Between

From Paper to Film: Historical and Cultural Implications of Italian Illustrated Editions of *Little Women* (1908-1945)

Valentina Abbatelli

Abstract

This article analyses Italian illustrated editions of *Little Women* published between 1908 and 1945. After an overview of the publishing history of the novel in Italy, the paper will examine Italian illustrations as hermeneutic tools in order to examine their ideological function in the representation of gender. The belated reception of Alcott's novel in Italy, caused by its representation of a nonconformist educational model for girls, is mirrored in the tension between the nationalistic drive and the influence of foreign models that can be pinpointed in the illustrated editions. By analyzing adaptations of American illustrations, original Italian creations, and omissions of iconic illustrations, this paper will unveil how much the visual element is embedded in the Italian historical and cultural context, as the choice (or omission) of particular images impacted the interpretation of the book. By examining the Italian editions of *Little Women* published in this time frame, we will also be able to retrace the links with the American illustrated history of the book and bear testimony to the powerful impact of the 1934 film version on printed editions.

Keywords

Little Women; illustrations; publishing; paratext; Italy

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From paper to film: historical and cultural implications of Italian illustrated editions of *Little Women* (1908-1945)

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Published for the first time in the US in 1868, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*[1] has a seamless history of illustrations starting with the very first edition illustrated by Alcott's sister. The book, set during the Civil War, recounts the story of the March family. While Mr. March is away fighting in the war, the four March sisters (Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth) experience the passage from childhood to adulthood and face the difficulties of everyday life. They starting a journey towards self-improvement in which they have to deal with their character flaws (impatience, shyness, vanity and selfishness) in order to become adults. In 1869 Alcott wrote a sequel, which came out under the same title in the USA. This second novel continues to narrate the vicissitudes of the March family three years later which sees Beth dying, the other three sisters marrying happily and Jo opening a school with her husband.

The novel arrived in Italy in 1908 where it was translated six times and 23 editions appeared until the beginning of the 1940s. Up to this point, most of the Italian editions published displayed illustrations that implied a transnational circulation of images. The examination of the Italian editions of LW published in this time frame allows to retrace the links with the American illustrated history of the book and exemplifies to the powerful impact of the film version by George Cukor on printed editions. Analysing adaptations of Anglo-American illustrations, original Italian creations, as well as omissions of iconic illustrations, this paper will reveal how deeply the visual element of illustrations is influenced by the Italian historical and cultural context, as the choice (or omission) of particular images

[1] Hereafter cited as LW in notes and text.

impacts on the interpretation of the book by readers. The importance of illustrations acquires special salience within the Italian publishing field during the Ventennio, when the beginning of mass production ushered in the development of mass advertising and the enhancement of the paratextual features of books. Publishers were particularly attentive to publishing strategies and chose volume covers «according to the supposed profile of the readers» (Bonciarelli 2012: 5).

Little Women in Italy (1908-1945)

Until 1945, the history of publishing of LW in Italy was short and fragmented[2]. LW was not the first of Alcott's books to be translated into Italian. While Treves had published earlier titles by Alcott, in 1905, Carabba published *Little Men* – which recounts the vicissitudes of Jo's sons and nephews as pupils the school founded by her and her husband – translated by Ciro Trabalza (1871-1936), teacher, literary critic and grammarian, and his wife Michelina. Forty years after the publication of LW in the USA, the first Italian edition of LW appear by the same Carabba translated by the Trabalzas only as a consequence of the successful reception of *Piccoli uomini*.

Two editions of LW came out in the 1910s (a reprint by Carabba and the first Bemporad edition in 1916) and two in the 1920s (both by Bemporad). The number of editions increased to eight in the 1930s (re-edited by Bemporad and published for the first time by Aurora and Bietti), reaching ten in the 1940s (published by Marzocco, Corticelli, Mursia and Fiorini). Except for Aurora (1934) and Bietti (1935), all these editions were explicitly illustrated for and targeted at a young audience. While during some years (1934, 1936, 1942 and 1943) multiple editions came out with different publishers, from 1937 to 1939 LW disappeared from the market.

The boom of editions of LW in the 1930s and 1940s coincides with the so called 'decennio delle traduzioni', during which Anglo-American literature became popular in Italy through translation. During this period, Italy was experiencing a process of great industrialisation of the

[2] All the six translations which appeared in Italian editions published between 1908 and 1945 have been analysed (Carabba 1908, Bemporad 1926, Bemporad 1934, Aurora 1934, Bietti 1935, Corticelli 1941, Fiorini 1945). In this case the *corpus* encompasses integral translations (Carabba and Corticelli) and abridged versions (Bemporad, Aurora, Bietti and Fiorini) published for a young and an adult audience.

publishing market, alongside the diffusion of cinema and radio. Translations were, then, a linchpin of the Italian publishing market. Besides being successful with readers, translations offered several economic advantages for publishers; they were cheaper than original Italian works and safer, since they were already successful in the market. The Fascist regime could not ban translations, since the Italian literary system needed foreign literature; Italian readers demanded it, and the publishing market required the income generated from it. Translations were therefore «indispensabili alla sopravvivenza della vita culturale italiana» (Billiani 2007: 15).

Nevertheless, the absence of LW editions between 1937 and 1939 might be due to the regime's negative attitude towards foreign books for children, among which LW needs to be situated. In 1938, the educationalist Nazareno Padellaro openly criticised Alcott's works and warned against its representation of promiscuity and excessive freedom (Padellaro 1939: 41). Furthermore, the firm that largely published LW, owned by Enrico Bemporad, who was Jewish, underwent a major change during these years. After the racial laws of 1938, Bemporad was removed from his appointment and the imprint took the name Marzocco. Another reason for the "eclipse" of LW editions between 1937 and 1939 might be related to the wartime paper shortage (Forgacs and Gundle 2007: 152). A new edition of LW appeared in 1940 published by Marzocco followed by the first Corticelli edition in 1941 (that was reprinted in 1943 and 1944) and by the Fiorini edition in 1945. Nonetheless, the publishing boom of LW in Italy happened after WWII: between 1948 and 1989, 51 editions of Alcott's novel came out in Italy.

Italian critics tended to focus on a traditional vision of the March sisters that concentrated on the sisters' self-improvement reared in a patriarchal family (Visentini 1936: 379) and underlined the sentimental character of the novel. LW was considered to belong to that «sano tipo di letture per ragazzi che da noi trovò un'espressione singolare e forse insuperabile col "Cuore" del De Amicis» (Giacobbe 1923: 175)[3]. Armando Michieli expressed explicit criticism of the book, as he identified, the main flaw of the novel for young Italian readers as the realism for Alcott's representation of foreign religion, social and family habit (Michieli 1937: 106).

[3] Palazzolo argues that, in contrast with Cuore, «the non-institutionalised model of education» promoted in LW this could be one of the reasons for the late reception of the novel in Italy: cf. Palazzolo 1989: 121.

Very traditional books for children were published at the beginning of the 20th century. The only exception was Bemporad whose books for children gave space to psychological descriptions of innovative characters, including female characters (for instance *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* by Vamba and *La nidiata* by Sofia Bisi Albini[4]). Girls could only access carefully selected reading materials. The young female audience was mostly advised to read religious and moralistic books, *exempla* taken from hagiography or Italian history and these books were used in schools until the 1940s (Beseghi 1991: 125). Girls were meant to acquire practical advice on how to manage home and family. Fascist education focused on these specific learning aims for girls with textbooks that taught them how to become «la donna-massaia prolifica» (Ulivieri 1992: 40).

The circulation of this type of texts combined with the high percentage of illiteracy among Italian girls (*ibid*.: 41) seems to explain the late publication of LW in Italy. Alcott's novel differs greatly from the nineteenth-century Italian literature deemed acceptable for girls. While Italian women were educated to follow preconstituted models of behaviour, Alcott's protagonists were free to determine their own futures and to strive for success (Palazzolo 1989: 122). In relation to this, a crucial point in the difficult reception of LW in Italy can be found in Jo's emancipation, symbolised by her haircut in exchange for money. Jo's decision to cut and sell her hair to cover to her mother's travel costs to visit Mr March reveals love for her family, self-sacrifice and independence. In addition, this act expresses defiance towards feminine fashion rules which prescribed long hair for women (McCallum 2000: 89). According to Novati, giving away her hair was

> un rito di iniziazione e scambio che allude alla parità, all'uguaglianza educativa, alla crescita comune e condivisa dai due sessi […]: idee pericolose per l'Italia-Cuoredipendente che spiegano come il romanzo […] suscitasse diffidenza per la pedagogia liberatoria e democratica che proponeva (Novati 1990: 300).

[4] See Blezza Picherle 2004: 122.

Anglo-American illustrated editions[5]

The long history of American illustrated editions of LW began in 1868 when May Alcott, Louisa's sister, provided images for the first edition of the novel. The iconic frontispiece of this edition depicts Mrs March sitting in her armchair surrounded by her daughters. Then each sister is the protagonist of one illustration (Amy skating, Meg looking herself in the mirror, Beth running towards her father returning home) except for Jo, who appears only in the frontispiece.

The 1880 American edition displays 200 drawings by Frank Merrill, whose influence can also be found in Italian illustrations. His mostly realistic drawings provided a shift in the publisher's approach to the novel that stressed Alcott's autobiographical references and sought to promote Alcott as an educational and entertaining author, downplaying the sentimentality of the book and choosing to illustrate «moments of absurdity and unexpected humor» (Gannon 1999: 116).

In subsequent illustrated editions, certain artistic choices repeat. Usually, the cover or frontispiece showed a group scene taken from the first chapter. Subsequently, at least one picture depicted each sister individually: Amy usually draws, Beth plays the piano, and Meg wears a ballgown. Jo progressively gained importance in the visualisation of the story, and was portrayed in more than one scene, mostly cutting her hair, refusing Laurie, and writing. The growing attention to Jo as a writer is evident from the 1903 Brown edition illustrated by Alice Stephens, where the title page includes an illustration of Jo sitting at her desk and, later, writing in the attic and reading her first published story, intent on the newspaper (Gannon 1999: 123-5).

When George Cukor's film adaptation of LW was released in the USA, film stills began to appear in printed editions of LW. The undisputed star of the film was Katharine Hepburn. Hepburn's Jo was naturally but not unwomanly tomboyish (McCallum 2000: 86), as the film capitalized on

[5] The following editions Anglo-American illustrated editions of LW were consulted for the comparison with the Italian ones: Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1870; London: Ward, Lock and co., 1878; London: Sampson, Low, Marston & co., 1907; London, Edinburgh, Dublin, New York: Nelson and Sons, 1911; London: RTS, 1913; London: Kelly, 1914; Philadelphia: Winston, 1926; London, Edinburgh, New York, Toronto and Paris: Nelson and Sons, 1932; London: Harrap & co., 1933; London: Juvenile Productions, 1937; London: Pictorial Art LTD, 1947; London: Dent, 1948.

Hepburn's attractiveness and presented her as a modern beauty (Kirkham and Warren 1999: 86).

For commercial reasons the story of film stills began around 1910-11. With the growing number of filmgoers, film companies needed to publicise their productions; therefore, stills were used in posters, magazines and newspapers to advertise films[6]. When films based on novels appeared during the 1920s and 1930s, editions of these novels might appear illustrated by the respective film stills, in so-called photoplay editions. At least two photoplay editions came out in the USA immediately after the release of Cukor's film. The first appeared in 1933 by the publisher of popular novels and photoplays A. L. Burt in Chicago and New York, which will influence Italian illustrated editions, and the second in 1934 by the Whitman Publishing Company, a publisher for children, in Racine, Wisconsin. The title page of Burt's edition shows Jo reading a book in an armchair. The second still depicts Amy's punishment for bringing pickled limes to school against the rules. The third image depicts s a group photo of the girls, while the last one is the iconic image of Beth at the piano, which would become the cover of the 1934 Bemporad edition.

The film iconography built around reading can be traced back to the 1918 silent film version of LW[7]. This film version received positive, but not enthusiastic, reviews that emphasized its sentimental aspect. More interestingly, however, «many visual images underscore the film's connection to the novel, depicting figures reading the book or characters stepping out of the pages of a book» (Lyon Clark 2014: 92).

Italian illustrated editions

Italian editions of LW published before 1945 were mostly illustrated, rather than including the phtoplay, and witnessed a transnational circulation of images. Images produced in the Anglophone context, illustrations and film stills, strongly affected Italian illustrators and the circulation of film stills, which appeared not only in books, but also in magazines. Despite the influence of Anglo-American illustrations on Italian reception, significant omissions and particular choices in Italian illustrated editions cast light on the consideration of women in Italy during the period under examination.

[6] Cf. Finler 2011.

[7] A British silent version of LW was released in 1917, but has been lost.

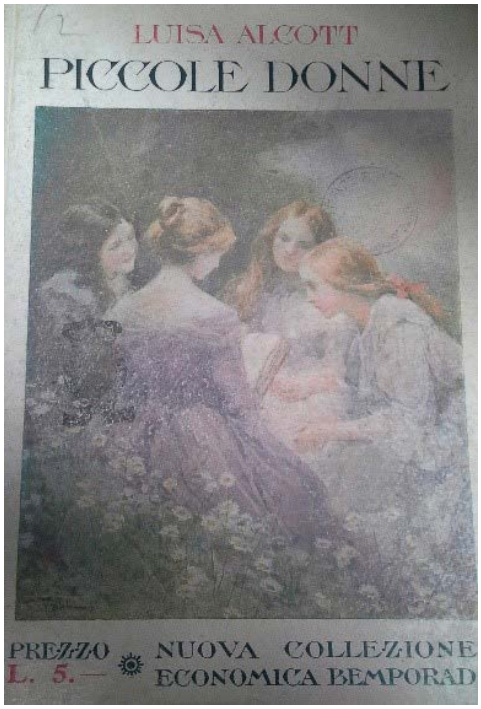

Fig. 1. Bemporad 1926 cover, the four March sisters.

Fig. 2. RTS 1913 inside illustration, the four March sisters.

The first Italian illustrated edition was published by Bemporad in 1916 and reprinted for the first time in 1926. Its illustrations were by Fabio Fabbi (1861-1945). As usual in Anglo-American editions, the first image was a group picture. Bemporad's cover, a delicate watercolour with fuzzy contours, depicts a bucolic scene (Fig. 1). It represents the four sisters in a forest while one of them is reading, most likely Jo since she was the one more inclined to reading and she is the only one with her hair tight in a bun. The non-realistic atmosphere makes it hard for the reader to understand the identity of the sisters. Except for Jo and Meg, since she is the only brunette, the other two sisters are hardly recognisable.[8] They all seem to be listening to Jo reading. The cover shares some similarities, mostly in relation to colour, with the edition by the RTS Society published in London in 1913 and illustrated by Harold Coppings (Fig. 2). Coppings, however, depicted the girls listening to Jo while doing their favourite activities. Thanks to this similarity, it is possible

[8] In Alcott's first description of the sisters Meg has brown hair, Jo has her hair bundled into a net, Amy has curly yellow hair, while Beth is depicted only as «smooth-haired».

Fig. 3. 1880, Mr Laurence was hooking a big fish

Fig. 4. Bemporad 1926, Mr Laurence was hooking a big fish

to distinguish between Amy and Beth. Both girls are blonde on this cover, but Amy is portrayed drawing, her favourite activity.

The Bemporad edition contained three additional illustrations. The first image depicts a minor episode, when old Mr Laurence, the Marches' neighbour, is at the fishmonger's shop and looks at a woman leaving the shop with a big fish. The image refers to the episode, narrated by Beth, in which Mr Laurence buys a fish for a young woman who was in the shop asking for fish in exchange for some cleaning (Chap. 4). Frank Merrill illustrated this episode for the first time in 1880, drawing a scene aimed to produce an ironic effect on the reader by contrasting the rather unsociable and apparently unpleasant character with the action of holding a fish with his walking stick (Fig. 3). In the Bemporad illustration Mr Laurence has already given the fish to the woman, a scene that underlines his generosity, which is further highlighted in the caption «ed essa si è affrettata ad andar via, così contenta…» (Fig. 4). This reinterpretation of the scene seemed to belong exclusively to the Italian reception of LW illustrations, since not only did it infrequently appear in the English editions; but also when it was, the scene recalled more directly Merrill's image as Mr. Laurence was

Fig. 5. Bemporad 1926, Amy praying for Beth

always portrayed holding a fish with his walking stick[9].

The second illustration portrays the iconic encounter between Meg and Laurie at the Moffat's ball, while the third demonstrates another minor episode when Jo and Laurie are out rowing (Chap. 11). As with the image of Mr Laurence with the fish, Merrill also drew this. The portrayal of rowing is not widespread in other editions consulted, and only appears in the set of illustrations by Percy Tarrant in the 1926 English edition published by Harrap & Co. However, Tarrant depicted Jo and Laurie in a different setting and surrounded by other people in chap. 12. It may be that Fabbi chose to reproduce this scene because of the importance that Merrill gave to this picture, putting it at the very beginning of the chapter[10].

The last Bemporad illustration shows Amy praying for her sister Beth who is suffering from scarlet fever (Fig. 5). This image was unprecedented. The episode of Amy praying in front of a picture of the Virgin Mary is narrated in chap. 19 when Amy is sent to her aunt's house because of her sister's illness. Nevertheless, the image that traditionally mostly represented Amy in this chapter was of her dressing up in old costumes found in a room at her aunt's house and in the company of her aunt's parrot (Fig. 6). It is worth noting that Merrill also stressed the religious aspect of the chapter, including a religious picture of the Madonna, that evokes a sense of maternity, at the end of it. Illustrators interpret the text according «to a spe-

[9] Alcott, *Little Women*, illustrated by Inglis (London, Nelsons and Sons, 1932) and *Little Women* illustrated by Heade (London, Pictorial Art Ltd, 1947).

[10] This hypothesis is argued on the basis of the popularity of Merrill's illustrations. Archival research might offer a different explanation to the illustrator's choice.

Fig. 6. 1880, Amy and the parrott.

cific audience, a specific ideology or a specific artistic trend, according to the time when the pictures are produced and the illustrator's value and ideology» (Pereira 2008: 114). Bemporad's reworking of the religious theme might be due to the publisher's will to underline the influence of religion on the girls' education, but could also be affected by the background of its illustrator. Fabbi depicted several religious scenes during his career and, particularly, took part in art competitions on the subject of the Virgin Mary[11].

There seems to have been a transnational circulation of illustrations for the Bemporad edition, since it appears heavily influenced by Merrill's illustrations. At the same time, this publisher does not seem to choose from Merrill's repertoire of images following a clear rationale, since minor episodes are illustrated alongside better-known ones (such as Meg at the ball). Overall, sentiments such as generosity and religious devotion are stressed, but references to them are too generic to indicate a necessarily intentional choice. It seems more plausible to credit them to Fabbi's reworked version of images and his professional background.

Italian illustrations after Cukor's film release

Cukor's film version of LW marked a watershed moment for Italian editions of the book. Shot in 1933, during the Great Depression ushered in by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the film stresses from the beginning the hardship the Marches were living through during the Civil War and recalls

[11] In 1899 he participated in the first competition announced by Vittorio Alinari on the theme of the Virgin and Child displaying two pictures "Mammina" and "Madonna alla Spiga". In 1902 he also participated in the second edition on the theme "Alla vita della Madonna". See Bernucci 1993.

the situation in which many American audience members were living. Whereas Alcott's novel starts with the sisters waiting for their mother to come home, talking about the upcoming Christmas around the fireplace, the film shows mother Marmee and the girls in their everyday lives. The opening scenes from the movie stressed «women's capability and employability» and «locate[d] the women in a community that sees its young, virile men, disappear» (Cartmell – Simons 2007: 82). Cukor, however, aimed to send a positive message to the audience, highlighting a sense of solidarity between members of the family. Reflecting on the difficulties of Americans during the 1930s and on the importance of family unity and collaboration as a way to face hard life situations, Cukor's version of LW conveyed «his tenacious belief that, with unity and family, America could become again what it once was: secure and plentiful» (Kellett 2016: 25).

In 1934, the film was released in Italy and presented at the second Biennale del Cinema at Venice where Katharine Hepburn was awarded the Coppa Volpi as best actress. From 1925, when Istituto Luce was created, and increasingly throughout the 1930s, cinema had been recognised by the regime as a powerful, immediate instrument of education and propaganda. The regime had also created venues such as the "Biennale del cinema" at Venice to promote foreign films alongside national films that could again raise the profile of Italian cinema.

According to the Italian press, the film capitalized on Hepburn's persona and her name featured prominently in reviews[12]. As the undisputed star of the film whom Cukor considered to be born to play Jo (Kirkham – Warren 1999: 86), she became a symbol of positive modernity that was to be counterpoised with images from the nineteenth century. Her angular beauty contrasted with the canonical model of Italian beauty that the Fascist regime promoted also in fashion magazines[13]. However, most of the approval found in the press focused on the ways in which Hepburn's persona and Alcott's character overlapped as two strong, independent women. Hepburn-Jo performed with a «forza scatenata e quasi selvaggia […] un temperamento ricchissimo e nativo, un'insofferenza di ogni luogo comune della recitazione, un desiderio di indipendenza a ogni costo» (Gromo 1934: 4). This statement highlights the relationship between Hepburn and

[12] The analysis of film reviews was made on the most popular Italian daily newspapers *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Messaggero* and on the weekly magazine *Cinema Illustrazione*.

[13] Cf. Gundle 2007.

Fig. 7. Bemporad 1934 cover, Beth at the piano.

Fig. 8. Bemporad 1934 inner illustration, Jo playing Roderigo

Jo. She was described as able to give life, real flesh and blood, to one of the characters of the movie, that was considered overall static and too idyllic.

Hepburn seemed to embody the positive values of American dynamism and renovation that fascinated Italy during the Ventennio. Her strength and spirit of independence recalled the image of an America «pensosa e barbarica, felice e rissosa, dissoluta, feconda (…) e insieme giovane e innocente» (Pavese 1962: 193). Her ability to give life to what was considered static and anchored to the past corresponded to the role that American literature had for the Italian state during the Ventennio: «una nuova linfa da immettere nel corpo malato ed esangue della letteratura italiana» (Lombardo 1981: 24).

The 1926 Bemporad edition was reprinted in 1934 and nine stills from the film version replaced the drawings. The image of Beth playing the piano became the cover (Fig. 7), following the generic Bemporad tendency of the 1926 edition. As Fabbi's drawings stressed wholesome sentiments and generosity, the choice of Beth playing the piano rather than spotlighting Jo on the cover underlines the preference for «the perfect little woman», in this case. This cover's subject has no needs or desires other than to take care of the family unlike Jo, who is «the vital center of Alcott's book» (Fetterley 1979: 379).

Fig. 9. Bemporad 1934 inner illustration, Jo and Laurie.

Fig. 10. Aurora 1934 cover, Jo sitting on an armchair.

Inside illustrations instead privileged group film stills. The first group still is taken from the scene of the Christmas breakfast and was followed by the sisters and Marmee sewing together and telling stories. The following pictures depicted the girls close to the piano given to Beth by Mr Laurence, and the girls greeting their mother leaving to visit Mr March, therefore foregrounding the sense of unity central to Cukor's film. The remaining stills mostly focus on Jo. She is depicted as playing the part of Roderigo in the play staged at the Marches house on Christmas day (Fig. 8), in Laurie's company at Mrs Gardiner's party on New Year's Eve (Fig. 9), and with Laurie and his grandfather. Stills from the film, allegedly bought by RKO, the American studio that produced Cukor's film, were circulating widely at the same time in Italian magazines. *Cinema Illustrazione*, for instance, used some stills shown in Bemporad (the photos in which Beth is at the piano and Jo is playing Roderigo) in a review of Cukor's film plus a variation on the theme of the scene in which Jo and Laurie are at Mrs Gardiner's home (An. 1934: 8).

Bemporad's use of film stills affected subsequent Italian editions. The Aurora edition, also published in 1934, included a cover with a photo of Jo reading in an armchair, which had already been used as cover in the photoplay published by Burt Company in the USA in 1933 (Fig. 10). The back cover photo depicts the sisters' happy, surprised reaction to the pi-

Fig. 11. Bietti 1935 cover, Jo on the stairs.

Fig. 12. Corticelli 1941 inside illustration, Jo playing Roderigo.

ano gifted to them by Mr Laurence. Bietti, in 1935, chose a still as its cover representing Mrs March and the servant Hanna checking Jo's dress before the New Year's Eve party (Fig. 11). Bietti stated on the cover that the still was a photo taken from LUX of Turin, the company that distributed the film in Italy. Stills continued to appear in the Bietti reprint of 1936 and in the Marzocco 1940 edition that used the same ones as Bemporad 1936.

The Corticelli edition of 1941 stands out because its illustrations referred back to film stills already circulated in previous editions of LW and magazines. Not only did Corticelli's portraits of the sisters recall actresses in Cukor's film, but also some of the illustrated scenes seem to allude to the film. The scenes in which Jo acts on the stage (Fig. 12), the girls and their mother sew and share anecdotes, Jo is with Laurie and Mr Laurence, derive from film stills used by Bemporad 1934. The first two group scenes that opened Corticelli's edition imitated two film stills reproduced in the review published in *Cinema Illustrazione* 31 already mentioned. The influence of the film version seems to stop in 1941, since the latest edition of LW published by Fiorini in 1945 did not show any trace of film stills. Bemporad, Bietti and Aurora bought the rights to use film stills from Lux or RKO Pictures as stated in their editions. The reasons why Corticelli and Fiorini did not use film stills are possibly due to publishing choices, but it can also be speculated that they did not buy

the rights to use them[14]. This is not to be linked with the price of the Corticelli edition at least, as it costed L. 40, much more than the Bietti, Bemporad and Aurora editions (priced between L. 3 and L. 10). This return to illustrations is most likely due to the period of hostility towards American cinema in Italy. As with publishing, the regime increased its control on foreign products in 1938, when ENIC ("Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche") was assigned a monopoly on the distribution of foreign films. Consequently, American studios, which could no longer sell their films to the highest bidder, boycotted the Italian market, and photos and news about Hollywood stars disappeared from cinema magazines[15]. Perhaps as a result, stills began to disappear from the publishing market as affected by such developments.

Italian photoplay editions of LW aimed to reach different types of audience. Bietti was the only edition situated in the lowest price range, being sold at L. 3 in 1935. Bemporad and Marzocco were priced between L. 5.50 and L. 6 in the period 1934 and 1940, while Aurora 1934 was sold at L. 10, which corresponded to the price of a luxury edition at that time (Ferme 2002: 50). The prices of weekly magazines varied according to the quality of the edition and the number and quality of photographs reproduced. The average price for magazines published between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s was around 60 cents[16]. Specifically, *Cinema Illustrazione*, which contained film stills published in volume editions of LW, was priced at 50 cents. De Grazia recalled that at the eve of WWII «an average clerk's family disposed of perhaps 40 lire a month for recreation» (De Grazia 1992: 131), with a rather low budget on books and periodicals. The data suggest that readers of these magazines were able to afford Bietti's edition, and could perhaps buy the Bemporad and Marzocco, while Aurora seems to have been less affordable. The price of photoplays, therefore, did not entirely even out against the average price of weekly magazines, but was aimed at a wider public.

A transnational circulation of illustrations of LW can be deduced from the use of the same stills in Italian editions and magazines and American

[14] This remains only a hypothesis for the Fiorini edition as it did not display its price. Therefore, it is not possible to argue that its cost did not allow the purchase and consequent use of film stills.

[15] See Gundle 2013: 29 and De Berti 2012: 39.

[16] *Cine Sorriso Illustrato* was sold for 30 cents (1930), *Cinema Illustrazione* for 50 cents in the 1930s, *Cine Cinema* for L. 1 in the 1920s and the fortnightly *Cineomnia* for L. 1.50 (1935).

photoplay editions and from the reworking of drawings already circulating in the Anglo-American tradition of illustrations. However, while drawings originated from the book, stills derived from a different medium and were chosen by the studios. They aimed to attract a broad public, both those who had not seen the film and those who had seen it and wanted a souvenir of their favourite stars. In both cases, the book ultimately seems to have become a vehicle for promoting the film. Illustrations and stills could be reused as they were, but, though illustrations could be reworked, stills could only be used as inspiration for new drawings. The reproducibility of photographs occasioned the highest degree of homogenisation. Stills led the reader to interpret the book in a narrower way than illustrations, namely through the lens of the film's director[17]. Furthermore, the choice of stills was limited to those photos that film studios would sell, while the repertoire from which an illustrator could be inspired was theoretically infinite.

The advent of film stills in the Italian editions reinforced Cukor's message around the sense of togetherness of the March sisters and their mother and marked an emphasis on the character of Jo in Italian editions, which was most likely due to Katharine Hepburn's interpretation. The 1926 Bemporad edition devoted three out of nine illustrations to Jo. This number grew in the 1941 Corticelli edition, where five out of the nine drawings depicting Jo did so by portraying her with Laurie, thereby underlining their close relationship. In the last edition of LW published during the Ventennio, the 1945 Fiorini edition, Jo was represented in half of the illustrations, alone or accompanied by different characters. It is worth noticing that Fiorini's foreword includes a short digression on Jo. The foreword states that the novel's universal popularity is due to the presence of Jo, as the nucleus around which the novel revolves. Jo is depicted as an unforgettable character and described as an example of self-sacrifice and identified with all those people who prefer to suffer themselves instead of their loved ones and which, according to the author's foreword, constitute the main part of the audience (G. 1945: 3).

Already in the USA «popular retellings and visualizations tend to emphasise Jo's personal story, to separate it from her sisters' stories» (Gannon 1999: 134). While in the USA this tendency could be observed from the beginning of the twentieth century, the emphasis on Jo and her personal

[17] As Benjamin put it «photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction – tasks that now devolved upon the eye alone» (Benjamin 2008: 20).

story in Italy resulted from the influence of the film, since it started with Bemporad 1934. The most nonconformist, modern character gained importance thanks to the mediation of the modern invention, the cinema.

Whilst Jo was also represented in Italy in some famous scenes (acting on stage, at the ball with Laurie, with Mr Laurence), one iconic image is absent from Italian editions. She is never represented having her hair cut or with short hair. The scenes of Jo at the barber's shop and Jo with short hair have a long tradition in the Anglo-American context, since they were represented from Merrill onwards. At least one of these images was displayed in six editions published in the UK and in one case the illustration with a shorthaired Jo was at the front of the book before the inner title page (Alcott 1948). This episode appears also to be crucial in Cukor's film version. The director presented a close up on Jo's hair and on her making odd faces as she explained the reasons for her gesture in order to downplay the dramatic reactions of her mother and sisters. However, in contrast with drawings, I did not find Anglo-American photoplay editions with stills depicting Jo's shorter hair. It seems, therefore, that studios did not seek to emphasise this incident in the story of Jo.

This only seemingly secondary episode might have represented a controversial theme in the illustrated editions of LW published under the Ventennio and entangled with the beauty canon and gender models. The fashion of short hair arrived in Italy from the USA, where it was born after WWI, and, where, by the 1920s, «millions of women of all ages were wearing shorter hair» (Sherrow 2006: 91). On the one hand, the regime promoted beauty that recalled Renaissance painting, and idolised the image of the young peasant woman who was in vast contrasxt with the so-called 'donna crisi', who was thin and well groomed, cosmopolitan and vaguely androgynous (Gundle 2007: 88). On the other hand, however, «a wide variety of non-hegemonic modern female types thrived during the fascist period – primarily in the artefacts of mass and consumer culture, and particularly in those whose target audience was women» (Chang 2015: 23). It has to be noted that a type of modern woman who embodied values such as competitiveness, vitality and advancement of the national interest was approved by the regime. This model of woman might incidentally have short hair and wear a short skirt but «she did so with a sense of moderation and always in the service of health and hygiene» (Chang 2015: 36), while the so-called donna-crisi was individualistic and self-absorbed.

Tensions around the fashion of short hair are however present in literature. In the 1925 short story *Capelli corti*, Sibilla Aleramo wrote about her choice to cut her hair, stating that, at that time, this gesture did not imply

sacrifice, or rebellion, but just being fashionable and more practical. This aesthetic choice, however, according to her, on the one hand, stood for an improvement of femininity since, thanks to short hair that left the neck uncovered, «la grazia e la nobiltà del viso femineo [sic] risaltano anche più commoventi come l'arte da una pittura primitiva» (Aleramo 1997: 73). On the other hand, short hair could help women to show their inner qualities and therefore help their emancipation:

> Il viso della donna, incorniciato all'incirca come quello dell'uomo, farà ancor più palesi i caratteri interni […]: esprimerà con assai maggior evidenza le qualità essenziali dell'animo e, […] dello spirito (*ibid.*: 74).

Therefore, Aleramo did not associate any sign of rebellion with short hair in 1925, and she was still linking it in the 1920s to modernity and to the emancipation that women were experiencing in the aftermath of WWI.

A different perspective can be found in the comic strip, *Il velo paterno* by Giuseppe Novello, published in the 1920s. One of its captions reads «Finora papà non si è accorto che oggi Franceschina si è tagliata i capelli alla maschietta» (Boneschi 2001: 136), implying that the father will frown upon her daughter for cutting her hair.

It would be difficult to not interpret Jo's decision as an act of self-sacrifice and generosity towards her family and therefore the opposite of individualism and self-absorbency. Nonetheless, the absence of the image of Jo having a haircut in Italian editions might be related to general controversies around female beauty during the Ventennio.

Conclusion

The late Italian reception of LW can be mostly explained in relation to the traditional model of girlhood proposed in nineteenth-century Italy by publishers for young people, but also by the presence of Italian literature for children centred on the building of a shared national identity through the scholastic institution. The open criticism directed towards the book under the Fascist regime, due to its depiction of perceived promiscuity and excessive liberty, did not impede the publication of LW in Twentieth-century Italy.

Influences on the choices of Italian illustrations can be traced back to Anglo-American originals. Italian illustrated editions tend to offer a more conservative ideal of women as might be seen in the depiction of Amy as a pious girl in the 1926 Bemporad edition, the choice of Beth as the protago-

nist of the cover of the 1934 Bemporad edition and the omission of the image of Jo with her short hair. The release of Cukor's film in 1934 triggered a 'modernisation' in subsequent editions that foregrounded a nonconformist Jo, played by Hepburn. The circulation of Italian photoplays and cinema magazines where Hepburn was prominently represented increased her appearance in illustrated editions published after the release of the film. In the years of the diffusion of cinema in Italy, 'modern' photo stills entered the publishing world of LW alongside the 'old' drawings.

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