In this regard, authorial biographies and journals serve to expand the dialogue about girl writerly identity as it relates to Alcott's, Webster's, and Fitzhugh's *Künstlerromane*. For example, looking at the communities of which the authors were a part sheds light on their depictions of the girl writer. Thus, I explore Alcott's family life, her journal writing, and her participation in the conversations about women's roles; Webster's experiences at Vassar College; and Fitzhugh's participation in the New York City art scene. This biographical approach will allow me to analyze how each author's experiences may have impacted her subsequent depictions of the girl writer.

However, all of this—history, genre study, biography—is simply the necessary background for the main event: the texts and their narratives. Within these narratives, the girl writers perform their artistic roles in diverse and often contradictory ways, always in dialogue with a range of socio-cultural and political forces. To enable my critique of the girl writer character as heteroglossic in this manner and to aid me in parsing the complexities of each emerging subject position, I turn to the feminist theorist of performativity, Judith Butler.

Butler's theory of performativity is a significant one for this project in that it helps to clarify and expand the potentialities of girl writerhood. Gender identity, in Butler's words, is not seamless, but "tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (270). Further, she claims that these "acts" are themselves "compelled by social sanction and taboo" (271). And yet Butler also points out that there is room in gender identity for revision, arguing that "in its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (271). In relation to the girl writers in Alcott's, Fitzhugh's, and Webster's *Künstlerromane*, then, Butler allows me to see each character's negotiations with gender identity as tenuous, improvisational, and unresolved. As I argue, each of these character's performances of girl writerly subjectivity are transitory, designed only to achieve a particular and limited aim in the moment in which they are enacted.

Andrea Abernethy Lunsford and Lisa Ede's ideas about dialogic writing have also influenced my thinking about girl writers. As they explain in their article, "Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration," the dialogic mode "is loosely structured, and the roles enacted within it are fluid; one "person" may occupy multiple and shifting roles" (257). Adopting this mode of discourse allows me to examine the interplay of writing acts within each of the *Künstlerromane* I have chosen. Following James Herrick, I also employ Lloyd Bitzer's theories of the situatedness of the writing act in tandem with Kenneth Burke's theories of rhetorical motives (227-33), a move that enables me to identify the rhetorical purposes that may lie behind the girl writers' enactments of a particular subject position.

Another composition scholar that I turn to when analyzing the girl writer's performances is Anne Ruggles Gere. In her article "Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing," Gere redefines the term "silence," which often gets a bad reputation in conversations about writing. Gere asks readers to think about silence "as in dialogue rather than in opposition to speech" (207), as conveying meaning in diverse ways. Gere outlines the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of silence, all of which prove useful tools for my analysis of the girl writer. Gere's theory of silence allows me to consider why the girl writer, on numerous occasions, uses silence as part of her writerly performances. Considering writerly silence in this way permits me to further expand the boundaries surrounding the understanding of girl writerhood as a form of subjectivity. Specifically, I argue that the gaps created by rhetorical silence frequently enable girl writers to imbue their identities with a radical form of ambiguity which not only aids them in navigating, or even overturning, cultural or narrative constraints, but which also—in Fitzhugh's work especially—work against romantic notions of the self as an objective reality detached from the field of dialogic play.

In addition, I also rely on the work of postructuralist and existentialist critics such as Jacques Derrida and Albert Camus. These two critics have the most impact on my study of Fitzhugh's heroine, since it is she who, alone amongst the girl writers I discuss, challenges the basic notion that agency must rely on the transcendental presence. For Fitzhugh, as for many artists in the latter twentieth century, such a proposition became less and less compelling. It is her contention, I argue, that the self is not, in fact, a *presence* at all. Rather, it is—as Derrida would have it—an absence whose "being," such as it is, takes shape only within the system of signs produced by discourse.

Although such a notion of the subject may at first appear dangerous to the political project of feminism, I argue that, to paraphrase Camus, the recognition that identity is an absurd fiction need not lead to despair. On the contrary, this recognition actually enables an approach to subjectivity as a form of freeplay wherein the writer may joyfully perform a kaleidoscope of selves without attachment and without fear. To parse the political efficacy of this strategy of identity production, I turn to bell hooks. hooks argues, particularly in her essay “Postmodern Blackness,” that the essentializing tendencies of the enlightenment model of identity, in which the authenticity of the subject is sacrosanct, are regressive, and, what is more, dangerous in that they inevitably re-inscribe notions of otherness. For hooks, the project of the postmodern critique of identity must be to resist authenticity and to affirm multiplicity, legitimizing the varied experiences of a range of subjects (515-6).

hooks, of course, is talking about the discourse surrounding black identity, and yet it is my contention that her arguments can be applied not only to women, but to all individuals. One’s experience and performance of subjectivity is always multiple and contingent, constituted in dialogue with a host of other forces. Rather than fear the delimiting aspects of these forces, one may adopt a policy of limited engagement, of limited being, in which the self articulated in any given instance is understood as transitory rather than definitive: it is a pose, or a position, or perhaps most clearly a rhetorical device, articulated as a means of negotiation, and its efficacy, although particular to the situation in which it arises and indeed derived in part from pre-existing social forms, is nevertheless quite real.

These are the major theorists and theories that inform my analysis in the remaining pages of this dissertation. Over the next three chapters, I apply these theories and theorists to Alcott's, Webster's, and Fitzhugh's texts, investigating how each of these writers reinvents girl writerly subjectivity for her own ends, and how the overall figure of the girl writer begins to move away from its enlightenment roots.

In the next chapter, "Trap-Doors and Escape Routes: Alternate Subjectivities in the March Trilogy and *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag*," I focus specifically on the novels of Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) in which Jo March appears as either a major or minor character. I examine Alcott's novels about Jo as a series of discourses in which complex fields of writerly identity emerge, and I take issue with the critical tendency to read Jo in terms of the declension model of the *Künstlerroman*. Moreover, I argue that despite Alcott's seeming capitulation to the declension model in *Little Women* and its immediate sequel *Little Men*, she in fact revivifies Jo as a creative artist in later books. What is more, I contend that Jo's writerly performances throughout Alcott's oeuvre map a series of trap-doors in the narrative, each of which opens into a potential avenue of escape from both the overdetermined developmental trajectory of the *Künstlerroman* and from essentializing notions of subjectivity.

In Chapter Three, "'Mistress of Effects': Performative Rhetoric and the Construction of Subjectivity in *Daddy-Long-Legs*," I present an analysis of Jean Webster's (1876-1916) text, focusing on Webster's relationship with composition scholar and teacher Gertrude Buck, and unearthing the influence of Buck's pedagogy in Webster's novel. This influence is important, because Judy, Webster's protagonist, is in many ways the realization of Buck's pragmatic and socially invested approach to rhetoric and composition. I argue that Judy composes herself along Buck-ian lines, taking a largely rhetorical approach to the production of her own identity, and further implying that not only is identity a rhetorical construct, but that it is—as a result—infinitely malleable.

Finally, in Chapter Four, "The Play is the Thing: Infinite Subjectivities in *Harriet the Spy*," I investigate Louise Fitzhugh's (1928-1974) novel. Here, I posit that Fitzhugh's Harriet is the most radical of the three heroines, arguing that even though Jo and Judy model narratives of resistance and mastery, they do so largely through a re-inscription of the authentic subject. Fitzhugh begins to pull away from this understanding of identity, positioning her protagonist within a liminal space influenced by the ideology of second wave feminism, yet also problematized by the emerging theories of poststructuralism and postmodernity. In the end, I suggest that, with Harriet, Fitzhugh takes an almost absurdist approach to subjectivity, arguing—with Camus and bell hooks—that one need not, like Judy, seek mastery over or, like Jo, escape from the socio-cultural discourses that surround and, yes, restrict the subject. Rather, one must pursue a policy of limited engagement, recognizing that the way in which one inhabits any given subject position, the way in which one performs within that role, enables a dialogue with power: a dialogue that contains the potential for radical re-visionings.

In the closing chapter of my dissertation, I examine the implications of my project and the potential for applying this reading to the literature and writing classrooms and to future studies of girl writers, including real world girl writers of Nancy Drew fan fiction and girl writer characters in twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels. Analyzing fan fiction and novels—such as Andrew Clements' *The Landry News* (1999) and Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy* (1994)—alongside earlier texts such as Alcott's, Webster's, and Fitzhugh's, help me to chart new possibilities for negotiating the terms of girl writerly identity.

I have chosen, somewhat contradictorily, I admit, to organize these chapters chronologically. Although I have argued against a linear reading of these narratives, looking at these texts in chronological order allows me to chart the historical movements in *Künstlerromane* featuring girl writers. I cannot ignore the presence of time, inside or outside of a text. The mistake, then, is reading these narratives as continuous and unified, arguing that one *Künstlerroman* of the girl writer supplants the other. I would argue, rather, that Alcott's, Webster's, and Fitzhugh's texts speak to each other in dialogue. Ultimately, by examining their texts and the relationships between them within a heteroglossic framework, I hope to extend the critical discussion of the *Künstlerroman*, formulating a more complex, dialogic understanding of the girl writer in America during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century and beyond.

# CHAPTER II: TRAP-DOORS AND ESCAPE ROUTES: ALTERNATE SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE MARCH TRILOGY AND *AUNT JO'S SCRAP-BAG*

In her wildly popular book *Little Women* (1868-9), Louisa May Alcott introduced readers to Jo March, an aspiring writer who finds herself at odds with normative standards of nineteenth-century subjectivity. Consequently, Jo's writing becomes a site of tension in which she grapples with essentializing notions of femininity. Alcott repeatedly depicts Jo as struggling with the limitations of that subject position, seeking through writerly performance alternative modes of being. Jo's subsequent writing acts in the sequels to *Little Women*—*Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886)—are basically a reiteration of this same central struggle.

Since Jo's narrative arc throughout the March trilogy seems to lead her away from the kinds of cultural production that would be considered high art, numerous critics have read Jo's writerly development as falling in line with the declension model endemic to nineteenth-century female *Künstlerromane*. Typically in these narratives of artistic becoming, the artist begins her journey at odds with herself and her community, and she must come to terms with those differences in order to reintegrate into her community. More specifically, as Grace Stewart and Linda Huf have noted in their foundational studies[1] on nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's *Künstlerromane*, the artist heroine, unlike the artist hero, must choose between her art and her femaleness.

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[1] *A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature*, respectively.

Judith Fetterley, moreover, claims that Jo is a defeated writer who sacrifices her true writing style for other people's needs. That decision, Fetterley posits, is simply a matter of "harsh necessity" for the nineteenth-century woman writer (34). Ann B. Murphy also admits to Jo's eventual "patriarchal silencing" (580) and Beverly Lyon Clark contends that, although "Alcott gives some play to subversive ideas of self-expression, her overt message is that girls should subordinate themselves and their language to others" (81).[2] These readings, though valid, overprivilege the idea of the essential subject, the very notion that Alcott and Jo are contesting. Moreover, these critics accept as inevitable the developmental narrative arc of the *Künstlerroman*. In so doing, they have missed an important aspect of Alcott's work. As I argue in this chapter, the March trilogy, along with *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* (1872-82), dramatizes the effort Alcott exerts in trying to find/open up a trap-door in the overdetermined notions of authorship, gender, and subjectivity prevalent in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

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[2] Even Elizabeth Lennox Keyser comments on the descending nature of Jo's writerly performance in her noteworthy study *Whispers in the Dark: the Fiction of Louisa May Alcott*, reading Jo as the least subversive artist character in Alcott's book. More revolutionary, according to Keyser, is Amy's character, for contrary to Jo, she does not permit authority figures "to determine the course of her career" (76). Amy is "least willing to engage in self-sacrifice" (74-5), thus protecting her artistic output, whereas Jo withdraws "into the domestic and dependent sphere from which she had sought to escape" (74). This controlling aspect of Amy's character is one I revisit in the subsequent chapter on Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*.

Alcott is not alone in this project. Nineteenth-century authors were often described in oppositional, gendered terms: women were popular writers of sentimental, educative fiction and men authors of high art. But women writers of the time, including Alcott, often challenged this troublesome binary. For example, in *Making the "America of Art,"* Naomi Z. Sofer traces "the process whereby American women writers negotiated their position within the emerging realm of high literary culture, and, in the process, modified existing models of female authorship" (13). This process, as Sofer explains it, is one of transformation from a culture of "bread and butter"[3] literature, produced largely for consumption, to a culture of distinctly American high art which could serve to establish America's cultural acumen on the world stage. For women, this transition meant a refusal of the terms of authorship as they had been previously defined, challenging the notion that women's writing must be morally edifying, and asserting that women too might pursue the production of a "great book" (1).

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[3] According to Martha J. Cutter, this image was popularized in nineteenth-century fiction, in which women writers are portrayed as writing "out of dire financial need" rather than "out of a need for self-expression" (33).

Anne E. Boyd's *Writing for Immortality*, similar to Sofer's work, follows women writers' emergence into "the realm of high literature" (9). Boyd asserts that women writers of the 1860s-80s no longer confined themselves exclusively to the republican model of authorship that stressed duty and social responsibility; they also adopted "models of authorship that previously had been considered available only to men, at least in the United States" (9). Both studies are significant in that they demonstrate how nineteenth-century women writers were actively involved in their cultural milieu, participants in the expansion of art and authorship.

Unfortunately, Sofer and Boyd barely scratch the surface of how this redefinition of authorship plays out in Alcott's *Little Women*.[4] Although Sofer asserts that Alcott uses her position as a popular writer of children's literature to promote a model of artistic patronage that would alleviate the economic restrictions on American artistic production, she focuses her argument on the figures of Amy and Laurie and largely ignores the primary writer character—Jo (134-6). Boyd, though she does discuss Jo, nevertheless glosses over much of Alcott's book, claiming that Alcott's "serious novels for adults allowed her the freedom to subvert" the conventional declension model expected of a children's book such as *Little Women* (72). Both of these critics successfully contextualize Alcott within her historical moment, but their mishandling of Jo represents a significant oversight, since it is in Jo's narrative that Alcott most effectively works to dismantle the conceptual framework in which women writers of the time were trapped.

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[4] Nor do they discuss Alcott's subsequent books in the March trilogy.

This is the case from the onset of *Little Women*, wherein Alcott characterizes Jo as an aspiring writer of tragic plays. Jo's older sister Meg deems Jo's latest play "the best we've had yet," and Beth compares her playwright sister to the great English dramatist, claiming "I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You're a regular Shakespeare!" (15). The appellative signals that Jo, similar to the women writers of her time, aspires to a place in the high art tradition as defined by the literary canon. Yet that tradition is already gender coded. It is exclusively masculine, as Jo herself is well aware. For her, the transition into the position of high art producer carries a necessary corollary in a kind of gender reassignment, and Alcott highlights Jo's "great disappointment in not being a boy" throughout the first part of *Little Women* (13).

This disappointment prompts Jo's repeated attempts at defeminization. Much to the chagrin of her more ladylike sisters Meg and Amy, Jo uses slang to emphasize her boyishness and understands boys such as Laurie "almost as well as if she had been one herself" (12, 49). Further, when Jo collaborates with her sisters on a newspaper project, the "Pickwick Portfolio," she not only takes on a masculine identity (more on this later) but eventually proposes adding Laurie as a member to their all-female club primarily so that he will make their writing less sentimental, an adjective frequently attached to women's writing (90). Finally, Alcott makes Jo’s gender trouble unavoidable to readers by alluding to a lengthy list of writers whose work serves as Jo’s models. For the most part, these writers are men, including Shakespeare, of course, but also John Bunyan, Charles Dickens, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and others of similar prestige (15, 17, 39, 85, 263). The technique defined here is one of imitation and assimilation, as Jo adapts her writing and herself to the conventions of nineteenth-century masculinity by metaphorically “unsexing” herself.

Indeed, Jo’s discomfort with and increasing separation from traditional notions of femininity is illustrated in the scene where she prepares herself to make social calls with Amy: “ ‘Let me see; ‘Calm, cool and quiet’! yes, I think I can promise that. I’ve played the part of a prim young lady on the stage, and I’ll try it off. My powers are great, as you shall see; so be easy in your mind, my child’ ” (230). As these descriptions make plain, Jo’s aspiration towards the male-coded status of artistic producer results in a recapitulation of traditional gender norms. Indeed, as Kathryn Manson Tomasek has noted, although Jo resists nineteenth-century gender norms, “her independence does not in fact constitute resistance . . . because it accepts and reinforces the binarism between feminine and masculine” (250). Although women are permitted the status of authors in this model, they are not permitted to be both authors and women, for in “this system, if women are not feminine, they are masculine” (250). The position of authorial power thus remains exclusively within the masculine sphere.

Alcott emphasizes this point by coloring Jo's search for artistic legitimacy as a kind of usurpation in which the masculine author is overthrown and his privileged position appropriated. This coloring occurs in the scene mentioned earlier, in which Jo and her sisters rehearse her play. Following Beth's comparison between Jo and the Bard, Jo answers: " 'Not quite,' . . . 'I do think 'The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy,' is rather a nice thing; but I'd like to try Macbeth, if we only had a trap-door for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part. 'Is that a dagger that I see before me?' " (15). Jo's identification of herself in the role of Macbeth is not incidental. It arises, in the quote, from her acknowledgment that she has not yet produced a play whose value as high art would be recognized outside of the domestic sphere. Here, Jo runs up against another troublesome binary constricting women writers of her time: the divide between the domestic field of discourse considered appropriate to women and the public field of discourse reserved for men. Her immediate response is to cast herself as Macbeth, whose boundless ambition drives him to assassinate his King and to seize the throne for himself. Thus Alcott figures Jo as feminist revolutionary bent on overturning patriarchy, at least as it appears in the discourse of artistic value.

With this in mind, it is worth taking a closer look at Jo's allusion to *Macbeth*, which contains a highly charged critique of gender roles. Intriguingly, in the opening act of Shakespeare's play, it is not Macbeth, but Lady Macbeth, whose desire drives the plot. In the famous scene where Lady Macbeth coerces

Macbeth into regicide, her verbal abuse of her husband openly critiques his manhood, playing off the notion that the male subject's agency is defined by an indomitable will to power. Moreover, in the same sequence, Lady Macbeth refigures herself in masculine terms, abandoning her role as mother-figure, protector, and life-giver in the pursuit of power: "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn, / As you have done, to this" (1.7.54-58). It is no coincidence that both Lady Macbeth and Jo must "unsex" themselves. Such a strategy is inevitable on the road to legitimization within a patriarchal hegemony that figures agency primarily as an act of violence.

Indeed, the patriarchal order is ingrained and well policed by women as well as men. In *Little Women,* the key moment in this regard occurs when Amy, in an angry, vindictive gesture, burns Jo's book, "the pride of her heart" (64). Jo takes the loss hard, and, in Alcott's words, "shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head" (64). Here are two acts of violence: Amy's destruction of Jo's manuscript, itself a symbolic murdering of Jo, and Jo's reciprocal assault on Amy, both of which are the inevitable result of a cultural milieu wherein the assertion of autonomous subjectivity is rendered as a zero-sum-game.

This episode also reveals the March family's position on Jo's aspiration to perform as a writer in the public masculine mode. However proud Jo's family may be of her work, they ultimately privilege familial tranquility and the maintenance of the domestic sphere over Jo's emerging and troublesome identity. In this light, Jo's charged defense of her writerly self over her domestic self represents inappropriate behavior: Jo places work before family, replacing one set of ritualized gender-specific acts with another. To use Judith Butler's words, Jo performs her gender in a manner incompatible with the sanctioned model of femininity, and, following the patriarchal model of antagonistic subjectivity, her rebellion initiates "a set of punishments both obvious and indirect" (279).

Jo's reprimand is delivered in the scene where Marmee reveals that, similar to her daughter, she struggles to control her anger. At this point in the text, Alcott averts our readerly gaze away from Amy's thoughtless act, and focuses it instead on Jo's need for greater control over her emotions. The move is ironic because Marmee recodes Jo's violent outburst as a sort of hysteria, a loss of emotional control typical of the "weaker sex." Here Marmee re-feminizes Jo, a movement complicit with patriarchal dominance. What is more, in discussing Mr. March's role in helping her (Marmee) to control her own rage, she makes Jo once again the object of masculine influence. The scene is ideologically punitive and serves to highlight the threat Jo's writerly identity represents to the feminine domestic sphere. Consider that Amy's behavior may briefly disrupt the family's communal tranquility, but it certainly does not challenge her role within the March family as Jo's writerly performance does. Alcott dramatizes this moment in the book to illustrate the way in which women in the nineteenth century become complicit in the violent policing of an overdetermined feminine subjectivity which is positioned as domestic and family oriented, and which reiterates, as both Cutter and Tomasek have noted, the exclusive patriarchal division of public and private spheres (44, 250, respectively).

However, what is more interesting is Alcott's implied critique of Marmee *and* Jo, both of whom are locked into a framework wherein agency—whether enacted on behalf of or against dominant societal norms—is equated with physical and/or ideological force. Intriguingly, Alcott has already suggested that what is needed is not simply a usurpation of patriarchal power, a la Macbeth, but also a way out of its exclusionary, essentializing framework. This suggestion materializes in the same allusion to *Macbeth* made by Jo in the sequence discussed above, when Jo discusses the craft of playwriting with her sisters. The pertinent line, again, is: "I'd like to try Macbeth, if only we had a trap-door for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part" (15). The "killing part," as Jo calls it, corresponds to the usurpation of masculine agency. And it is a tactic which, as noted, has limited results.

The more subversive strategy takes shape in the figure of Banquo's trap-door, which appears in dramatizations of *Macbeth* during the banquet scene. Banquo's ghost publicly terrorizes Macbeth, embarrassing him in front of his wife and a group of assembled lords, none of whom can see Banquo. Banquo materializes and dematerializes frequently within the scene, part of a strategy to make Macbeth appear mentally unstable and emotionally erratic, thus delegitimizing his status as king. This fact is essential to understanding Jo’s wish for alternatives to the patriarchal framework of power relations, for—as with Lady Macbeth before him—Banquo’s attack on Macbeth proceeds along highly gendered lines. Macbeth’s loss of composure is repeatedly described, both by Lady Macbeth and himself, as a failure of masculinity. When Banquo first appears, Macbeth blanches, and Lady Macbeth asks, “[A]re you man?” (3.4.53). Upon Banquo’s disappearance, she repeats, “What quite unmanned in folly?” (3.4.72). Finally, as Banquo leaves for the last time, Macbeth says, “Why so, being gone, I am a man again” (3.4.106-7). Banquo’s particular power lies in his ability to unman Macbeth.

But this is not all, for Banquo himself is an ambiguously gendered character. Like Macbeth, Banquo receives a prophecy, but rather than become subsumed in the masculine will to power, as Macbeth does, he gives his knife away to his son, a gesture that in its phallocentrism seems to signify a renunciation of masculine agency. And yet it is Banquo’s children who ascend the throne after Macbeth. Banquo, and his trap door, thus represent a way out of the overdetermined gendered subject positions defined by the binary exclusions enforced by the patriarchal society of nineteenth-century America. Alcott here foreshadows the project of *Little Women*: to craft tactics that can potentially unsettle fixed subjectivities based on gender, projecting new, more flexible subjectivities into the future.

Banquo’s trap-door is illustrated best in the chapter “The P.C. and P.O.,” in which Alcott offers two escapes from the overdetermined subject positions presented thus far. The first occurs with the “Pickwick Portfolio,” in which the March sisters engage in the production of a heteroglossic pastiche that renders subjectivity performative and infinitely malleable. At first glance, the “Pickwick Portfolio” may not seem so radical. In fact, it may appear to be yet another iteration of the usurpation strategy mentioned earlier, as each March sister appropriates a male persona: “Meg, as the eldest, was Samuel Pickwick; Jo, being of a literary turn, Augustus Snodgrass; Beth, because she was round and rosy, Tracy Tupman; and Amy, who was always trying to do what she couldn’t, was Nathaniel Winkle” (85). After introducing their male doppelgangers, the narrator switches from using female pronouns to male ones, thereby communicating to the reader that the March sisters have shaken off their former subjectivities and assumed those of Dickens’ newspapermen.

And yet the sisters’ appropriation of masculinity in this sequence is fundamentally different from that attempted by Jo elsewhere in the novel. Whereas in other moments, Jo’s performances of masculinity threaten to eradicate her femininity, or are at least figured as rigidly opposed to it, here the assumption of a masculine subjectivity is done in the context of theatrical play: the masculine subject is mask or persona which at once signals identity and its absence. It is a construct which enables the production of different voices and different forms, each of which are granted authenticity as a form of performative currency without requiring that the actor's "real" self be displaced or discarded. Similarly, the portfolio itself, as a parody of the newspaper, enacts a liminal space in which domestic (feminine) and public (masculine) literary spaces are rendered simultaneous and overlapping, and are placed in dialogue with each other.

The liminal space figured by the sisters' pastiche inspires them to conduct a range of writerly experiments, each of which tends to reiterate the hybridity of the portfolio itself. For instance, Beth's brief entry begins, "Once upon a time a farmer planted a little seed in his garden" (87). She then recounts a factual story in which a young girl (Beth) buys a squash from said farmer and transforms it into a dish consumed by "a family named March" (87). For the most part, Beth remains traditionally feminine in her expository story/recipe. But she fuses different genres in her story: the fairy tale, the newspaper article, and the cookbook. Beth's entry scrambles mutually exclusive forms to create something new.

Jo takes this experimentation even further, executing, as Beth has, multiple forms, including the poem, the obituary, and the advertisement. Although her re-enactments of these forms do not contain the same genre mixing as Beth's, Jo's performance has remarkable range. She shows herself capable of taking on multiple personae and speaking in multiple voices. In her poem "Anniversary Ode," Jo uses outdated terms to highlight the importance of literature to the club: the members not only "unite / To joke and laugh and read," but also to “tread the path of literature / That doth to glory lead” (86). Jo’s persona then shifts when she creates advertisements for a weekly gathering “held at Kitchen Place, to teach young ladies how to cook” (89) and for a play “which will surpass anything ever seen on the American stage. ‘THE GREEK SLAVE, or Constantine the Avenger,’ is the name of this thrilling drama!!!” (89). Her remarkable performance balances a nineteenth-century audience’s expectations of recognizable writerly conventions with Jo’s (and Alcott’s) desire for increased freedom of movement. Not unlike Banquo, the girl writer here materializes and dematerializes at will.

Alcott offers yet another trap-door for the female writer when introducing Laurie to the Pickwick Club. Prior to his admittance, the club is exclusively gendered, and so the radical play it enables remains contained in feminine domesticity. Alcott does not allow such containment to stand, and Laurie’s entrance into the club provides a significant break, rendering the space more truly dialogic and hybridized. As always, hybridity of this type is met with serious resistance, signaling as it does a breakdown of traditional identities and social groupings. As Amy notes, “We don’t wish any boys; they only joke and bounce about. This is a ladies’ club, and we wish to be private and proper” (90). Here, Alcott recreates one of the persistent tensions facing women artists of the nineteenth century: the woman writer may be experimental, but only within certain frameworks sanctioned by her society. And yet, although elsewhere in the novel such divisions are intractable and result in the forcible re-inscription of exclusive gender roles (as is the case when Amy burns Jo's book), here, in the third space opened by the Pickwick Club, they result in a bizarre synthesis: the P.O. box[5] alluded to in the chapter's title.

The P.O. box is Laurie's olive branch, offered to the March sisters in the hope that they will admit him to their club. However, on a symbolic level it represents the possibility of a truly heteroglossic space. Laurie's choice of P.O. box—an "old martin-house," or bird-house—is a familiar, homey structure (91). Laurie's gesture is inclusive of all kinds of communication between "each nation," the world of the March home and that of the Lawrence camp (91). As illustrated in the description of the P.O. box below, there exists within its walls endless potential for multiplicity and play:

> . . . many queer things passed through it as through the real office. Tragedies and cravats, poetry and pickles, garden seeds and long letters, music and gingerbread, rubbers, invitations, scoldings and puppies. The old gentleman [Laurie's grandfather] liked the fun, and amused himself by sending odd bundles, mysterious messages, and funny telegrams; and his gardener, who was smitten with Hannah's charms, actually sent a love-letter to Jo's care. (91)

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[5] Interestingly, in an effort "To encourage her daughters to write, [Abba Alcott] set up a family 'post office' where the girls could leave notes for her and one another" (Matteson 104).

With the “Pickwick Portfolio” and the P.O. box, Alcott creates a truly dialogic space “full of unruly members” (87).

What is additionally fascinating about this incident is that Alcott dramatizes, once again, the tension between experiments with diverse identities and forms—all explored within the context of the Dickensian newspaper model and further highlighted with the P.O. box—and Jo’s belief that her work is not on par with male models of literary genius. Alcott includes a brief paragraph detailing how Laurie’s work impacts both the club and Jo’s writing:

> He certainly did add “spirit” to the meetings, and “a tone” to the paper; for his orations convulsed his hearers, and his contributions were excellent, being patriotic, classical, comical, or dramatic, but never sentimental. Jo regarded them as worthy of Bacon, Milton, or Shakespeare; and remodeled her own works with good effect, she thought. (91)

Amidst this conflict between ideas of authorship, Alcott offers strategies for writers such as Jo, who seek to redefine traditionally male *and* female forms by combining them to form something entirely new.[6] Ultimately, Alcott suggests that Jo can experiment with a diverse range of socio-culturally gendered genres and voices, including sentimental (“female”) *and* classical (“male”) ones.

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[6] Alcott’s hodgepodge of different genres not only includes references to Dickens’ work, but to her own previously published work, for the “Pickwick Portfolio” is also modeled after “selections from various copies of the real *Pickwick Portfolio*, the family newspaper written by the four Alcott sisters” (Shealy, “Louisa May Alcott’s Juvenilia”

The kind of free play represented in “The P.C. and P.O.” chapter is not, however, the dominant mode in *Little Women*. More typically, Alcott describes Jo as caught in a binary trap, searching for a way out, a trap-door that inevitably closes all too soon. For instance, later in the book, when Jo first begins to publish her writing, she finds herself caught within the high/low binary that codifies most writerly production in the period.[7] In this regard, it is important to recognize—as Susan S. Williams does in *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900*—the nineteenth-century distinction between the terms writer and author. Williams explains that, “On the whole, writers in the nineteenth century were seen as occupying a lower . . . cultural plane than autonomous authors since they were defined as those who wrote from experience or observation rather than from unique genius or imagination” (5).

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15). Those family newspapers, Daniel Shealy explains, contain the same kind of writing described in this chapter.

[7] Prior to 1850, however, these two “literary levels,” as Richard H. Brodhead puts it, “were not truly separate but lived together” (103), thereby allowing writers such as Alcott to publish stories in publications addressed to diverse audiences (e.g., The high brow *Atlantic Monthly* and the low brow *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*). *Little Women*, Brodhead continues, dramatizes the post-1850s literary stratification that ensued, which made it difficult for writers to continue publishing in both high and low periodicals.

Ever the contrarian, Jo initially refuses these overdetermined roles. Instead, she attempts to publish in both the high and low modes, carving out a third space in which she can be both writer and author.

As a writer of sensational stories, Jo draws on her “theatrical experience and miscellaneous reading” to write tales that belong “to that class of light literature in which the passions have a holiday” and in which “most of the characters died in the end” (213-4, 127). Jo successfully launches herself into this sphere, receiving legitimization in the form of publication and pay. Consequently, Jo begins to “feel herself a power in the house; for by the magic of a pen, her ‘rubbish’ turned into comforts for them all” (215). That point is further articulated later in the book as justification for Jo’s continued production of sensational fiction: “money conferred power; money and power, therefore, she resolved to have; not to be used for herself alone, but for those whom she loved more than self” (272). This affirmation of Jo’s position as a popular writer is further couched in gendered nineteenth-century terms, wherein a woman may pursue economic independence so long as she does so in service to others. Nevertheless, Alcott was well aware that this kind of independence is one of the keys to liberty and self-determination for women writers, and her positioning of Jo as commercial writer underlines the necessity of this role.

In addition to working as a commercial artist, Jo also develops her position as literary author working on her first novel, a text Alcott illustrates as being inherently superior to Jo’s sensational tales in two significant ways. First, Alcott frames Jo’s creative process in line with dominant notions of artistic production as passionate, all-consuming, and divinely inspired: when Jo’s “writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world” (211). This “divine afflatus” is typical of the Romantic image of creativity and serves to mark Jo’s writing in this instance as being of high literary value (211).

Alcott further distinguishes Jo’s novel as superior by offering it legitimation in the form of critical attention, an attention her sensational tales do not receive, garnering, as they do, “[l]ittle notice” (215). The chapter concludes with a list of book reviews, further revealing that Jo’s work is to be judged by artistic standards. What is remarkable in this section of Alcott’s novel is that Jo simultaneously inhabits the roles of writer and author and does so with some success. Moreover, despite the apparent privileging of literary authorship in this sequence, the simultaneity of Jo’s performances blurs the boundaries between these two positions, opening, as I noted earlier, a third space in which subjectivity is rendered primarily operational. Jo’s writerly and authorial identities each enable different forms of agency within the culture, operating in different spheres, both the socio-economic and the cultural.

Despite her success, Jo backs away from this dual identity, abandoning the role of literary author. She does so for two reasons, both of which are rooted in her central problem as a character: her internalization of the ideology of essential subjectivity. The first problem Jo faces is her editor's insistence that she cut her book "down one-third" as a prerequisite for publication (215). In line with Transcendental notions of authorship popularized by writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose contention it was that literature is "a natural extension of [one's] original" self (Boyd 24), Jo too believes that her novel is an extension of her true self. To redact it, as Jo eventually does, is to commit an act of violence. As Alcott puts it: "with Spartan firmness, the young authoress laid her first-born on her table, and chopped it up as ruthlessly as any ogre" (216). Clearly, Jo struggles with the reality that authorship itself is heteroglossic, responding not only to the needs of the writer but to those of her editors and the marketplace as well. A common reading may be that Jo's revisions speak to her growing understanding of the different forces at play in constructing her public persona as female author.

Although this is a valid reading, the second problem that Jo encounters extends the scope of Alcott's depiction of identity. That problem occurs after her book is published and garners mixed reviews. Some deem her book's theory "bad" and her characters "unnatural"; others praise it as being "one of the best American novels" (217). Jo is upset by the contradictory nature of these reviews and wishes she had "printed [the novel] whole, or not at all, for I do hate to be so horridly misjudged" (217). Here, too, Jo equates her novel with herself, and is reluctant to accept the multiple ways in which both her book and her identity as author have been constructed by her readers. This discomfort leads her to suspend her artistic production, and to retreat into the singular position of commercial writer. She even denies having produced an artistic work at all, saying "I only wrote it for the pleasure and the money" (217).

Murphy argues that Alcott's attempts to imagine "a new form of power" for her character fail; instead, Jo herself capitulates to "the exploitive, manipulative male model of power [she] seeks to evade" (580). Ultimately, Murphy posits, Alcott's character is trapped by a seemingly endless process of either/or choices" (580).[8] However, whereas critics such as Cutter argue that writers including Alcott "seldom present an alternative theory of voice that allows female characters in their texts to challenge those [patriarchal] structures" (64), I would argue that Alcott does allow space—however narrow and fleeting it may be—for an alternate theory.

In the previous example, Jo attempts to recreate the multiplicity of the "Pickwick Portfolio," by being *both* a writer *and* an author. Despite Jo's discomfort, a contemporary reader should recognize that this heteroglossic approach to writerly identity is objectively successful: Jo publishes sensational stories and a novel. What's more, her work contributes to two different markets.

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[8] These ideas are echoed in conversations about Alcott's career. Eugenia Kaledin views Alcott as sacrificing "her honest literary aspirations in order to write the kind of stories that would support" her family (254), whereas Daniel Shealy posits a more favorable view of Alcott as a savvy writer very much aware of audiences and unique publication demands ("The Author-Publisher" 65).

Jo rakes in money as a commercial artist and publishes a book that garners exciting—if contradictory—dialogue. Jo's dual strategy thus permits her currency in different fields of cultural production. As previously noted, the problem with sustaining this strategy is that it brings Jo outside of the essentializing framework of patriarchy. Furthermore, as noted, it flies in the face of dominant Transcendentalist notions of artistic production in addition to the Romantic notion of essential selfhood. Thus, Jo's eventual retreat is not a sign of Alcott's failure; rather, it illustrates Alcott's awareness of the dangers inherent in internalizing the dominant ideology.

Indeed, Alcott is not through with her critique of the essential self. The subject surfaces again when Jo visits a literary and philosophical symposium with Professor Bhaer, her future husband. The symposium, held "in honor of several celebrities" (277), quickly turns into a discourse on modern thought. Alcott deliberately alludes to Kant and Hegel, presenting an alternative theory of selfhood in which the "transcendental" self does not exist *a priori* but rather emerges as a synthesis of the tensions produced by one's external environment. This notion of selfhood challenges the patriarchal model, which always imagines identity as something intrinsic that precedes contact with culture. Here, then, the subject has once again been rendered protean and contingent. The transformation has a rather profound effect on Jo, who realizes "that the world was being picked to pieces, and put together on new, and, according to the talkers, on infinitely better principles than before" (277). Moreover, she responds to this realization with “a curious excitement, half pleasurable, half painful, . . . with a sense of being turned adrift into time and space, like a young balloon out on a holiday” (278).

Just as before, Jo is confronted with the notion that identity is constructed, and that it can be reconfigured in multiple ways. Though she meets this idea again with some discomfort, she is also excited. Even when called away by Bhaer, she resists: “[Bhaer] shook his head, and beckoned her to come away, but she was fascinated, just then, by the freedom of Speculative Philosophy, and kept her seat, trying to find out what the wise gentlemen intended to rely upon after they annihilated all the old beliefs” (278). Clearly, Jo is intrigued by the possibilities of yet another trap-door, another escape route leading away from the constant tug between binaries which she has experienced so frequently over the course of the novel. The balloon image, which Alcott deploys in this sequence, is telling, since it encapsulates a kind of untethered waywardness, the playful and pleasurable displacement of being on holiday from restrictive norms.

As always, though, the moment cannot be sustained, and Bhaer, in his role as cultural authority, drags Jo back to terra firma, interrupting the philosophers with a defense of tradition: “as [Bhaer] talked, the world got right again to Jo; the old beliefs that had lasted so long, seemed better than the new . . . She felt as if she had solid ground under her feet again” (278). One might be tempted to read Jo’s return to earth as yet another recapitulation to what Murphy has called “the forces of patriarchy that so consistently limit the choices in the novel” (583). However, to assume that Jo’s acquiescence is also Alcott’s, or the novel’s, is a mistake. Although it is true that the trap-door closes, and that normalcy is reinforced, it is also true that in this brief instance, Alcott opens up a space that, via its embrace of indeterminacy, unsettles all the traditional assumptions about the nature of the subject. Even though in this instance Alcott may have been unable to sever herself entirely from her Transcendental roots, she nevertheless entertains the possibility of an alternative way of being. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the implicit freedom of the balloon metaphor with Bhaer’s restrictive grounding of Jo further highlights the delimiting aspects of traditional subjectivity and the liberatory potential of a decentered approach to the subject.

Of course, this reading further illustrates that Jo’s writerly performances represent instances of tension with the predominant institutions delimiting women artists’ roles in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. However, I cannot ignore that in the trajectory of Alcott’s *Künstlerroman* Jo becomes a married woman *and* a writer of domestic fiction. What’s more, Jo inherits Plumfield, the home left to her by Aunt March at the end of the book (373). Together with the help of her husband and the Lawrence men, Jo converts the home into a school for boys rich and poor. Thus Alcott casts Jo in a maternal light in the final chapter, titled “Harvest Time,” and, to make things worse, has Jo abandon her artistic ambition:

> “the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely and cold to me now. 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 for such experiences and illustrations as these;” and Jo pointed from the lively lads in the distance to her father, leaning on the Professor’s arm, . . . and then to her mother, sitting enthroned among her daughters. (379)

Here, it would seem that the critics[9] who bemoan Jo’s descent from her position as an interesting writer are right. Jo’s writing career goes nowhere. She is ultimately subsumed into a cookie cutter femininity that either delimits her writing by forcing it into the accepted mode for women writers, or ends her writing altogether in favor of her responsibilities as Mrs. Bhaer, matron of Plumfield.

This reading is hard to escape, if, like many of Alcott’s critics, one accepts that the narrative arc of the *Künstlerroman* is determinative. The form, however, is a product of its time, and Alcott’s decision to work within it an act of negotiation. Initially, Alcott had intended to upset the traditional form: she did not want to marry Jo off.[10] Eventually, as her biographer Madeleine B. Stern elucidates, Alcott was forced to marry off her little woman because of audience and publishing demands (183-4). Even as she concedes to these demands, Alcott seeds her text with gestures that disrupt inherited ideologies.[11] These disruptions, moreover, recur in the later texts involving Jo, proof that, *Little Women* notwithstanding, Alcott's writerly project remained deeply invested in exploring the potential of alternate approaches to narrative identity.

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[9] The most representative of these critics are Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant, who claim that “By the end of the novel Jo has no rebellion, no self, left. Jo’s mind, earlier filled with divided but vital and authentic impulses, is now—like the doll Joanna’s head—vacuumed out and replaced with Beth’s one-dimensional, selfless personality” (10).

It must be said, however, that Alcott's next book featuring Jo, *Little Men*, in which Alcott focuses on the adventures and misadventures of the young boys and girls who attend Plumfield School, is the least evocative in this regard.

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[10] As Alcott writes in her journal: "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. I *won't* marry Jo to Laurie to please any one" (167).

[11] Even in Jo's marriage there are small signs of resistance in the form of feminist gestures. Ann Douglas notes in her introduction to the 1983 Signet edition of *Little Women* that, by marrying Bhaer, "Jo chooses something less exciting but more viable, a life capable of accruing wide social, even political connotations; she will be occupied, not possessed" (54). Murphy also allows that the ending, "however uneasily, depicts a reconciliation between the coercions of her culture and needs of her character. In rejecting Laurie, Jo breaks . . . sharply with her society . . . In marrying Professor Bhaer, and hence committing herself to her work rather than to romantic love, Jo creates new possibilities for herself as a member of a community and as a professional in her own right" (568-9).

Picking up on Jo's domestication at the end of *Little Women*, Alcott assigns Jo the roles of motherly confidante and mentor. Jo revels in her new roles, which offer her a great deal of control over the young students in her household, while her husband works as head teacher. Together, they strive to mold intelligent and moral individuals who pursue their passions, whether in medicine, music, art, or business.

Nor do Alcott's descriptions of Jo's writing strategies/subjectivities range as widely in this text as in *Little Women*. Within the pages of *Little Men*, and in line with her pedagogical status, Jo uses writing primarily as "an instrument of social control" (Keyser, *Whispers in the Dark* 87). This mode of writing is evidenced in the following passage wherein Jo describes the contents and purpose of her chief writing implement, her conscience book,[12] to Plumfield's newest student, Nat:

> I have a page for each boy. I keep a little account of how he gets on through the week, and Sunday night I show him the record. If it is bad I am sorry and disappointed, if it is good I am glad and proud; but, whichever it is, the boys know I want to help them, and

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[12] Alcott's inclusion of the conscience book closely mirrors her own parents' frankness about her behavior as a young child, in addition to their written comments in her journals. According to biographer John Matteson, Alcott "was certainly made to know what her parents thought of her" (66), and this constant criticism is dramatized in *Little Men*.

> they try to do their best for love of me and Father Bhaer. (546)

The scrutinizing element of Jo's writing is supplemented by her use of didactic maxims. For instance, upon learning that her sons, niece, and nephew burnt some of their beloved toys while playing a game—"sacrifice"—Jo (laughingly) responds in the following manner: "I shall have to write up in the nursery the verse that used to come in the boxes of toys—'The children of Holland take pleasure in making, / What the children of Boston take pleasure in breaking' " (617). Jo continues to use writing and storytelling when teaching moments arise, as she does when attempting "to impress upon [Nan's] mind the difference between liberty and license, telling several tales to enforce her lecture" (675). Jo's skill for story helps her to reinforce appropriate behavior.

Critics view Jo's writing as stuck in this didactic mode, further proving that Alcott's character succumbs to the dreaded cult of True Womanhood.[13]

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[13] According to Barbara Welter, "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power" (152). This idealized vision of women imagines them to be angels of the home. Yet it was not the only model available to nineteenth-century women. Frances B. Cogan acknowledges the presence of yet another popular feminine ideal—that of Real Womanhood—one that "advocated

Within the context of this book, their arguments are mostly justified. Jo's writing in *Little Men* perpetuates the restrictive model of gender identity that Jo fought so hard to refashion through her writing in *Little Women* (Keyser, *Whispers in the Dark* 98-9). Michelle A. Massé agrees with Keyser, noting that, although Jo's writing continues in *Little Men*, "it also merges with other issues of control. As matriarch of her 'little men,' [Jo] records their progress each week and, in her monitoring, 'writes' actual lives as she used to want to do for her sisters" (334). Jo's character certainly wants what is best for the boys: that they pursue their passions, whether in the fields of music or botany. And yet the way in which Jo monitors the boys' development reveals a limited and manipulative use of writing.

Although Jo certainly appears to be trapped, one image emerges from the text to suggest that she is not: Jo's kite. The kite, given to Jo by the boys as an act of reconciliation after they have misbehaved at a party, serves as a metaphor for disruption, recalling to readers of *Little Men* the Jo that many readers love best, the Jo of *Little Women*, the erratic, unpredictable Jo: "Mrs. Jo enjoyed [her kite] immensely, and it acted as if it knew who owned it, for it came tumbling down head first when least expected, caught on trees, and nearly pitched into the river, and finally darted away to such a height that it looked a mere speck among the clouds" (632). The connection to *Little Women*, as well

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intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage: it was, in other words, a survival ethic" (4).

as to its more transgressive iteration of Jo's character, is further solidified when Jo remarks that she has not flown a kite since she was "a naughty little girl" (633).

But the most significant point of interest lies with the similarity between the kite image and the balloon that appears in the symposium scene in *Little Women*. As noted, the balloon represents a momentary escape from normality, replete with all the pleasures of the unfamiliar. As a symbol of the self, it suggests ultimate freedom: an absolute break with the forms of subjectivity produced and legitimized by the dominant culture. And yet the balloon is also doomed to be lost; in sacrificing any relationship to its cultural "ground," it not only loses its own bearings (as Jo does in that scene) but also forfeits the potential to create a dialogue between established ideas and newly constructed potentialities. The kite, on the other hand, is different. It has all the balloon's mobility, all its range, but remains firmly tethered to earth, and *to Jo*. As such, it represents a more practical re-visioning of the female subject, one which maintains its dialogic relationship to the culture while simultaneously expanding or extending the culture's boundaries.

This moment in *Little Men* allows for an alternative to the standard reading of Jo's character: her marriage to Bhaer, her place at Plumfield, and her role as pedagogue constitute Jo's tether to the culturally dominant, providing her with much needed legitimation that grants her power and agency under the terms of the existing patriarchal society. And yet, they also provide her with cover, enabling her to eventually return to the subversiveness that marked her younger years. In fact, Jo hints at this eventuality in the conclusion to *Little Women*, noting: “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 for such experiences and illustrations as these” (379).

Indeed, the next time Jo materializes in *Jo’s Boys*, she has not only produced such a book, but has actually established herself as a successful author. Although Alcott returns her heroine to the domestic sphere where readers last saw her, she does so in radically altered form. Though in *Little Men* Alcott characterizes Jo solely as matronly figure, in *Jo’s Boys* Jo is much more, having at last realized what in her girlhood were merely castles in the air. In the conversation with her sisters Meg and Amy that opens this final book in the March trilogy, Jo recalls,

> We used to believe in fairies, you remember, and plan what we’d ask for if we could have three wishes. Doesn’t it seem as if mine had been really granted at last? Money, fame, and plenty of work I love,” said Mrs. Jo, carelessly rumpling up her hair as she clasped her hands over her head just as she used to do when a girl. (807)

Once again Alcott’s depiction of the adult Jo calls to mind her earlier incarnation as subversive adolescent. Alcott here seems intent upon revivifying Jo as an artist character who has remained active in pursuing her earlier dreams.

Alcott is also interested in resuscitating a portrait of Jo as a writer who fights for repeated artistic experimentation. One way that Alcott allows for this reading of Jo is by upsetting, once and for all, the idea that Jo's writing is limited to one genre. In *Jo's Boys* Alcott tells readers that Jo wrote a book very much like *Little Women*. Similar to Alcott, Jo responds to the need for a girls' book, and "she hastily scribbled a little story describing a few scenes and adventures in the lives of herself and her sisters" (834). Though no excerpts from this work are included in *Jo's Boys*, *Little Women* itself may provide clues as to the content of Jo's novel. If one assumes that Jo's book is a version of *Little Women*, then it seems clear that, rather than being delimited by the genre of domestic fiction, Jo, similar to Alcott, uses it as a framework for writing in multiple modes. As the text of *Little Women* illustrates, Jo draws on a range of genres to construct a seemingly unified work: the newspaper, the play, the journal, sensational fiction, the domestic tale, the sentimental novel, and more. This fact provides further support for the idea that Alcott is invested in a strategy of grounding formal experimentation in popular frameworks that meet both audience and marketplace demands. Her writings, and presumably Jo's, are in fact heteroglossic in nature, a move which recalls the "Pickwick Portfolio's" use of the newspaper form, or perhaps the pastiche, to open up a radical "third space" for cultural dialogue.

That dialogue presents itself in *Jo's Boys* in the form of Jo's replies to various pieces of fan mail. The epistolary format not only connects Jo to her readers in a more personal way, but it also enables her activism on behalf of women's rights. For example, in one letter, a reader asks for Jo's opinion about women's education, and "[a]lso what careers [her daughters] shall follow" (839). Jo replies: "as I have no girls, my opinion isn't worth much and will probably shock her, as I shall tell her to let them run and play and build up good, stout bodies before she talks about careers. They will soon show what they want, if they are let alone, and not all run in the same mould" (839). Despite its flippancy, Jo's response crosses gender boundaries, reproducing her pedagogical bent in creating spaces in which one's identity is not predetermined by the considerations of culture (here figured as one's career goals) but can develop along particular and divergent lines.

Here Alcott reinvents Jo's character. She is now tied to the culture, having carved a space for herself as celebrated author. Moreover, she is in dialogue with the culture, using her authorial position to alter the construction of overdetermined subjectivities. But truly remarkable is the way in which Alcott achieves this reinvention of Jo. She does so literally from nothing, inserting a ten-year gap in the narrative arc of Jo's artistic development. This strategy is important because it signals Alcott's recognition of the limiting functions of the narrative form. As noted, the *Künstlerroman*, similar to any narrative of becoming, reifies the notion that one's development of subjectivity proceeds systematically through a series of successive and mutually exclusive identities, each of which is mere preparation for a fully realized and *final* self. By breaking with the linear conventions of narrative, however, Alcott is able to circumvent the developmental arc and produce a self for Jo that not only arrives seemingly from nowhere but is coincident with, or overlaps with, her prior selves. What emerges is much closer to the model of becoming which Kant and Hegel imagine in their works, a model wherein being is figured not as the result of the cancelation of a thesis by its antithesis, but rather as a self-transcending synthesis of both opposed terms. Here again Jo is in the realm of Banquo's trap-door, having at last escaped the binary strictures of a zero-sum world.

Alcott's final iteration of Jo, this time in *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag*, proceeds directly from this miraculous escape. A series of six volumes, *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* is a diverse compilation of writing from the desk of Jo Bhaer. According to Joy A. Marsella, Alcott's editor "wanted to capitalize on the fame and selling power of his most famous author" (xii)—and, I would add, Alcott's most famous author character—by encouraging Alcott to participate in the nineteenth-century tradition of women writers who tell stories from the perspective "of a warm, loving, and intelligent maiden aunt" (xvii). Alcott found such a project to be an attractive venture, for it would provide her with even greater financial security and could be completed in a reasonable amount of time, as the collection would include her previously published work in addition to a few original stories (xii-iv).[14] Marsella further elucidates that Alcott likely collaborated with her editor to decide which of her stories to include in each volume.

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[14] The reprinted stories had "originally been published in children's journals such as *Merry's Museum* and *Youth's Companion*" (Marsella xiv).

Despite its commercial motivation, *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* is a remarkable work, not least because it contains an explosion of writing that finally disproves the critics' adherence to the declension model, proving that Alcott's fictional character, despite her seeming silence, has in fact been busy writing, and publishing, for quite some time. Further, as the title implies, *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* returns Alcott's readers to the "Pickwick Portfolio" model of collage and to its radical play with heteroglossia. Within the textual world of this work*,* Alcott's character shows a tremendous range of writing, including, for the most part, stories, but also "descriptions, autobiographical sketches and reminiscences, narratives, travelogues, and fables" (Marsella xx). These genres fit within the female writer's sphere—an example of Alcott writing within an already established tradition. However, Alcott is not, as one might be tempted to assume, simply reproducing the customary discourse associated with women writers of her time. Rather, as always, she negotiates these forms, occasionally imbuing them with feminist themes. More to the point, it is within the pages of *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* that Alcott most powerfully reforms the figure of the female subject.

In this text, the problem of occupying multiple writerly subjectivities, which causes so much discomfort for Jo in *Little Women*, is resolved. Jo is now free to write as she likes, and a significant part of her writing involves social critique directed against the overdetermination of female identity, as evident in the story “My Girls,”[15] a treatise in favor of girls’ pursuit of careers spanning from doctor and lawyer to artist, actress, and more. Just as in *Jo’s Boys*, this expansion of the writing subject is enabled by a break with narrative. Indeed, Jo is no longer the *subject* of a narrative at all. She stands outside the text, constructing it, peppering it with narratives of her own. Alcott makes it clear that Jo has escaped the bonds of narrative convention at the end of *Jo’s Boys*, where she writes: “Having endeavored to suit every one by many weddings, few deaths, and as much prosperity as the eternal fitness of things will permit, let the music stop, the lights die out, and the curtain fall forever on the March family” (1064). The self-reflexivity built into these lines, along with their overt allusion to theatrical production, is no accident. They serve to remind the reader that Alcott’s narrative and the characters populating it are artificial constructs, situated in a particular cultural milieu. However, the Jo who appears in *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag* is constructed differently. Her identity is formed out the reader’s memory of the prior books acting in concert with the character of Jo’s voice as expressed in the text of each individual tale.

The result is a multitude of Jos, existing, in a sense, outside linear time. Reading the stories in *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag*, one finds oneself trying to fit them into the imagined arc of Jo’s life, inventing correspondences between Jo’s various personas in the March trilogy and the individual stories themselves. One imagines, for instance, that the story “Cupid and Chow-Chow,” in which an initially rebellious young girl is gradually reformed and falls in line with traditional models of femininity, might have been written by the Jo at the end of *Little Women*, recalling perhaps her own rebellious youth and the reprimands of her family and culture. Conversely, the story “My Girls,” which takes a more feminist bent, might have been penned by the Jo of *Little Men* who champions the co-education of Plumfield School and encourages the willful Nan to follow her dreams of becoming a doctor.

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[15] Alcott refashioned this story from her nonfiction essay “Happy Women” (1868), originally published in *The New York Ledger* (Showalter, *Alternative Alcott* 203-6).

Taken as a whole, then, *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag*, like the “Pickwick Portfolio,” creates a truly heteroglossic space in which Jo is severed from her origin and becomes a free-floating sign whose meaning is no longer fixed or static, but constantly in the process of being renegotiated. This point is further underlined by the story “Patty’s Patchwork.” In this story, a young girl makes a patchwork quilt, whose patches record the daily incidents of her life. The quilt, as Patty herself discovers, acts as a kind of “Calico diary” in which narrative time ceases to function and all its disparate instances exist simultaneously as part of a whole whose formal unity is organic, a function of its multitude of differences—a description which explicitly recalls the scrap-bag image of the collection’s title (195). Once again, the quilt-text, like the scrap-bag, offers a vision of the subject fully removed from the essentialism that haunts *Little Women*. What is more, it resists resolution, engendering a kind of reading open to radical instability. Patty herself suggests this possibility when she says: “I am making two kinds of patchwork at the same time; and this that I see is to remind me of the other kind that I don't see" (196).

In the end, it is Jo's instability that makes her such a powerful character. As Keyser says of *Little Women*, its "greatness . . . lies not in a miraculously coherent whole that transcends the sum of its parts but in the parts themselves and the multiple strands that thread their way through these parts" (*Little Women* 25). Jo herself is a creature of multiple strands, and it is these loose threads, unfinished, trailing off into the unknown, that give her character longevity. Through her, Alcott presents a tacit critique of fixity, of essential subjectivity, and of delimiting, gendered binaries. Moreover, she dares to imagine alternative modes of being. Jo herself, then, is Banquo's trap-door: a liminal space through which one passes beyond time, narrative, culture, and identity. It is this Jo, Jo Unbound, that will free future writers of female and feminist *Künstlerroman* to pursue their own experiments with self and authorship.

# CHAPTER III: "MISTRESS OF EFFECTS": PERFORMATIVE RHETORIC AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN *DADDY-LONG-LEGS*

Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912) is a rags-to-riches *Künstlerroman* about seventeen-year old orphan Judy[1] Abbott. When Judy's strong writerly voice captures the attention of an orphanage trustee,[2] he decides to pay her way through college so that she can pursue a career in writing. The only stipulation is that Judy write letters to her benefactor, keeping him abreast of her scholarly progress. With the exception of the opening section, titled "Blue Wednesday" and told in the third person, the story is reported through Judy's detailed letters. Webster uses these letters to emphasize her protagonist's ability to self-consciously wield a range of different personas.

Critics such as Roberta Seelinger Trites, however, do not give Judy enough credit for her own self-fashioning. As Trites opines, Judy is one the many girl writer characters[3] who "end up as young adults preoccupied by love interests; they lose the sense of autonomy that has made them interesting characters in the first place" (*Waking Sleeping Beauty* 78).[4] Trites considers the narrative arc of the female *Künstlerroman* determinative, the very viewpoint I have been arguing against in this dissertation. Indeed, rather than simply fall prey to the seemingly pervasive influence of the female *Künstlerroman*, an influence that critics such as Trites blame for rendering Webster's heroine powerless and boring, I argue that Webster not only concedes to some genre demands (similar to Louisa May Alcott before her), but, more significantly, manipulates them in order to emphasize the intentionally constructed nature of her heroine's subjectivity.

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[1] Soon after she arrives at college, Jerusha decides to go by Judy instead, for she has "always hated" her given name (18).

[2] The identity of Judy's benefactor—whom she dubs Daddy-Long-Legs because his shadow, which she glimpses on his way out of the orphanage, reminds her of a daddy-longlegs—remains a mystery until the end of the novel, although readers are likely to catch on that Daddy-Long-Legs and Judy's love interest, the philanthropist Jervis Pendleton, are one in the same.

Webster calls attention to the constructed nature of Judy's persona early in the text by referencing, interestingly enough, Alcott's *Little Women*. In a letter to her benefactor, Judy expresses the desire to fill the gaps in her knowledge by reading books that her fellow classmates were brought up on: “I find that I am the only girl in college who wasn’t brought up on “Little Women.” I haven’t told anybody though (that *would* stamp me as queer). . . . the next time somebody mentions pickled limes, I’ll know what she is talking about!” (24). Judy adopts a rigorous reading load—in addition to her regular coursework—in order to meet her new community’s expectations regarding a typical girl’s educational background. Judy does not want attention paid to her status as an orphan—as being different in a radically disadvantageous way.

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[3] Trites includes Jo March in this list of characters.

[4] Similarly, Janice M. Alberghene focuses on the objectification of girl characters, such as Judy, by older men like Daddy-Long-Legs ("Daddies Girls" 75). Anne K. Phillips, on the other hand, claims that Judy's marriage enables her "personal and social transformation" (80). Moreover, that relationship does not invalidate Judy's development into "a successful, self-sufficient novelist" (68). Karen Alkalay-Gut also views Judy's marriage to Jervis in a positive light, going so far as to call their union subversive because it is a marriage between equals (97).

In this regard, Webster’s reference to Amy’s character—rather than to Jo’s—is significant. In *Little Women*, Amy’s pickled limes initially represent her desire, similar to Judy’s, to integrate more fully into her school culture. For Amy, this participation entails exchanging limes with her peers: “It’s nothing but limes now, for every one is sucking them . . . and trading them off for pencils, bead-rings, paper dolls, or something else . . . If one girl likes another, she gives her a lime; if she’s mad with her, she eats one before her face, and don’t offer even a suck” (57). Amy’s bag of limes offers her a great deal of control over her circle of friends, who, upon learning of Amy’s treats, pepper her with gifts and invitations to parties (58). Amy’s distribution of limes buys her the privileged status she so ardently seeks. Furthermore, Amy’s behavior proves that she is conscious of the way in which the performance of subjectivity is conducted by proxy, via the acquisition and exchange of commodities imbued with symbolic value by one’s community. Amy understands that identity is socially constructed. At the same time, she understands that identity is rhetorically constructed. In addition to being commodities, the limes function discursively in that the way a girl eats a lime constitutes a speech act which articulates her relative position in the social hierarchy.

Similar to Amy, Judy understands that identity is socially and rhetorically constructed. For her, the primary commodity is not limes, but knowledge, specifically that of literary texts. Such knowledge is, as with the case of limes, exchanged symbolically via speech acts. The casual allusion to a literary text establishes one's educational background and thus one's class. One deploys such information as a mark of status but also as a means of interacting with the social order. Judy's decision to conceal her lack of knowledge, while acquiring new knowledge, represents a powerful kind of informational competence, as well as a profound awareness of the ways in which her performance of subjectivity is contingent upon the expectations and values of a particular discourse community.

This analogy can be extended. In *Little Women*, Amy is eventually betrayed by one of her classmates, Jenny Snow,[5] her limes are confiscated, and she is forced to endure corporal punishment from her teacher, Mr. Davis. After returning home, she is further scolded by Marmee, who disapproves of Mr. Davis's behavior, but is also disappointed in her youngest daughter. Marmee concurs that some kind of punishment was necessary, as Amy has become too conceited (61). Although this may be seen as yet another punishment triggered by a female's inappropriate use of social power, it is more productively understood in light of Amy's continued development as a character. Amy learns that she must wield her power more carefully, with a fuller awareness of the niceties of social convention. She becomes, in the words of Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, "a mistress of effects," manipulating social conventions to get what she wants (*Whispers in the Dark* 78).[6]

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[5] Amy refuses Jenny a lime and Jenny, in turn, takes revenge by alerting Mr. Davis to Amy's possession of the contraband items.

Judy too becomes "a mistress of effects," rendering her subjectivity in distinct and sometimes contradictory ways, depending on her audience. For example, she conceals her status as orphan from her peers, recognizing that it works to her detriment in that context. However, with her benefactor her orphan status becomes a useful construct. In her fourth letter to Daddy-Long-Legs, for example, Judy reminds him that she is special because she is a writer *and* an orphan: "What do you think, Daddy? The English instructor said that my last paper shows an unusual amount of originality. She did, truly. Those were her words" (18). Judy follows this pronouncement by marveling at her creativity, which "doesn't seem possible," given that she was raised in an environment that tried to stamp it out (18). By underscoring the stultifying nature of the orphanage, along with her own special means for escaping it, Judy returns to a form of writing familiar to Daddy-Long-Legs: Judy grappled with these same ideas in her essay “Blue Wednesday,” the essay that initially captured the trustee’s attention. Judy rehashes the same themes to convince her benefactor that his decision to send her to college based on her writing skills was wise, for even a college instructor recognizes her talent. In so doing, Judy calls attention to her orphaned position to justify her benefactor’s continued interest and financial support. Part of constructing this position demands that Judy critique the orphanage to establish herself as the alienated artist—the subject position that got Daddy-Long-Legs’ attention in the first place.

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[6] Readers of *Little Women* may recall that it is the proper, ladylike Amy whom Aunt March chooses as her traveling companion, not the rebellious, outspoken Jo.

Ever the “mistress of effects,” Webster’s heroine assumes yet another role in this same letter: one who carefully critiques an authority figure:

> I forgot to mail this yesterday so I will add an indignant postscript. We had a bishop this morning, and *what do you think he said?* “The most beneficent promise made us in the Bible is this, ‘The poor ye have always with you.’ They were put here in order to keep us charitable.” The poor, please observe, being a sort of useful domestic animal. If I hadn’t grown into such a perfect lady, I should have gone up after service and told him what I thought. (20)

Judy is clearly angered by the bishop’s words and uses italics to emphasize that emotion. And yet she is also careful to characterize herself as a “perfect lady,” and in keeping with that identity refrains from telling the bishop what she thinks, and even leaves those thoughts unsaid in her letter to Daddy-Long-Legs. Judy presents herself as both the alienated artist—the outsider who sees the truth—and savvy woman who is able to hold her tongue, thus observing social conventions (unlike Amy in *Little Women's* pickled limes scene).

The gaps in Judy's letter are not, however, merely a capitulation to those conventions, but a manipulation of them. They indicate her recognition that her relationship with Daddy-Long-Legs is fundamentally unequal. As Mrs. Lippett reminds Judy prior to her departure from the orphanage, the trustee requires monthly letters, but "He will never answer" them (10). Mrs. Lippett further advises Judy to mail each letter on time, "as though it were a bill that [she] was paying," to be "respectful in tone," and to keep her audience in mind when writing (10). Judy knows that her benefactor has "the upper hand" and "can always stop payment on [his] checks" (18). Contrary to appearances, Judy's use of silence as a rhetorical strategy is an expression of power. Her silence is strategic, allowing her to register challenging opinions while still casting herself in the roles necessitated by her rhetorical situation.[7]

This reading of Judy's rhetorical performance in her fourth letter to Daddy-Long-Legs counters developmental readings of her character. Anne K. Phillips, for instance, contends that Judy's character grows into a constructed knower, someone who only at the end of the book recognizes the inevitability of "internal contradiction and ambiguity" (75). Clearly, however, Judy is comfortable with contradiction and ambiguity much earlier on. She has already, as Phillips puts it, come to embrace all the different parts of herself, and what is more, knows when and how to deploy them.

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[7] For an extended discussion of the uses of silence as a rhetorical strategy, see Anne Ruggles Gere's article "Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing."

A brief foray into Webster's own experiences as a college student—particularly her time spent in Gertrude Buck's English courses at Vassar College—further clarifies this characterization. In September of 1897, 21-year-old Webster arrived at Vassar College thrilled to find other women who, along with her mother and grandmother, supported equal rights for women (Simpson, Simpson, and Connor 47). Webster entered a college shaped by activist teachers such as Gertrude Buck,[8] who sought to empower students through the study of rhetoric. As Buck's biographer Suzanne Bordelon explains, Buck facilitated her students' use of inductive reasoning "to examine traditional assumptions and think for themselves" (103). In addition to prompting students to question and challenge assumptions rather than passively accepting them as absolute truth (Bordelon 103), Buck required students to determine real audiences for their writing, the importance of which she establishes in her textbook, co-written with Elisabeth Woodbridge, *A Course in Expository Writing*

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[8] Susan Kates provides a historical overview of activist rhetoricians in her book *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education 1885-1937*, though she only briefly mentions Buck's influence. See also Katherine H. Adams' *A Group of Their Own: College Writing Courses and American Women Writers, 1880-1940*.

(1899).[9]

For instance, Buck foregrounds an awareness of both audience and social contexts when asking students to persuade “a factory owner to improve the conditions of his employees” or to convince “people of wealth to leave money to some cause or institution” (qtd. in Campbell xxxiii). Through these types of exercises, Buck highlights the position of the writer, who should never lose sight of her subject, audience, and social context. The result of this kind of rhetorical training, Buck ultimately hoped, would be to give her students the rhetorical tools necessary for them to become “agents of change in society” (Bordelon 40). Buck was aware that, by moving into the field of higher education, women were afforded the opportunity to construct new identities, and so part of her project as a feminist rhetorician was to provide her students with the kinds of tools needed to make informed decisions, notwithstanding the pervasiveness of ideologies that sought to make those choices for them.

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[9] Buck herself shows an awareness of her audience—Vassar students—in her text *A Course in Argumentative Writing* (1899), for she includes the following propositions as starting points for formulating arguments: “Cooking and sewing should be taught to girls in the public schools” (151), “Women should receive the same salaries as men for the same work” (199), and “The Life of women in the nineteenth century is extremely complex” (201). Buck includes propositions of a troubling, racist nature, too: “Lynching is sometimes justifiable” and “The negro will sometime be the intellectual equal of the white” (201-2).

It is unsurprising that this radical change in women's lives was met with resistance. As Webster's biographers and historian Lynn D. Gordon have noted, Vassar President James Monroe Taylor[10] felt obligated to educate women without changing their gender roles.[11] According to Bordelon, President Taylor sought to protect his female students from suffragist rhetoric, which he deemed propaganda. Instead, he attempted to instill an "obey rather than question" mentality in both his women faculty and students (Bordelon 98-9). Even so, the president's pronouncements did not prohibit them from challenging established cultural norms, as Buck's pedagogy and Webster's novel illustrate.

Through Judy's various performances of subjectivity, Webster draws attention to the ways in which women's identities were newly in play, and how they were, in turn, met with resistance from their surrounding culture. Webster depicts her heroine as being very much aware of both the radical and reactionary voices of her time. An example of Judy's mindfulness appears when she attempts to persuade Daddy-Long-Legs to let her spend the summer in the Adirondacks with the McBride family (73). Judy supports her argument by appealing to the radical and reactionary positions at once. She opens her argument by invoking tradition: if allowed to stay with the McBrides, she will further her education in the domestic arts, thanks to Mrs. McBride's fine example of homemaking (55). Judy herself says that housekeeping is something "every woman ought to understand" (74). She is careful to couch her request in terms that satisfy the traditional terms of her gender role.[12]

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[10] James Monroe Taylor was president of Vassar College from 1886-1914. Although he honored founder Matthew Vassar's mission to offer women the same kind of rigorous coursework available to men, he balanced Vassar's vision with a more conservative socio-cultural agenda (Gordon 121).

[11] Even more disparaging than President Taylor—who at least championed for equality in women's education—was Dr. Edward H. Clarke. In his well-known study *Sex in Education* (1873), Dr. Clarke, a Harvard professor of gynecology, argued that women who pursued higher education became fine scholars, but the unnatural process of receiving an education better fit for men damaged their reproductive organs. These college women eventually married "and were sterile" (39). His argument reinforced the Victorian cultural norm of separate spheres for men and women, spheres that Gordon identifies as "domesticity for women and public life for men" (4).

Within this environment Judy will not only learn the domestic skills expected of her; she will also get ahead in her studies. Judy's argument here is essentially feminist. Along with her friend Sallie, Judy plans "to do a lot of reading . . . The Professor said it would be a great help if we would get our reading finished in the summer; and it's so much easier to remember it, if we read together and talk it over" (74). Despite her cloying tone, Judy's plan to study is a continuation of her earlier agenda, acquiring literary knowledge for use as social currency. Moreover, her approach is distinctly communal, reflecting Webster's powerful experience of the community of activist women at Vassar College.

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[12] Moments like these in Webster's text prompt critics Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig to argue, along with historian Martha Banta, that the conservative strain in the book is what made it so popular (107, 249, respectively).

Judy ends her letter in a conciliatory mode by appealing to her audience not as "Jerusha Abbott, the future great author," a position that might appear threatening, but "just Judy—a girl," thereby returning to the traditional framework with which she began (74). Judy is unaware whether Daddy-Long-Legs aligns himself with the more conservative views exemplified by the college's president, and so she is careful not to come off as too radically minded in her letter. Although Judy is unsuccessful in changing Daddy-Long-Legs' mind, her letter nevertheless demonstrates her awareness of and ability to navigate the conversations about gender circulating at the time. Her masterful use of *ethos* enables the construction of multiple contradictory subjectivities, the combination of which is designed to play upon a range of possible biases. In this sense, Judy is the realization of the type of writer championed by Buck, one who uses language in a meaningful way and is always conscious of both her audience and social contexts.

In another letter that could be read as a response to one of Buck's prompts, Judy addresses issues of economic inequality, requesting money for a family in need. Initially, Judy describes the family to her audience in terms of an exaggerated *pathos*: the father is in the hospital, the mother "a picture of patient resignation" and the oldest daughter "kills herself with overwork" so that she can support her family (114-5). Then, via *logos*, Judy stipulates how Daddy-

Long-Legs' money would be used, thus presenting details necessary for him to make an informed decision. Finally, Judy explains her reason for requesting money in the first place. She feels that the oldest daughter "deserves help a lot more than I ever did" (115). There are, Judy posits, individuals who are much worse off than she and in need of help from men such as Daddy-Long-Legs, "the richest man" Judy knows (115). Here, Judy inserts a three-pronged appeal to *ethos*, one that recalls her orphan status and simultaneously positions her benefactor, as well as herself, as selfless agents of social justice. Judy's call to action is effective, for Daddy-Long-Legs mails a check almost immediately (116). Here, Judy once again demonstrates her mastery of the rhetorical construction of subjectivity. She knows when to wield specific identities for maximum impact.

Webster makes this point once again through the illustrations that Judy includes in her letters to Daddy-Long-Legs. These illustrations highlight the embedded construction of identity native to the epistolary format, making it obvious that Judy's representations of herself, both visual and literary, are deliberately formulated. Judy's drawings call attention to her conscious awareness of subjectivity as constructed and performative, while also demonstrating her ongoing navigation of the relationship between subjectivity and the rhetorical situation as defined within particular communities. One example of this emerges in a drawing that figures Judy, along with her roommates Sallie McBride and Julia Rutledge Pendleton, dancing on stage, framed by a banner that reads "McBride Forever" (54). All three roommates are united in their celebration of Sally's presidential win, a position represented by Webster through the characters' matching costumes, facial expressions, and physical deportments (Fig. 1). Webster situates this celebration in an environment—the stage—that emphasizes the artificiality of the performance. It's not that Judy is not honestly celebrating her friend's win, but she is aware that this kind of feminist victory is particular to the context of her all-girls college.

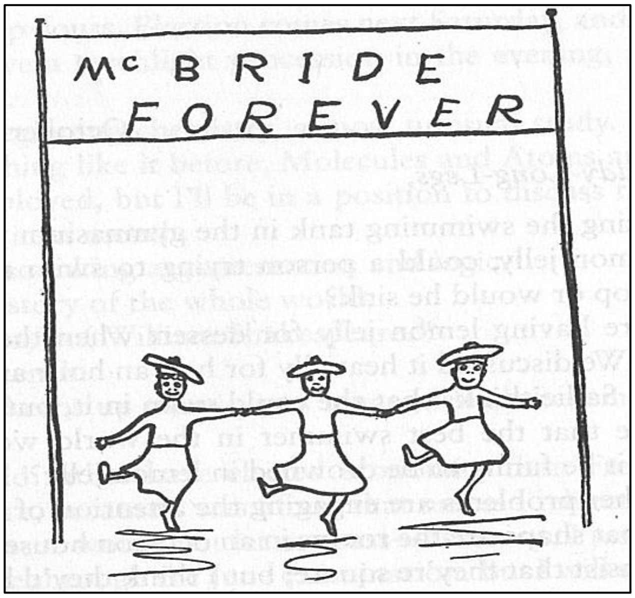

Fig. 1. "McBride Forever"

In the above example, Judy represents herself as fully part of her college community. And yet, in another scene, where Judy constructs herself as being outside of that college context, she registers an intriguing discomfort, switching from gestures that signal alienation to gestures that signal belonging and finally to gestures that enact subjectivity and distinction. At the same time, Judy invokes the socially constructed nature of the subject. When spending her first summer at Lock Willow Farm with Mr. and Mrs. Semple, Judy initially illustrates herself as alienated, referring not only to the Semples but also to herself in the third person: “The people are Mr. and Mrs. Semple and a hired girl and two hired men. The hired people eat in the kitchen, and the Semples and Judy in the dining-room” (44). This speech act creates a sense of extreme distance, implying that, although Judy knows the preset location of her subject position, she is not yet able to occupy it.

Later, however, Judy refers to the entire group in first-person plural, a gesture of belonging: “We had ham and eggs and biscuits and honey and jelly-cake and pie and pickles and cheese and tea for supper—and a great deal of conversation” (44). Here, Judy engages the community dialogically, sharing food and conversation. Judy’s entrance into the community has profound effects, for she is reconstituted as an individual subject, describing herself in the very next sentence in the first person: “I have never been so entertaining in my life; everything I say appears to be funny. I suppose it is, because I’ve never been in the country before, and my questions are backed by an all-inclusive ignorance” (44). And yet, even though Judy at first seems to occupy a privileged position as life of the party, she quickly comes to doubt herself, feeling as if the group is laughing at her rather than with her. What is revealed here is a paradox: subjectivity can only be constructed in the discourse of specific rhetorical communities, but the same gesture that produces the subject’s existence can also reduce it to the status of object. This contradiction is significant in that it reminds readers that subject positions are dangerous things: they enable agency, but also restrict it.

The key to successfully navigating this paradox lies in the development of discursive competence, a competence that becomes the focus of another illustration in Webster's text. The relevant image (Fig. 2) arrives in "a picture of Miss Jerusha Abbott, the future great author, driving home the cows" at Lock Willow Farm (47). This play with contrasting registers—great author, cow herder—is remarkable: it signals Judy's growing competence within the Lock Willow Farm community, while reminding readers of Judy's aversion to being locked into a fixed subjectivity and signaling her ability to simultaneously inhabit

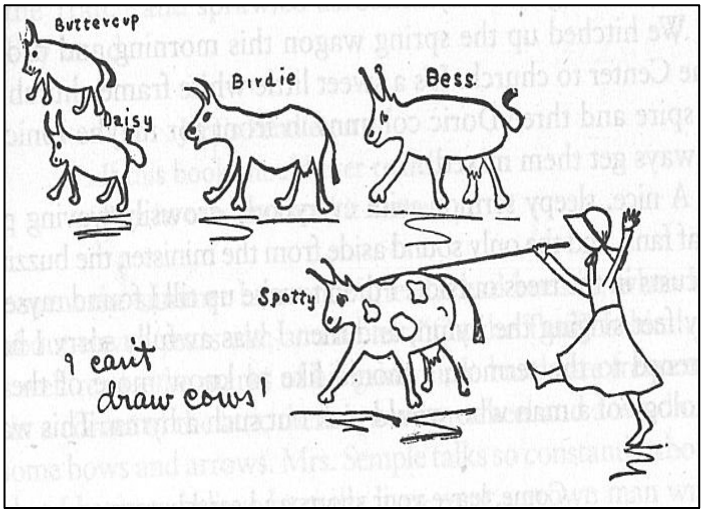

Fig. 2 "Miss Jerusha Abbott: Great Author/Cow Herder" multiple identities.[13] In this regard, the fact that Judy's face is obscured by her bonnet is especially important. This depiction invokes Judy's earlier use of rhetorical silence, a move that—as before—signals the constructed nature of the images of herself that she deploys. Judy is not commensurate with her image, but rather absents herself, toying with the viewer's gaze in a self-aware burlesque of identity that at once invites and resists its consumption.

The most telling illustration of this occurs in a portrait of Judy with her back turned (Fig. 3). The fact that Judy has rendered herself this way implies another self-conscious play with the viewer's gaze. The portrait invites us to look, but the position of the figure denies the viewer the presumed intimacy of consumption. Here, though, the drawing serves a more explicit purpose. The image appears in a letter written during Judy's second visit to Lock Willow Farm, a visit she was forced into after Daddy-Long-Legs rejected her request to spend the summer with the McBrides (discussed above). In her letter, Judy returns to the position of the alienated subject, expressing her unfulfilled longing for escape and sarcastically mocking her surroundings. Her drawing echoes these sentiments. Judy's figure in the illustration is almost entirely overwhelmed by her hat, a large hat made to block the sun during outdoor work (79). Judy is also holding a rake, and, according to her letter, is on the way to "rake the hay" (79).

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[13] This aversion to fixity is one that Bordelon identifies within Buck's work as well. In the article "The Sentence-Diagram," Buck "strongly opposes the popular use of the 'straight-line, Reed-Kellog diagram,' contending such diagrams fail to represent the true autonomy and organic nature of a sentence … Buck argues that mechanical diagrams lead students to believe that a sentence is a 'fixed and bounded thing,' and that the main concern is to know that it can be 'chopped up into small pieces' for use in diagrams" (qtd. in Bordelon 250).

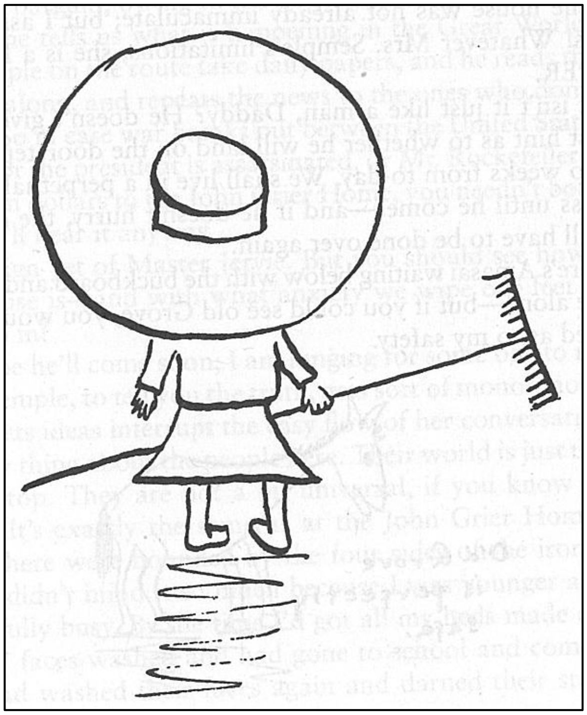

Fig. 3. "Judy Abbott: Farm Hand"

Judy's depiction of herself suggests two things. First that she has once again fallen in line with the conventions of her social environment: the farm. And yet, since Judy is literally effaced in the drawing (back turned, head covered by hat), the representation also implies that she sees herself as having been overwhelmed, or diminished, by this position.

Consider that in her previous drawings of farm labor, Judy's self-portraiture was intended to signal her growing competence. Here, though, it seems less positive. Judy's toes are pointed inward, a stance of childishness and submissiveness. This stance, taken along with Judy's assertion at the end of her letter that "the news is all used up," and her use of the appellative "Sir" in her salutation, seems to be intended to illicit sympathy from Daddy-Long-Legs. Both the letter and its accompanying illustration imply that Judy is no longer growing in this environment, but may in fact be regressing, losing something of herself as a result of having been denied a chance for new and edifying experiences. As if to emphasize the point, one of Judy's later letters compares the farm to her orphanage, saying: "Their world is just this single hilltop. They are not a bit universal, if you know what I mean. It's exactly the same as at the John Grier Home" (81).

Here again Webster makes plain that subjectivity is a dangerous thing, at times enabling and at times restricting agency. Moreover, she also makes plain that Judy is well aware of the limitations of subjectivity, and what is more, is able to reframe, or refigure, her subject position in distinctly savvy ways. Judy's use of rhetoric, both in her writing and her drawing, operates as a critique, registering her discomfort and offering a subtle plea for Daddy-Long-Legs to intervene. He does, appearing at the farm in his guise as Jervis Pendleton mere pages later. At the farm, Pendleton transforms Judy's experience: together they explore the country, and Pendleton teaches her to fish, to shoot a rifle and revolver, and to ride horseback (83). All of these activities lie outside the bounds of traditional feminine behavior, and so it is not surprising that Judy seems much happier after Pendleton's arrival as she is once more pressing against the limits of her perceived identity.

What the illustrations make clear is that Judy is in control of her own self-fashioning and knows how to manipulate that self-fashioning for specific ends. Further, her use of rhetorical silence, both in writing and drawing, indicates that she sees herself as existing apart from her representation as subject. Where, then, is Judy? Where she always is: outside the text, pen in hand. Webster's treatment of the artist character aligns with structuralist ideas about authorship, wherein the authorial self stands outside of the text as transcendental signified.[14] The structuralist perspective is particularly useful to Webster in that it offers her a way to rework the narrative constraints of the *Künstlerroman* and thus the developmental trajectory such texts inevitably take. Like Alcott before her, Webster seems to be aware that the narrative of becoming embedded in the *Künstlerroman* is problematic in that it locks its protagonist into a final, supposedly adult and therefore fixed, subject position. Also similar to Alcott, Webster seems particularly uncomfortable with such a proposition and takes steps to upset it.

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[14] Though Structuralism had not yet been formally defined when Webster was writing her novel, its founder Ferdinand de Saussure had begun laying the ground for its fundamental tenants in his Course on General Linguistics beginning in 1906 ("Ferdinand de Saussure" 846-7).

Webster's most effective strategy for unsettling the narrative of becoming arrives when she implies that her writerly heroine's most self-aware and expertly constructed self comes, not at the end, but at the very beginning of the novel: in the opening section of the book titled "Blue Wednesday."

Phillips reads "Blue Wednesday" as a separate text, something written by Webster to fill in the period of Judy's life in which she cannot speak for herself. However, this reading ignores an important fact. The reader is told that the author of "Blue Wednesday" is Judy. She wrote the essay for her high school rhetoric teacher, and it was this essay that first captured Daddy-Long-Legs' attention. The implication is that the story that opens the novel *is* Judy's work. This reading of "Blue Wednesday" is further supported by the stylistic consistency between the text of the essay and the text of the letters. For example, in the opening paragraph of "Blue Wednesday," Judy writes:

> The first Wednesday in every month was a Perfectly Awful Day—a day to be awaited with dread, endured with courage and forgotten with haste. Every floor must be spotless, every chair dustless, and every bed without a wrinkle. Ninety-seven squirming little orphans must be scrubbed and combed and buttoned into freshly starched ginghams; and all ninety-seven reminded of their manners, and told to say, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," whenever a Trustee spoke. (5)

Within her letters, Judy performs the same practice of capitalizing Very

Important Ideas: Very Respectful (13), Great Author (57), Great World (81), Very Useful Citizen (107), Great Big Worry (129). There are also certain phrases and ideas that are repeated between the two texts: Judy reuses the phrase "ninety-seven orphans" in several letters, including the fourth one discussed earlier in this chapter: "The aim of the John Grier Home (as you doubtless know and heartily approve of) is to turn ninety-seven orphans into ninety-seven twins" (18). Indeed, she even repeats the first line of the book almost word-for-word in one of her final letters to Daddy-Long-Legs: "the first Wednesday in the month—a weary day for the John Grier Home" (118).

Within the letters, the repetition of these ideas and phrases is underdeveloped and fragmented; indeed, their full extent only seems to be realized in literary form in "Blue Wednesday." Thus, the opening section of the book seems to have been completed only after Judy's four years spent at college, after she has had time to "look back through a haze of four years" (119) and revisit her experiences at the orphanage using her skills gained as a published writer.[15] It is almost as if we have been given, as readers, a facsimile draft of "Blue Wednesday," with both the completed draft and its prior iterations. Thus Webster undoes the developmental model of the artist novel by inverting its *telos*, crafting a recursive novel best understood circularly.

I would further argue that not only has the text of "Blue Wednesday" been revised by an older Judy, but the epistolary text has undergone this treatment as well. The letters, too, offer supporting hints, the most important of which lie with the title of the letter section: *The Letters of Miss Jerusha Abbott to Mr. Daddy-Long-Legs Smith* (11). Ostensibly, this title seems to be taken from one of Judy's dreams, which she explains in a letter to her benefactor: "I dreamed the funniest dream last night. I thought I went into a book store and the clerk brought me a new book named "The Life and Letters of Judy Abbott." (112). Given the similarities in title, it would seem *The Letters of Miss Jerusha Abbott to Mr. Daddy-Long-Legs Smith* is the revised fulfillment of the book Judy dreams up in college.

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[15] Judy publishes her first poem, "From my Tower," shortly after arriving at college (30).

Her decision to change the title, replacing the name Judy with Jerusha, is also significant. In her letters, Judy always refers to her writerly self in the third person, as Jerusha, thereby using her inherited name to signal a consciously constructed public persona.[16] When sharing news of her first publication within the pages of a letter, Judy writes: "Jerusha Abbott has commenced to be an author" (30). And later, she shares news of her second publication: "Jerusha Abbott has won the short-story contest" (63). Judy's playful use of naming conventions allows her to create a critical distance between her authorial self and the subject positions that she assumes in her letters.

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[16] Contrary to Alkalay-Gut's argument that Judy gives up "the name Jerusha (meaning inheritance)" to create "her own inheritance with a name relating to no ancestors" (92), Judy re-appropriates her inherited name for her own writerly purposes.

By applying the same rhetorical device to the title of the letter section, Judy lets the reader know that all and none of the various subjectivities represented in the pages of the book are really her. Whether Judy, or Jerusha, whether first person or third, they are all constructs, each inhabited for a time, or a purpose, but none fixed or definitive. Webster and Judy make this point over and over again in both the text and the illustrations. The novel, then, is a self-conscious autobiography in which the author manipulates the narrative in order to emphasize the intentionally constructed nature of subjectivity. The appeal of this kind of meta-fictional biography is that it erases the "true" subject from the text, thus giving the subject absolute agency. And it is only from this position—the position of what Roland Barthes calls the "Author-God"—that Judy can become what she, like Alcott's Amy, has always already been: the Mistress of (Rhetorical) Effects. Webster's Judy thus combines strategies pioneered by *both* of Alcott's artist characters—Amy and Jo. She has mastered Amy's ability to inhabit socially constructed selves, and Jo's ability to escape them.

Webster's revisioning of the female subject is especially necessary given first wave feminism. Her positing of a Judy who exists outside the text positions this absent female author as an autonomous subject with absolute agency, giving her political parity with male citizens. And so when Judy asks, "Don't you think I'd make an admirable voter if I had my rights?" (93), the text becomes an overtly politicized treatise on equality. As mentioned before, though, this drive toward equality is deeply upsetting to those who would maintain gendered social conventions, or who imagine that such conventions, such performances, are determinative. What Webster’s protagonist does, then, is offer women a way to navigate this tension: taking on, when necessary, a position of limited engagement that allows them to perform in particular ways—sometimes reifying but at other times challenging pre-existing gender norms—though still ultimately asserting their status as autonomous beings whose “true” self exists outside the discursive field of the social and outside the system of signs. To paraphrase bell hooks (who is writing decades later), Webster’s depiction of Judy reconnects women’s oppositional practices to the world of the everyday (“Postmodern Blackness” 427), applying Buck’s rhetorical philosophy to identity politics and illustrating that through the purposeful use of rhetorical devices, one can reposition one’s very being.

# CHAPTER IV: THE PLAY IS THE THING: INFINITE SUBJECTIVITIES IN *HARRIET THE SPY*

Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964) features sharp-tongued writer heroine Harriet M. Welsch, who—in her guise as spy—records honest, scathing observations about her friends, family, and neighbors in a notebook that is eventually confiscated and made public. As a result, Harriet is ostracized by her classmates and friends and only reintegrates into those communities when she accepts the position of newspaper editor and issues a formal apology. The plot of *Harriet the Spy*, then, bears striking similarities to the standard narrative of the female *Künstlerroman*, but with the significant difference that here the protagonist need not abandon her artistic persona in order to achieve reintegration. Indeed, as many critics have argued, this difference is precisely what sets Fitzhugh's text apart from those of her literary forebears. Lissa Paul points out that Harriet, unlike her precursors, learns to successfully negotiate the "splits," between life and art (72), a distinction that Roberta Seelinger Trites identifies as making Fitzhugh's book "the first overtly feminist *künstlerromane* written for children" (*Twain, Alcott* 149).

In keeping with Paul's and Trites' readings, it is worth noting that, throughout the novel, Fitzhugh illustrates the kinds of socio-political expectations that influence the female *Künstlerromane*, dramatizing the process by which her protagonist achieves a balance between her artistic aspirations and social obligations. According to Francis J. Molson, Harriet achieves that balance by developing increased self-awareness and empathy for those around her (970, 967).[1] Alternatively, both Paul and Robin Amelia Morris analyze those traits as superficial masks Harriet assumes to maintain her writerly independence. According to Paul, Harriet "doesn't learn anything as noble as being nice to other people" (72). Instead, Paul offers a more subversive reading of Harriet's character by framing her growth as the mastery of one particular skill: the ability to "reconstruct herself," to conform and be obedient when necessary, "while at the same time remaining true to herself, her life, and her art" (72, 70). Morris posits a similar view of Harriet's character: by the end of Fitzhugh's novel, Harriet learns that she must perform the gender role assigned by her culture so that she can continue to write the kinds of things that define her true self (128-9). Thus, for critics such as Paul and Morris, the key trajectory of Fitzhugh's novel is Harriet's development from a position of alienation to one of active integration, wherein she is able to consciously navigate the tensions between opposed subjectivities.[2]

These readings are compelling in that they elaborate upon the kinds of developmental and performative concessions Harriet makes as a female artist.

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[1] Robin Bernstein similarly notes, "The book ends with Harriet older, stronger, more empathetic, more fully known and accepted by her friends, surer of her identity, and closer to her goal of being a "real" writer" (n. pag).

[2] This is a view that Trites further explores in chapter five of her book *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*.

Yet they are overdetermined by the developmental conceit of the *Künstlerroman* narrative, which always (as noted in previous chapters) necessitates some type of final position, a *true self*. What the critics ultimately fail to account for is that Fitzhugh's novel does not follow the straight-line character arc of the developmental *Künstlerroman*, and that Harriet never arrives at a terminal subject position, never recognizes nor asserts a true self that she would have to defend. Rather, her identity is, from the very beginning, infinitely flexible, articulating a range of positions, none of which should be read as definitive and none of which should be privileged over another in a critical reading. Moreover, in each position she inhabits, Harriet's performance is complex, involving a range of negotiations, both conciliatory and subversive. Ultimately, these complex negotiations form the crux of Fitzhugh's portrayal of the girl writer. In Harriet, Fitzhugh creates an image of the girl writer as a rhetorical figure arising out of, rather than preceding, or standing apart from, the rhetorical situation.

A precedent for reading Harriet's character in this manner can be found in Fitzhugh's experiments as a painter. Although Fitzhugh's paintings "are not presently available to the public" (Stahl 159), what is available is an *Art News* review of Fitzhugh's 1963 Banfer Gallery show. In it, the (unnamed) critic argues that Fitzhugh "depends substantially on . . . a montage technique, assembling images, one memory overlying, giving way to another" (qtd. in Wolf, *Louise Fitzhugh* 19). This image of a collage text is significant. The collage is by nature non-linear and anti-narrative. It fuses disparate moments into a tangle of juxtapositions, and its *effect* is quintessentially unresolved. Hence, I would argue, the collage is a fair analogy for Harriet's character. What emerges from Harriet's story is a tangle of contradictory subjectivities. But unlike the other characters I have discussed—Jo March and Judy Abbott—Harriet has no need to be extricated from this knot.

Harriet's tendency toward inhabiting a wide range of personas can be clarified by examining the interplay between the notions of essential subjectivity popularized by second wave feminists and the concept of freeplay put forth by poststructuralist theorist Jacques Derrida. As noted, for feminists including Trites and Paul, Harriet represents a radical re-visioning of the female artist, no longer locked into the tragic descending curve that defines the narrative of previous heroines. Rather, she is a model feminist, the self-actualized girl character. However, in order to realize this agency, feminism generally appropriates the powerful, useful, but ultimately problematic notion of the romantic self, wherein individual identity is considered an essential quality and the individual is imagined to possess a unified and autonomous subjectivity.

This privileging of the autonomous subject is reflected in a number of critical readings of Harriet's development as a character, each of which posit that Harriet's story is one of development toward self-knowledge or self-awareness.[3] The most representative of these critiques is Hamida Bosmajian's assertion that the end of Fitzhugh's story represents Harriet's "moment of all-oneness in which she loves and accepts herself" and those around her (81). This reading of the book's ending argues that Harriet's story is one of self-realization, followed by self-actualization. The narrative ends when Harriet has learned how to be herself in a world often hostile to that self.

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[3] These critical readings include Virginia L. Wolf's "*Harriet the Spy*: Milestone, Masterpiece?"; Francis J. Molson's "Another Look at *Harriet the Spy*"; and Judith Gero

Readings that assert that Harriet is self-actualized are problematic because the model of subjectivity they employ has been challenged by postmodern theorists such as Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida. The postmodern critique is made especially apparent in the novel in one key sequence, when Ole Golly recites quotes from Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," Cowper's "Retirement," Emerson's "Conduct of Life," and, finally, Shakespeare's famous lines from *Hamlet*: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (106). Ole Golly quotes these male writers to establish the significance of self-reliance. And yet Ole Golly does not assert herself or her own voice; she is simply ventriloquizing the voice of the Transcendental or Romantic subject, performing its discourse in a way that reifies a master narrative of autonomy. However, Fitzhugh ironically undercuts Ole Golly's performance by making it clear that she is not speaking from a position of

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John's "The Legacy of Peter Pan and Wendy: Images of Lost Innocence and Social Consequences in *Harriet the Spy*."

autonomy, but rather from a script written for her by the dominant culture.[4] Fitzhugh even inserts Polonius—Shakespeare's satire of the philosopher—at the end of Ole Golly's speech as a clue that the mask of Romantic selfhood worn by Ole Golly here is not to be taken seriously. That point is doubly made when one notices that the nurse's monologue is not a logical discourse, but a pastiche of unconnected maxims. Fitzhugh further asserts this reading through Harriet, who wishes that Ole Golly "would just shut up" (106).

Harriet's development, therefore, should not be read simply as a straightforward reification of an autonomous self discovered after a series of conflicts with opposing social forces. Fitzhugh's text is much more complex, and much more interesting, than that. Fitzhugh gestures at this complexity when she introduces a second competing model of subjectivity, this time one inherited from poststructuralism. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,"[5] Derrida posits a model of decentered subjectivity based not on the *presence* of selfhood, but on its *absence*. In this model, the subject is articulated by the tensions between various systems of control.

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[4] Ole Golly is not always so inauthentic, and it may be that in this scene her performance constitutes a negotiation with her role as nurse, with Harriet's parents' expectations, and with the expectations of the culture. Nevertheless, Fitzhugh's treatment of Ole Golly's monologue in this scene opens up a space for a critique of, rather than a defense of, romantic notions of subjectivity.

[5] Although Derrida's work was not yet available in the U.S., his postmodern bent bears similarity to an art movement of which Fitzhugh was certainly aware—Dadaism.

That model of decentered subjectivity appears in *Harriet the Spy* in a number of places. The scene in which Harriet plays an onion for a school performance is perhaps the most obvious example, as here the self is doubly decentered. Not only is Harriet acting, literally taking on an alternate persona, but the role she has been cast in is a rather transparent metaphor for Derrida's absent center. Derrida points out that, prior to the advent of postmodernity, all ontological systems were based around a center, or a "presence" that justifies, or authorizes and delimits, their system of signs (be they political, social, religious, etc.). Derrida critiques that model, asserting that the center is not an origin, but rather an effect of a system of signs. The implication for Fitzhugh's text is that Harriet, who occupies the physical "center" of her onion costume, is, in reality, as empty as the onion itself.

This comparison between Harriet and the onion has been made before, typically in service to the standard critique of the novel as a tale of growth. For example, in Bosmajian's analysis, the onion is an apt symbol for the young person in the process of becoming (80). Additionally, Bosmajian writes, "in her onion self Harriet can be regressive, as she rolls around the room in a fetal position . . . But her part also furthers her education in empathy as she learns to feel herself into something that is quite unlike her" (80). Harriet's onion role is symbolic of the "existential implications of becoming" (80). When practicing her onion dance, Harriet feels what it might be like to be something, or someone, else. Eventually, Bosmajian implies, Harriet will become a “nut,” which “is much more the symbol of being the mature self” (80). In Bosmajian’s formulation, the onion dance is important insofar as it propels Harriet toward her decisive moment of “all-oneness.”

I disagree with this conclusion. For one, onions do not mature into nuts. Nor does Harriet mature into a stable and unified self. Over the course of the novel, Harriet occupies a range of roles, each of which necessitate a degree of self-reinvention, but the idea that these roles exist on a graduated continuum is one that the text does not support. First, Fitzhugh freezes Harriet in childhood, refusing to allow her to grow up and thus emphasizing the ongoing instability of her identity. Second, while Harriet’s movement towards increased empathy is certainly a part of the text, Fitzhugh refrains from making this movement the sole or even the primary focus of her novel. In fact, in the scene where Harriet criticizes Sport for laughing at Ole Golly’s mentally disabled mother, Fitzhugh makes it clear that Harriet has the capacity for empathy even before she is ostracized by her peers. This scene complicates the developmental reading of Harriet by implying that Harriet already recognizes the need to consider the feelings of others, and that she need not wait until the end of the novel to learn this skill.

Thus, I would argue that, although Fitzhugh certainly engages the standard tropes of the *Künstlerroman*, she also challenges and problematizes these tropes. With this in mind, it is possible to read Harriet’s onion dance as an inscription of the postmodern and postructuralist critiques of identity, one which invokes existential crisis and ultimately suggests that the fundamental realization of being rests not on the actualization of one's true self but on the recognition that one never had a true self in the first place.

Another example of Fitzhugh's decentering of the subject surfaces when Ole Golly, whose role, exemplified in the passage quoted earlier, it is to reify the autonomous subject, leaves her position as Harriet's nurse. Prior to her departure, Ole Golly's character functions as a stabilizing force in Harriet's life: "even if she didn't say anything, you were aware of her. [Ole Golly] made herself felt in the house" (136). When Ole Golly finally leaves, Harriet notices a huge gap both within the house and herself—"THERE'S A FUNNY LITTLE HOLE IN ME THAT WASN'T THERE BEFORE" (132). Fitzhugh's phrasing is not incidental. The hole calls attention not only to Harriet's grief at Ole Golly's absence, but also to a greater absence: one in Harriet's very being, or as she puts it "a . . . hole in me." This scene highlights the relational, rather than the autonomous, nature of selfhood, illustrating that selfhood is deeply tied to the social and the interpersonal.

Fitzhugh's play with the decentering of the subject should not be understood as an argument that the self is entirely created and maintained by the linguistic, social, political, and economic systems that delimit and determine subjectivity. Nor should it be understood as a denial of individual agency. Rather, it may be that Fitzhugh is critiquing the belief that autonomy is a prerequisite for agency. In fact, as Derrida points out, it is precisely the absence or lack of a transcendental signified—in Harriet's case the autonomous self—that enables freeplay within the system of signs (236-7). Further, as Albert Camus argues in "The Myth of Sisyphus," recognizing the world's absurdity should not lead to despair but to a joyful engagement with the myths and fictions that surround us (117-8). This is precisely what Harriet does, or rather, who she is.

Contrary to Judy's character, Harriet does not imagine that she needs to be someone, much less an autonomous someone. In fact, as Harriet explains to Ole Golly, she "feel[s] sorry" for "people [who] are alone all the time" (105). This assertion appears just prior to, and again during, Ole Golly's homage to self-reliance and serves to set Harriet at some ideological distance from the concept of autonomy. What Harriet realizes, which Ole Golly and Judy do not, is that the self is a creature of community: that it arises and acts only within a web of social relations. It is performative and has agency at that level, but severed from the social, it cannot exist at all.

This assertion represents an astounding break with the ideological apparatus at work in Alcott and Webster's prior iterations of the girl writer, both of whom long for a way to either escape or control the narratives in which they find themselves articulated, and both of whom imagine that the way to accomplish this is to step outside narrative altogether. For Jo and Judy, the construction of selfhood within a narrative frame (whether literary or socio-political) always entails a kind of conflict between one's true self and the imposed constraints of narrative and/or cultural forms (Jo's conflict with Amy, for example, or Judy's conflict with Daddy-Long-Legs when he forces her to return to Semple Farm). What is more, they seem to imagine that to achieve agency requires an escape from those pre-existing forms (in *Little Women* that escape is dramatized via Banquo's trap-door, and in *Daddy-Long-Legs* it is illustrated through the implication that Judy is the author of the novel).

Fitzhugh, though, suggests that such agency as exists in subjectivity exists precisely because the self is ensconced in pre-existing cultural narratives. For her, subjectivity and narrativity arise from one another; they are, indeed, mutually constitutive. The first example of Harriet's engagement with this idea occurs with the construction of her spy outfit:

> . . . an ancient pair of blue jeans, so old that her mother had forbidden her to wear them, but which Harriet loved because she had fixed up the belt with hooks to carry her spy tools. . . . Then she put on an old pair of blue sneakers with holes over each of her little toes. Her mother had actually gone so far as to throw these out, but Harriet had rescued them from the garbage when the cook wasn't looking. She finished by donning a pair of black-rimmed spectacles with no glass in them. She had found these once in her father's desk and now sometimes wore them even to school, because she thought they made her look smarter. (39-41)

At first glance, Harriet's clothing choices suggest that she is defining herself *against* traditional norms of femininity, establishing an identity outside convention. Yet Fitzhugh is careful to place Harriet's choices in constant contrast with her mother's wishes. Harriet's mother, an upper class housewife and socialite, is frequently positioned in Fitzhugh's novel as being representative of more acceptable modes of femininity, and as being particularly concerned that Harriet learn and conform to these constraints, as when she asks Harriet to attend dance classes. The meaning of Harriet's outfit, then, must be understood in conjunction with this more conservative performance of femininity. The radicalism of the subject position Harriet crafts with her outfit is therefore entirely dependent on its relation to pre-existing master narratives of feminine identity. Moreover, it is entirely dependent on pre-existing codes of masculinity as well, since it is only her appropriation of those codes that enables her to articulate her resistance. Harriet's construction of subjectivity does not escape convention, nor does it overturn convention; it is produced in *negotiation* with convention.

The prime example of this poststructuralist approach to subjectivity is Harriet's treatment of her own name. She invents for herself a middle name, M., which is an empty signifier, as it has no referent and exists as a pure sign with the potential for endless inscription of meaning, thus mimicking Derrida's figuration of the subject as based on an absence. That Harriet assigns this middle name to herself has additional significance. Fitzhugh imbues her writerly protagonist with a kind of agency that reveals the radical freeplay enabled by

Derrida’s absent subject. Harriet’s middle name thus functions to displace notions of transcendental being or identity, and to engender instead a notion of selfhood as a nexus of provisional possibilities situated by language games.

Yet another example occurs in the scene where Harriet refuses to attend dance school, claiming that is not something spies do. Ole Golly disagrees, clarifying for Harriet the difference between boy and girl spies. In addition to doing all “[t]he same things” as boy spies, girl spies assume “a few more” roles as well, such as dancing (86). To support her point, Ole Golly reminds Harriet of a movie they watched about Mata Hari, which includes scenes of the infamous spy attending parties and dancing (86-7). Upon hearing this story, Harriet changes her mind about going to dance school.

Initially, Harriet’s problem is one of opposed subjectivities. She cannot be both spy and dancer because spies do not dance. The Mata Hari narrative, on the other hand, changes the rules, opening up a new narrative space in which spies do, indeed, dance, and what is more, do so because dancing is an essential spy skill. There are thus two narratives, or perhaps metanarratives, at work in this scene: the one (not incidentally coded masculine) in which identity is absolute and immutable and the other (coded feminine) in which identity is protean and subjectivities may overlap and recode each other. Although the feminine/masculine binary here is undoubtedly oversimplified (even overdetermined) the point is that, in embracing the second narrative, Harriet finds a way to revise both her conception of the spy and the dancer, transforming their seeming opposition into dialogic play.

This is the nature of agency in a poststructuralist world: one cannot escape narrative structures: there is, in fact, nothing else. But neither is one limited by these structures or forever in conflict with them. Rather, one may approach narratives (again, be they literary, socio-political, etc.) through pastiche or assemblage: overlaying them and playing on, or within, the tensions their interactions give rise to.

An extended example of this kind of agency surfaces when Harriet learns that she has been chosen to write the Sixth Grade Page of her school newspaper, *The Gregory News* (282). Harriet's psychiatrist Dr. Wagner is the first to endorse Harriet's new position: he urges Harriet's parents to facilitate their daughter's reentry into her school community by refocusing her artistic strengths in the form of a school project. Harriet's parents proceed by acting in accordance with Dr. Wagner's recommendation, procuring the approval of the school dean, Miss Whitehead, and Harriet's teacher, Miss Elson. By assigning her this role, the adults in Harriet's life intend to curb her potential for subversion by corralling her into a preexisting institution, one that is already sanctioned by the culture and which works largely in tandem with the interests of power. And indeed, Dr. Wagner's endorsement describes precisely this re-integrationist arc, as reflected in the following phone conversation between Dr. Wagner and Harriet's father:

> Well, Dr. Wagner, let me ask you this … yes, yes, I know she's a

> very intelligent child. … Yes, well, we're aware that she has a lot of curiosity. . . . Yes, I think she just might make a writer. … What? a project? oh … school … yes, I think … Yes, we'll call the principal. (268)

As Jane Greer explains, this corralling of the girl writer is nothing new, for "cultural authorities and public institutions throughout the centuries have attempted to manage the complexities of the Girl by managing her interactions with the written word" (xvii-xviii).

As it happens, Harriet's peers are not as unanimously supportive of Harriet's ascension to the role of editor. Marion Hawthorne, former editor of the Sixth Grade Page, objects to the undemocratic nature of Miss Whitehead's decision because it ignores the sixth grade vote. Miss Elson subsequently allows for a class vote, citing it as "an interesting experiment in terms of democracy" (283). In the end, the election marks Harriet's official win, confirming her newly acquired status and, more significantly, the approval of her classroom community. The editorship also grants Harriet a degree of power over those who previously shunned her. As every sixth grader knows, the person elected editor of the Sixth Grade Page also becomes class officer, the one who controls everything "When the teacher went out of the room," recording "the names of anyone who was disorderly" (34).

In short, in this instance, Harriet is invited into a subject position—the position of editor—that has been crafted, and which is further legitimized and maintained by the community at large. This subject position also comes with an attached narrative, one in which Harriet's heretofore alienated identity will be re-integrated, and in which her heretofore subversive writerly performances will be reformed. It is worth noting that Harriet is aware of the *situatedness* of the editorial role, for she has already critiqued it. Consider the case of Marion Hawthorne, the previous *Gregory News* editor, whose work Harriet criticizes. Harriet disapproves of Hawthorne's "editorial about candy wrappers," saying, "She just did that because Miss Whitehead talked about them on opening day" (88). Harriet's problem may be that Marion uses her role as editor solely to support Miss Whitehead's disciplinary agenda, an agenda meant to usher students into conforming to appropriate behaviors. Marion, then, is largely co-opted: she does not represent an independent student voice, but simply echoes the administrative voice or has enthusiastically adopted it and its attendant power. There is, however, no evidence in the text that Marion has been coerced by an adult; rather, the implication is that she writes this way due to a tacit understanding that this is what an editor does, or is expected to do.

Marion's editorship, then, would seem to underscore the nihilistic view of Derrida's model of the subject as being without agency. And this is certainly the tactic taken in Harriet's critique. And yet, despite her awareness of the limitations of editorship, and its potential corralling of voice, Harriet accepts the position, recognizing that she need not perform the position in the same way as Marion. She can accept the legitimacy such a position offers and negotiate its constraints without necessarily becoming subsumed in its hegemonic framework. This she proceeds to do by altering the content of the editorial page, refiguring it as a space for radical indeterminacy and rhetorical play.

Harriet revises the content of the Sixth Grade Page by replacing its once panoptic gaze with a collage of fragmented stories that never resolve into a bigger picture. Harriet thus renders the paper heteroglossic, foregoing metanarrative in favor of *petite histoire* (or, anti-narrative). Intriguingly, this move prompts ex-editor Marion to remark that Harriet's stories are "absurd" (292). Indeed they are. They are absurd in precisely the way Camus describes, insofar as they resist rationalization. This may be why Marion argues that "things like that don't belong in a paper," for if the purpose of the editorial page is to editorialize (i.e. to *make sense* of events), then Harriet's writing is definitely alien (292). It offers no overarching worldview, but instead mashes characters' lives one into the other, prompting the reader to discover what meaning, if any, is to be made. Harriet's editorials do not solely observe and report; they also encourage radical engagement with the community, both within the school's walls and beyond. This repositioning of the paper mirrors Fitzhugh's notion of subjectivity wherein agency is achieved through radical engagement in negotiations with preexisting limitations: not just accepting parameters, but engaging with them to achieve some kind of effect.

Harriet's rhetorical strategies are similarly open ended. For example, when writing about her best friend Janie, Harriet refrains from giving away too many details: “JANIE GIBBS HAS WON HER BATTLE. THIS SHOULD BE A LESSON TO ALL OF YOU IN COURAGE AND DETERMINATION. IF YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT, THEN ASK HER” (290). The key rhetorical device here is silence, as Harriet leaves out crucial details that would make Janie’s story whole. This use of silence is different than that employed by Judy in *Daddy-Long-Legs*. Judy uses silence as an instrument to control her reader’s perceptions. Harriet uses silence to provoke conversation, inviting her peers to become journalists themselves and providing opportunities for the freeplay of discourse outside the confines of the paper.

Along the same lines, the gaps Harriet leaves allow Janie to tell her own story. In fact, Harriet’s editorial hardly tells a story at all. Instead, it simply creates a subject position for Janie to occupy: heroine. It is then up to Janie to fill in her narrative. Here again, Harriet asserts the mutually constitutive relationship between subjectivity, narrative, and agency, illustrating that, as she has done with her editorship, one may inhabit the position of subject within a pre-existing narrative framework, which then, by dint of its being inhabited, becomes open to revision.

The editor role is not the only subject position which Harriet treats in this way. Throughout the period in which she is writing for the *Gregory News*, Harriet is also working on a short story intended for submission to the *New Yorker*. Fitzhugh tells readers that Harriet’s story is about Harrison Withers, an artist she spied on earlier in the book. The raw data for the story comes from Harriet’s spy notes, and is every bit as fragmented as the stories she writes for her school newspaper. However, the *New Yorker*, Harriet knows, is not the *Gregory News*: it demands a more structured and recognizable narrative framework for its stories. In order to publish her story, Harriet must take on a more traditional authorial function, stringing her notes together into a coherent plot that culminates in, as Harriet puts it, “A GOOD MORAL” (279). Two issues are salient here: Harriet’s imposition of a master narrative in the form the story’s plot, and her imposition of a determinative end to that narrative in the form of the story’s moral.

First, an examination of the latter issue: regardless of the plot structure of Harriet’s story, its moral is an affirmation of difference. As Harriet says, “SOME PEOPLE ARE ONE WAY AND SOME PEOPLE ARE ANOTHER AND THAT’S THAT” (279). Lissa Paul explains:

> The curious thing about the moral is that it isn’t a moral at all, at least not in the sense that a moral distinguishes between right and wrong conduct. For Harriet, a moral can be simply an acknowledgement of difference—an appropriate feminist moral in the light of poststructuralist discussions about difference as the way to defer meaning and to accord value to non-patriarchal traditions. (71)

Simply put, Paul’s argument is that Harriet’s moral is a defiant one, asserting the value of difference in the face of a polarizing cultural framework that typically marks the different as *Other*. Although Paul has a point, her argument neglects to recognize that difference cannot exist in a vacuum. In Harriet's moral, difference exists in relation to convention. The reader only recognizes, as Paul does, that Harriet's moral is unusual when he or she compares it to other more traditional morals. Furthermore, the difference between people that Harriet celebrates is, intriguingly, only comprehensible when the syntax of her closing sentence is read together. The noun phrase "some people" that Harriet uses to distinguish between one group and another does not, in fact, distinguish them at all, because Harriet uses the same phrase for both groups. The point is that, even though Harriet's moral imbues difference with value, it does so within a dialogic context. Thus Harriet's moral is less determinative than it first appears. It does not assert the value of difference over and above the value of convention; rather it argues that difference is produced in relation to convention and that both are necessary terms in the construction of identity.

Similarly, Fitzhugh complicates Harriet's imposition of a master narrative by keeping her story out of the text. As readers, we never get to read Harriet's work. Critics have largely ignored this gap, focusing instead on Harriet's thoughts about her story. For Robin Bernstein, Harriet's musings symbolize her growth, for she adapts Ole Golly's advice to fashion her notes into a publishable form.[6] Thus, Bernstein argues, the Harriet at the end of the book is "older, stronger, more empathetic, more fully known and accepted by her friends, surer of her identity, and close to her goal of being a “real” writer” (n. pag.). Although Bernstein acknowledges the significance of Harriet’s thoughts to her overall development as an individual and a writer, she makes no attempt to deal with the fact that the reader is denied the opportunity to observe that development as it plays out in an actual work of art.

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[6] Virginia L. Wolf has also read Harriet's moral in developmental terms. For her, Harriet's moral reflects a "growing awareness of others" ("Harriet the Spy" 125).

On a meta narrative level, this absence argues against Bernstein’s developmental reading. Even though the reader may imagine that Harriet’s production of a unified text speaks to her growing abilities as an author, there is no proof that Harriet’s writing has changed. Her story might be as fragmented and indeterminate as the *petite histoire* she included in the Sixth Grade Page. Indeed, Fitzhugh’s decision to absent Harriet’s narrative only amplifies its instability and potential for indeterminacy, inspiring hundreds of ghost narratives in the minds of her readers. As a result, Fitzhugh undoes the ontological certainty of master narrative in favor of ontological instability and dialogic freeplay. Moreover, she protects Harriet’s story from *becoming*, a gesture of resistance to those who would take a developmental approach to understanding both Harriet and her writing.

Of course, I cannot entirely ignore the developmental arc of the *Künstlerroman*, nor the importance of its *telos*. If, as I have been arguing, difference is produced in dialogue with convention, and agency achieved by engaging with the normative constraints of narrative, then my own reading must also engage these conventions and constraints. As previously noted, most critics look at the final scenes of Fitzhugh's novel as an affirmation of Harriet's development of empathy and her reintegration with her community. Moreover, they see in this development evidence of Harriet's maturity, her move from "innocence to experience," and her establishment of a "new order" in her life (Stern 445). In other words, Harriet has at last achieved a mature self, able to assert her identity and still maintain her empathy for others. This is a fine reading, and useful within the framework of feminist *Künstlerromane* in so far as it argues that the girl writer can maintain her essential identity as an artist and still manage the needs of others. And yet, as always, such a reading owes its usefulness to a re-inscription of romantic selfhood. I would argue that this re-inscription is in fact unnecessary and, what is more, that Fitzhugh herself resists it in her novel's closing pages, specifically in one of Harriet's last notebook entries:

> I HAVE THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT BEING THINGS SINCE TRYING TO BE AN ONION. I HAVE TRIED TO BE A BENCH IN THE PARK, AN OLD SWEATER, A CAT, AND MY MUG IN THE BATHROOM. I THINK I DID THE MUG BEST BECAUSE WHEN I WAS LOOKING AT IT I FELT IT LOOKING BACK AT ME AND I FELT LIKE WE WERE TWO MUGS LOOKING AT EATH OTHER. I WONDER IF GRASS TALKS. (297-8)

This passage does indeed show evidence of Harriet's empathic abilities, but it does *not* demonstrate that those abilities rest on an acknowledgement of her ultimate external subjectivity, that is, on the absolute existence of an autonomous self. Rather, Harriet's empathy is produced by her evacuation of selfhood. Note that the performance Harriet believes to be most effective—her performance of the mug—is the one in which she loses herself most fully. As she puts it, "I FELT LIKE WE WERE TWO MUGS LOOKING AT EATH OTHER" (298). Here, it is Harriet's displacement of her identity that enables her dialogue with the mug, suggesting that *being* is, for her, less important than the infinite play of *becoming*.

Fitzhugh further emphasizes this point through her manipulation of the *Künstlerroman* narrative, freezing it as she does in Harriet's childhood. Whereas Jo and Judy grow up and marry, Harriet does not. She remains as she has always been: a child at play, imagining herself one way, then another. With this in mind, Harriet's seemingly random question, "I WONDER IF GRASS TALKS," assumes additional significance (298). The question may be an allusion to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, particularly to *Song of Myself*, wherein Whitman sets up grass as speaking metaphorically from innumerable subject positions, calling it a uniform hieroglyphic. Furthermore, Whitman refers to grass as "the flag of my disposition" (l.101), linking it to his own self-conception.

In this poem, selfhood is a symbol for a multi-modal way of being. As Whitman puts it: "I am large—I contain multitudes" (1323). Parallel to Whitman's speaker, Harriet too sees herself as a heteroglossic field from which a multitude of subjectivities may arise. Fitzhugh's *Künstlerroman* thus suggests a model of girl writerly identity that is no longer indebted to enlightenment models of the subject, one that is neither overdetermined nor alienated, but which takes shape in dialogue with socio-cultural conventions and which, as it is performed, revises them. Above all, this model of the subject is engaged in play, recognizing in its own instability and malleability the opportunity for infinite variations and reinventions.

# CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION—FUTURE INHERITANCES: A DISCUSSION OF APPLICATIONS

Explicitly or not, Louisa May Alcott, Jean Webster, and Louise Fitzhugh register a discomfort with the constraints of the *Künstlerroman* genre, seeking through their own versions of that narrative to render subjectivity flexible and different. Nevertheless, the way in which each author achieves this break with convention varies.

Alcott dramatizes her character's struggle with overdetermined notions of the gendered writerly subject throughout the March trilogy, offering her multiple escape routes that would render her self more flexible and multi-voiced. Such a move is largely understandable within the context of first wave feminism, as women fought to overturn a patriarchal ideology that sought to curb their potential for socio-political agency in the public sphere (hooks, *Feminism* 4). Indeed, the primary drama informing Jo's story is her conflict with limiting narratives and her drive to open up new dialogic—and at times radically heteroglossic—spaces. Alcott points to this possibility most pronouncedly with the "Pickwick Portfolio."

Alcott's time period, however, is not equipped with the trap-door needed to make such a heteroglossic space a recurring event for Jo, at least not within the textual worlds of *Little Women* and *Little Men*. Alcott only realizes the heteroglossic space put forth in the "Pickwick Portfolio" once she absents her writerly character from the text, as she does briefly in *Jo's Boys* and more completely in *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag*. Within this final volume, Jo ceases to be defined by narrative at all. She ceases to be a character—at least in terms of having an inner psychology or a developmental arc. Jo, in *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag*, bears the closest resemblance to Barthes' notion of authorship: a presence not separate from but articulated by the text. Readers of *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag* do get an impression of Jo, but that impression is derived entirely from her writerly performance. She exists—in so far as she exists at all—in the reader's mind, outside the frame of the book. This move highlights the rhetorically constructed nature of the subject.

Jean Webster picks up on this notion. Similar to Alcott, she too feels a distinct uneasiness with the delimiting aspects of both the *Künstlerroman* genre and with the narrow constraints placed on gender identity in her time. And, again like Alcott, Webster seems to feel that the way out lies in absenting identity from its narrative frame. Webster accomplishes this feat by casting Judy as "mistress of effects," slyly constructing herself in response to the needs of the moment and of her audience. The technique is only magnified when Webster suggests that Judy herself may be the author of the novel. This move is especially significant in that it gives Judy absolute agency, absolute control over the multiple versions of herself appearing in her letters. Here too, one sees the influence of the times, as Webster's Judy (or rather Judys) arises out of specific negotiations with both the radical and reactionary voices at work in the dialogue about women's experience of higher education and the ways in which such education might be altering their roles in the culture, as well as challenging traditional ideas about feminine identity.

Both Alcott and Webster participate in the project of upsetting the master narratives of identity embedded in their respective historical moments and in the female *Künstlerroman* genre. However, their reliance—partial in Alcott's work, but pronounced in Webster's—on the figure of the autonomous, authorial self is problematic, or becomes so over the course of the twentieth century with the encroachment of postmodernity.

Fitzhugh's text, influenced as it is by the emerging postmodern context of the mid-twentieth century, is less concerned with maintaining the illusion of autonomous identity as a prerequisite to achieving agency. Picking up, perhaps, on Alcott's more radical experiments in authorial performance, Fitzhugh posits a model of the subject that is always already situated, but which has no need to escape, instead achieving agency through a self-conscious play with the cultural and narrative conventions in which she finds herself ensconced. Her protagonist is far less concerned with discovering, much less developing, a true self. For her, the *play* is the thing, and she approaches subjectivity not as a thing in itself, but as a field of potentialities, a space for infinite improvisations.

This movement, from alienation and escape to mastery and at last to playful reengagement, mirrors the dissolution of nineteenth-century ideologies in the increasingly fragmented and mediated culture of the late-twentieth century. And yet the reproduction is not exact. Each writer harkens both backwards and forwards: Alcott especially, and Webster to a lesser degree, both gesture towards an understanding of identity as performative, rather than *a priori*; Fitzhugh, meanwhile, includes romantic notions of the self as part of the assemblage of narratives that her girl writer invokes. In examining the work of all three authors, then, critics may do better to focus less on the historical trajectory defined by these works and more on the "bag of tricks" developed by each of the three authors, that is, on the rhetorical strategies employed to construct, unsettle, and reconstruct the girl writer. Naming (or Re-naming), Silence, Appropriation, Assemblage, Pastiche, Self-reflexivity, Pronoun mixing, Burlesque (via visual rhetoric), the Subversion of the Narrative Form (via circularity or freezing) et al have been and remain important techniques for renegotiating girl writerhood and for reforming the female *Künstlerroman*, as well as for challenging the precepts of first and second wave feminism. Indeed, it is these techniques that, even though they continue to inform the writing of contemporary *Künstlerroman*, more and more influence the practices of real world girl writers.

One example of this influence can be found in fan fiction, a form that has, with the advent of the Web, proliferated widely in recent years. For instance, MysteryNet's Nancy Drew Website—which is by no means unique—offers writers (most of whom appear to be young women) the opportunity to create new narratives within the Nancy Drew-niverse. In doing so, the website opens up a space for dialogic re-negotiations with existing narrative and writerly conventions. Writers coming to the site must concede to certain constraints, such as conventional spelling and grammar, as well as, more intriguingly, the established rules of narrative continuity, along with the normative guidelines of the classic Nancy Drew formula. Despite these restrictions, the site contains wildly experimental texts that interpolate the Nancy Drew series with more contemporary literary and televisual media, including the Harry Potter series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *American Idol*. Although these interpositions may seem silly or random at first, they are in fact quite powerful, as they are frequently at odds with the accepted Nancy Drew *mythos*. Inserting Nancy into Hogwarts, for example, and granting her magical powers, or giving her psychic abilities as occurs in the American Idol tale, overturns the realism of the classic Nancy Drew story, robbing the Drew-niverse of its master narrative of rational empiricism. Meanwhile, the Nancy/Buffy crossover creates a dialogue between two models of female agency and feminine identity and also undoes the seeming "timelessness" of the Drew series and revealing its situatedness within its historical moment.

Of course, such an examination of real world writing practices—and their relationship to the practices modeled in more traditional *Künstlerromane*—is only one avenue future critics of girl writerhood may take. Another useful approach would be to return to the texts of the early- to mid-twentieth century, such as Maud Hart Lovelace's *Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown* (1943), and to apply the kind of heteroglossic, non-linear readings I have attempted here. In doing so, critics may fill in some of the gaps in the historical timeline I have sketched in this dissertation while also expanding our understanding of these works' portrayals of the girl writer as subject and salvaging moments of radicalism that might otherwise be missed.

Critics may also wish to investigate contemporary instances of *Künstlerromane*. However, the pickings are slim. Indeed, it seems that the *Künstlerroman* as a genre has been on the wane since Fitzhugh. The girl writer character, though, is alive and well, and it may be that critics will have to revise their sense of what constitutes a *Künstlerroman* in order to continue studying her. For example, critics may examine how girl writers are positioned in Andrew Clements' *The Landry News* (1999) and Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy* (1994), as both texts contain girls who write, and, what is more, girls who negotiate the writing act in ways that reflect and even extend the techniques mapped so far. In Clements' book, wherein the protagonist creates her own newspaper, writing is again—as in the "Pickwick Portfolio"—figured as collaborative and heteroglossic, but, unlike Alcott's example, is given real socio-political agency. Similarly, the fictional diary format employed by Cushman echoes the concerns of Webster's work, illustrating the ways in which its heroine uses writing to construct her identity in dialogue with the rhetorical framing conventions of her time (the thirteenth century), and offering a vision of the writing act as, in part, unoriginal, drawing on multiple articulations already present in the culture at large.

Critics might even go further, investigating girl writers who appear as ancillary characters, such as Valentine Wiggin in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* series (1985-present). Valentine not only writes in a persona entirely opposed to her day-to-day identity, but she must also contend with the fact that this persona has been crafted for her by her megalomaniacal brother as a means toward furthering his Machiavellian political agenda. Valentine's negotiation with and eventual usurpation of this identity harkens back to the zero-sum conflict in *Little Women*. At the same time, her negotiation invokes the performative appropriation and refashioning of subjectivity prevalent in *Harriet the Spy*.

Finally, critics may wish to rethink the writing act altogether, extending it to include the kind of data manipulation found in works such as M. T. Anderson's cyberpunk novel *Feed* (2002), wherein the female lead runs spurious Feed searches in order to create a misleading consumer profile for herself. Here, writing is understood as being commensurate with information management, and rhetorical competence is refigured for the digital age. In *Feed*, where the concern is resistance to the mechanisms of surveillance and control, Anderson echoes Webster's concern with mastery and self-determination, while rebooting readers' understanding of how we write and are written in a digital environment.

I would like to close my dissertation by considering the application of my theories to the literature and writing classrooms. One of the implications of my work for the teaching of literature is to emphasize how literary texts are always in flux—there is no need to see the narrative arc as determinative, nor the text itself outside the realm of negotiation. This understanding of literature would naturally surface in class discussions focusing on disagreements or complications in the existing critical discourse. Students might, for instance, be asked to read secondary sources positing opposed visions of Jo's writerly performance, such as Elizabeth Janeway's book review of *Little Women* in which she argues that Jo is "the tomboy dream come true" (98) and Angela M. Estes and Kathleen Margaret Lant's article in which they argue that Alcott renders Jo voiceless by the end of the novel (10).

More interestingly, however, students might also be encouraged to apply this understanding of literature as in flux more directly by appropriating and rewriting moments in Alcott's text to see how they might refigure Jo by altering either the novel's close or other seemingly determinative moments in her life (such as the scene in which Amy burns her early work). Along the same lines, students might be asked to locate and fill in gaps in Jo's biography, answering for themselves the question of what happens to Jo between *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*. Far from reinstating a developmental arc, this assignment instead illustrates how gaps in the text can create heteroglossic spaces that provide opportunities for freeplay and intertextual dialogue. Last but not least, students might be asked to take on Jo's voice—or the voice of any of the girl writers discussed here—and to craft stories mentioned but not included in the "official" novels. For example, students might fashion one of Jo's sensational tales, or write a version of Harriet's Harrison Withers essay. Again, the point is to offer students the chance to enter into these texts and to carve out a space for their own experiments. These kinds of assignments would not replace the more standard interpretive work expected of students in the literature classroom, but would work alongside it, perhaps curbing the tendency to position the reader as standing apart from the text at a critical remove and encouraging the view of reader as co-creator, or meaning-maker.

In the writing classroom, on the other hand, this approach would illicit a movement away from theories that posit a writer will discover a final voice to theories that view voice as merely another rhetorical construct. To facilitate this kind of discussion, I would ask students to read selections from Walker Gibson's textbook *Persona: A Style Study for Readers and Writers*, in which Gibson illustrates how one's stylistic choices in diction and sentence structure create different voice effects. I would pair this with further examples taken from primary texts including the "Pickwick Portfolio" in Alcott's *Little Women*. As a related assignment, students might try appropriating an existing essay and rewriting it in a new voice simply by altering its style; additionally, students might experiment with a multi-voiced dialogic essay in which they write in various personas, each distinguished by a unique idiom.

On another note, following the collaborative framework also dramatized in *Little Women*, students may further complicate the figure of the unified author by working in pairs or groups, either attempting to craft an essay with a single voice (thereby highlighting its fictional nature) or crafting essays in an epistolary form, developing an argument or another text in tandem with each other. These assignments could be supplemented with articles on collaborative writing, such as Andrea Abernathy Lunsford and Lisa Ede's "Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration," as well as with discussions about the contrasting views of collaboration in the humanities and other fields, such as the behavioral sciences.

The assignments discussed above only scratch the surface of what might be attempted in the classroom, and I encourage my readers to treat them as a jumping off point for their own teacherly experiments. Indeed, along the same lines, I see this dissertation too as a launching pad for continued discussion and reinvention. It is my hope that readers will continue the conversation begun in these pages and will use the theories and strategies presented here to help them further explore the inter-relationship between rhetorical discourse (narrative or otherwise) and the performance of identity, especially that of the girl writer. In the end, I believe we will find that no reading is final, for the girl writer is not reducible; she is, to use Walt Whitman's words, an ever-changing "kosmos" (l. 497). Missing her in one place, search for her another, she stops somewhere, waiting for you (1345-6).

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