Women Writing Intimate Spaces

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Women Writing Intimate Spaces

The Long Nineteenth Century at the Fringes of Europe

Edited by

Birgitta Lindh Estelle
Carmen Beatrice Duţu
Viola Parente-Čapková

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The Open Access publication of this book has been made possible thanks to a grant of the Donation Board of the Philosophical Faculties, Gothenburg University and the Department of literature, history of ideas and religion, Gothenburg University.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022044787
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022044788

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2352-8354
ISBN 978-90-04-51850-6 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-52745-4 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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The editors wish to thank Ennaliina Leiwo, Nea Pälä and Victor Rizon for their technical assistance.

Introduction

Birgitta Lindh Estelle, Viola Parente-Čapková and Carmen Beatrice Duţu

Intimacy is a tricky concept. As easy as it is to identify intimacy in various situations and in relation to people, places, and items, just as hard is the concept to define. As Pratt and Rosner remind us in *The Global and The Intimate* (2012), the word intimacy, originally meaning "the innermost", invokes a cluster of related ideas: privacy, familiarity, love, sex, informality, and personal connections, concepts associated with something that is hidden away from a larger world and tangible only in the closed-off sphere involving a few persons (4). In dictionaries most definitions mention closeness in relationships of varying kinds. Intimacy is associated with familiarity and matters of a personal or private nature, including situations of close friendship or sexual relations and things that are said and done by people involved in such relationships.

Aristotle, who was already contemplating interpersonal relationships more than two thousand years ago, stated that relationships built on attraction to the other's virtuous character were the longest lasting ones and the only kind of relationship in which each partner was liked for themselves (Aristotle, Book VIII). Aristotle's philosophical analysis dominated the study of intimate relationships until the late 1880s (Perlman and Duck 13). One of the important issues at stake in literature at the end of the nineteenth century was precisely virtue, at the time connected to ideas of decency and female chastity. These ideas were intertwined with male honour. At the turn of the twentieth century, when modern psychology and sociology emerged, intimacy and virtue became a relationship in transformation (Giddens 2–3) and literature became a site for struggles over values connected to this transformation. Women writers contributed to these very changes by sharing their perspectives and utopian ideas on matters of intimacy, shaped into fictional worlds which added to the new literary schools and movements of the new century. Women had of course written on intimacy and responded to it as a literary topic before the twentieth century and it is still explored in fiction, as the conditions for intimate relationships change with society.

In academia intimacy has developed into a research field spanning a variety of academic disciplines investigating, for example, the new arenas offered by the internet and social media (Chambers; Huw). Theories about the democratization of intimacy in the conditions of late modernity have evolved: elective intimacy (Chambers; Davies), pure relationships and plastic sexuality

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(Giddens), non-normative, causal, and promiscuous intimacies (Berlant and Warner, Reay). Intimacy is often related to emotion and embodiment or part of an affective cluster, that is, aspects which resonate with the private and personal. Intimacy is also a part of what the theoreticians of emotions have called "ugly feelings", for example, envy (Ngai 33–35). Intimacy is inbuilt in what is called the most difficult emotion or affect, shame, which, for its part, is closely connected to sexuality, but also, for example, to sexual violence, trauma, and anti-intimacy.

The significance of space, place, and mappings in literature and the world has given birth to fields operating under banners such as literary geography, feminist geography, literary cartography, and spatial criticism. Across these fields and various disciplines, conventional presumptions about what intimacy entails have been challenged. In *Writing Intimacy into Feminist Geography* (2017), Donovan and Moss point out that the taken-for-granted elements of humanness and privacy that are conventionally attached to intimacy have been contested through ideas about public intimacy, cultural similarities and non-human and cross-species intimacies (5–7). Recent research has shown that bodies are not the only mediators or sites for intimate acts; instead, intimacy has been regarded as a product of social and spatial relations. For example, Bronwyn Parry (2008) explores "distributed spaces of intimacy" and the role of material artefacts as interfaces between individuals and communities that are geographically and socially distant (35–36). In *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Lauren Berlant replaces the bonds to proximity, personal closeness, and reciprocity with affective expectations of "the good life" as a fantasy created in the conjunction of economic, social, and collective structures (2–12). Sarah Ahmed in *Willful Subjects* (2014) uses the theoretical method of queering, which detaches intimate connections and reattaches them to other constructs in order to produce new narratives of the world that can change our way of thinking and acting (13–19).

Intimacy is a theme that is embedded in the agenda of gender studies, but at the same time it has often proven rather difficult and controversial. As Donovan and Moss state, "the personal is political" is no longer a unifying principle around which to organize a feminist politics. Researching and writing the intensely personal is seen as an indulgent privileged practice which undermines the dismantling of systematic structural oppression (4). Some major protagonists of first- and second-wave feminism, for example Wendy Langford in *Revolutions of the Heart* (1999) and William R. Leach in *True Love and Perfect Union* (1981), already pointed out that the discourse and myth of romantic love, closely intertwined with intimacy, was a site of women's complicity in patriarchal relations, one that would silence women more than the patriarchal oppression (also Parente-Čapková, 54, 79). The yearning for intimacy and

fusion, brought about by the socialization of women, has also been labelled as an inability "to tolerate distance and otherness", and thus "experienced by the partner as a disturbing threat to his and her autonomy" (Felski 109).[1] Writings on the personal and the innermost in women's individual lives, typical e.g. of the genre of feminist confession have become furthermore problematic (Felski 198–209), as the notion of woman has been heavily contested by postmodern theories on other aspects of identity. Contrary to the resistance to intimacy, though, many currents within feminist and gender-conscious thought (in the more or less remote past as well as at present) have sought to appropriate the idea of love and intimacy and develop various, mostly more or less utopian, theories of new love and Eros, either outside or within the framework of the heterosexual union, claiming to be able to do away with the domination and subordination of women. To these currents belongs for example the idea of "a transactional negotiation of personal ties by equals", as Anthony Giddens put it, or some other figurations of intimacy, such as various non-normative intimacies (Giddens 3). Pratt and Rosner highlight a continuity between feeling and attachment as two different aspects of feminist approaches to the intimate. As feeling is always feeling *something*, the perceiving subject is deeply and multiply attached to the world around her, and feminist scholarship tends to depict the subject as relational and critiques the masculinist bias in unary, indivisible models of subjectivity (7). As always and everywhere, everything depends on the context in question as well as on the degree of symbolic investment, making the issue of gendered intimacy in time and space messy and "multi-layered", as Ebru Ustundag puts it (186).

1 Intimacy and Women Writers in History

The messy and multi-layered issue of intimacy and spatiality is the topic of this volume on women's writing from the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. The concept and phenomenon of intimacy in connection with transnational and spatial aspects serve as the point of departure and a series of intimacies is addressed: intimacy as love, eros and lust; intimacy as affection, communion and association; anti-intimacy, the lack of it or intimacy that fails and finally the culture of divorce and adultery. First drafts of the chapters assembled here were presented at the online workshop "Rethinking Intimacy in Women's Reading and Writing at the Peripheries of Europe", which

1 Felski points to Ann Oakley, *Taking It Like a Woman,* London: Jonathan Cape, 1984.

was arranged at the Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion at the University of Gothenburg in October 2020.

The workshop and the book draw on and have been inspired by a long-term collaboration of an international network of scholars working on women's writing and its reception. The background of this collaboration is the Women Writers' Networks / NEWW network with its annual conferences, from which there originated a COST Action, Women Writers in History (2009–2013).[2] The Women Writers in History network now continues as a DARIAH-EU Working Group with the same name (since 2016), and has an open access database, a Virtual Research Environment NEWW Women Writers.

Dealing with literary works by women, our task is to analyse the meaning of various cultural, social, and, in the broadest sense, political constructions of intimacy as present in women's texts and lives. The tension between intimate matters of domestic life and the impulse to escape confinement in women's writing was observed already in the first wave of feminist criticism in the 1980s (Di Battista and Epstein Nord 3). The new technologies and theoretical achievements that have evolved since then essentially call on rethinking intimacy in women's writing.

2 The Transient Spaces of the *Euro-Fringes*

Extensive research has been done on intimacy in Western European literature. Literature from these parts of Europe is often regarded as influential in the field of comparative literature. In Pascale Casanova's terminology they are regarded as "the great national literary spaces" (Casanova 84). In our study we move the focus to North, Central and Southern Europe. How did the geographical, social, cultural, and religious conditions shape the scenes and scenarios of intimacy in women's writing in these parts of Europe? The relations between the political and geographical centres and peripheries of Europe still have to be reassessed, and our book contributes to this need. By presenting case studies from a wide range of countries situated on various European fringes, it differs from the narrower scope of publications which concentrate only on Western Europe, as well as from those that embrace only specific regions of Europe, for example, in the north. Literary texts from the fringes of Europe

2 For more on the COST ACTION WWIH, please see Sanz & van Dijk 2014, 11–12. The COST Action enabled various international projects as e.g. the HERA-funded "Travelling Texts 1790–1914: Transnational Reception of Women's Writing at the Fringes of Europe" (2013–2016).

are largely underrepresented, as are such in publications addressing intimacy globally (Pratt and Rosner).

Models based on one single global literary system, characterized by a continual and unequal struggle between centres and peripheries, like those by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova have been criticized by Orsini and Kristal among others, for taking for granted a one-way route of literary trends from the centres to peripheries. Alternatives have been presented, for example Stefan Helgesson's circular approach, which displays the literary landscape more like a network without definitive centres and peripheries (308). In *Swedish Women's Writing on Export* (2019) Leffler et al. use the term *semi-peripheries*, which in line with Moretti's and Casanova's work is derived from world-systems theory, to nuance common dichotomies such as centre/periphery, major/minor, large/small (15). Leffler et al. show a massive dissemination of novels by two Swedish women writers, Fredrika Bremer and Emilie Flygare-Carlén, which were widely read and reviewed internationally (12). They also find that the communication between what they term peripheries and semi-peripheries is vital to the circulation of literature. The reception of Swedish women's novels in the Czech lands implies that "semi-peripheral" literatures invoked each other as acts of distancing themselves from centres, in this case that of contemporary Central Europe dominated by the German language (16).

The editors of the present volume have also been long concerned with the issues of reconsidering the term *periphery*, which has been felt as problematic due to its intrinsic negative connotation. Consequently, borrowing from European studies in the present volume we use the term *fringe.*[3] The term actually appears in European studies in relation to literature as early as 2003 in *Writing Europe: What is European about the Literatures of Europe* edited by Ursula Keller. The expression *fringes* of Europe has also been employed in relation to the literary production and reception of women writers in South-Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century (Duţu). Moreover, the term *fringe* has been successfully used in international research in the field of feminist historiography in the aforementioned HERA project "Travelling Texts 1790–1914: Transnational Reception of Women's Writing at the Fringes of Europe", which studied the role of women's writing in the transnational literary field during the long nineteenth century. The project further explored the way in which gender-cultural encounters through reading and writing contributed to shaping modern cultural imaginaries at the fringes of Europe. In the same

3 See Hadjimichalis, Costis, "The Fringes of Europe and EU Integration. A View from the South", in: *European Regional and Urban Studies*, Volume: 1 issue: 1, page(s): 19–29, Issue published: January 1, 1994.

logic, in the present volume we understand *fringe* as a margin, indeed, but not implicitly peripheral in value. After all, the meaning of the word *fringe* is also "not part of the mainstream, unconventional". In relation to women's cultural production, *fringe* would imply a different dynamic of the centre-and-periphery binome as fluid categories; we propose that *fringe* involves new limits and routes, adequate for a different perspective on geographical space in relation to gender and intimacy. It would thus encapsulate the zero-degree tension, the *in-betweenness* and the exchanges between the traditional geographical centre and peripheries, an intimate geography.[4] The concept of *in-betweenness* implies also the ways of exceeding the traditional spatial divides between the public and the private, vis-à-vis both the real and the imaginary spaces, where identities as well as cultural and political emancipation are discussed.

Consequently, putting *fringe* countries together in this volume places women authors from those countries within the wider European culture and reveals interesting parallelisms in women's authorship: Romanians writing in French; Russian-Finnish writing in Swedish; Czechs writing in German etc.. As this volume furthermore attests to, women writers from these fringe countries read each other's work. Moreover, there are parallels at a thematic and rhetorical level in their writings on intimacy: for example, the figure of being suffocated, stifled, or fenced in, as well as the creation of a visionary space in which the yearnings of the protagonists can be fulfilled. These are recurrent themes in many of the writings by the women authors represented here and as Leffler et al. states, it suggests other routes than the traditionally mapped ones (16).[5]

The concern with transnationality and transculturality is particularly present in the choice of the authors and the work we analyse. In the case of some authors, the issue of national belonging (Berlant and Warner) becomes very complex, associating various forms of intimacy, and intersecting with the aspects of class, sexuality, religion, as well as with the gendered role of the writer, especially problematic in the case of women writers from the countries

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4 The concept of *in-betweenness* appears in Homi Bhabha's *Cultures in Between* (1996), where he uses the term to illustrate the idea of a transcultural, hybrid space; here we are introducing it in conjunction with the concept of the *fringe*.

5 This kind of recurrent and converging patterns in women's writing has been called *confluence* by Carol MacKay. Mac Kay uses this concept in her efforts to define Fredrika Bremer's (a Swedish writer born in Finland) proximity to the novels of her contemporary, Charlotte Brontë. The concept as been elaborated by Kati Launis, according to whom "what MacKay means by confluence is parallelism: two women writers, writing in different countries in the same period, were interested in the same topics connected with woman's life, as woman's education, and would often use partly similar plot configurations and similar ways of expression." (62).

undergoing the process of national renascence in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Many of the authors discussed in this volume are transnational and multilingual or translingual figures, not belonging unequivocally to any national literature. The enterprise of mapping straightforward one-way routes immediately collapses when these women writers, often in exile or leading nomadic lives, are brought into the picture.

The emphasis on the *fringes* of Europe allows us to call attention to authors such as Marie Linder, a writer of Russian origin, who moved to Finland and wrote in Swedish in the nineteenth century, Zofka Kveder, a Slovenian-born transnational author writing in Slovenian, Croatian, Czech, and German, or Dora d'Istria, a Romanian who wrote exclusively in French and lived in Russia, Switzerland, and Italy. Many of 'our' writers travelled and experienced travelling as a kind of an escape from the limiting and oppressive environment 'at home', which represented the negative side of intimacy; others felt lost and alienated when spending time or living abroad, longing for the lost intimacy of the home and/or language they left behind. Various roles and meanings or, directly, the profound *in-betweenness* of *fringe* inhabited spaces vis-à-vis intimacy is at the heart of many texts we have been and are dealing with. It is visible also in the way women writers treat the dichotomies of public and private, home and outside, countryside and the city, national and cosmopolitan, and, indeed, we do not necessarily have to see these as dichotomies. The muddled and multi-layered qualities of the transnational, transcultural and translingual situation of these women writers, as well as of intimacy as a concept and phenomenon, rather require us to notice the fluid relationship between these areas and in terms of space and time. A view of intimacy as multifaceted furthermore implies that any analysis of intimacy has to be inherently intersectional, paying attention to as many variables as possible – from gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, age, religious and/or spiritual beliefs to health conditions.

3 Rethinking Intimacy in Women's Writing in History from the Perspective of Spatiality

Spatiality as geographical distances and movements is obviously part of transnational studies and intimacy is in itself a spatial concept, incorporating proximity. Moreover, as Donovan and Moss point out, intimacy is often cultivated by setting a scene or creating an atmosphere, although it can also be unexpectedly felt through chance encounters (3). The historical interest in women's literature formulated one of the original reasons why some of us started our

collaboration in this field and why spatiality, often together with temporality quite naturally appears as a relevant perspective for explorations of intimacy in the research environment of the Women's Writers in History network. The combination of spatial and temporal inquiry to women's texts and the way they have travelled in and beyond Europe is inherently inbuilt in our main common research tool, the previously mentioned NEWW Women Writers Virtual Research Environment. Considerable attention has been paid to the issue of literary foremothers, which implies relations of intimacy, as every mother–daughter relationship, literal or metaphorical, does, between women writers in the past and in the present, across geographical and linguistic borders, in other words, across time and space. It involves women reading each other, inspiring each other, becoming intimate with each other, again and again, both literally and metaphorically. Looking at the spatial and temporal aspects of intimacy in women's writing from this viewpoint is, of course, one possible way to approach the issue. Equally important it is to analyse representations and other manifestations of intimacy in the actual texts written by women and, indeed, these two approaches can and should be combined.

Many of the sites of intimacy that preoccupied women writers throughout the centuries can be approached with the help of the *chronotope* as coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in the twentieth century. *Chronotope* literally means "time space" and expresses "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin). For example, the well-known and intrinsically ambivalent *chronotope* of family home can function in a myriad of ways, depending, apart from the historical and geographical context of the author, on various aspects of literary form, from language and style to genre. The aspect of intimacy within the given *chronotope* would be expressed differently depending on the period styles and modes employed (from baroque and sentimental fiction through realist and decadent to avant-garde, post-avant-garde, and postmodern fiction), and, last but not least, on the degree of realism or other kinds of mimesis. Some genres have traditionally functioned as the most important means of exploring intimacy in time and space: one example is epistolary fiction, be it in the form of love letters or text messages within the environment of the smartphone, as explored in contemporary fiction by women. Another important example is the *Bildungsroman*, often interconnected with that of the artist's novel and used by women writers for their needs, continually transformed and ironized. These genres highlight the gendered figure of the seeker, which has been used in studies of religion and spirituality, but which, both vis-à-vis the intimate search for spirituality and on a more general plane, is very well fitted to our purpose of exploring intimacy in space and time, combing the intimate,

personal, and political on many different levels. Yet another spatial genre or rather mode, as is a commonplace view among theoreticians of the field, is melodrama, in which the representation of values is characterized by the contrasting of different spaces and times, for example involving childhood homes and married life, the countryside and the city. By investigating how the topos of intimacy is organized in or constructed by space and time, one starts from the very core of the analysis of literary narratives. Ideology and bridges to the outsides of literary worlds, such as the experience and lives of the women writers and social orders of different cultures, can thus be part of the interpretation, organically and in new ways.

4 A Journey between the Fringes of Europe with Women Writers through History

The chapters in this volume investigate, in different ways and within different genres, scenes and scenarios of intimacy in cultural and literary universes, for example, through the notion of vicinity or movement between spaces, how intimacy and anti-intimacy are mediated as well as illuminated, through the mapping of literary landscapes, constructed by nation, gender, class, and sexuality. The impact of geographical and historical distances and movements on narrative strategies of intimacy is explored, as are narrative connections between nations, cultures, and historical periods at the fringes of Europe.

The contributors to this volume will invite readers on a round trip to the literary and cultural sites of an intimate geography of the Euro-*fringes* through the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. In the first section, "Transnational Intimacies", Carmen-Beatrice Duţu brings us to the transient space of intimacy in-between Romanian and French culture in the writings of Dora d'Istria (1828–1888), Anna de Noailles (1876–1933), and Martha Bibesco (1886–1973) at the turn of the twentieth century. In "Women, Writing and the Cultural Politics of Intimacy in Modern Romania" she examines the gendered reactions to the making of the Romanian modern identity in the lives of these three Romanian-born French women writers and their writings. By examining the intimate geography of the two national spaces intimacy is carved out as an *in-between* space where both gender and political emancipation discourses are intertwined, underlining the subtle transfer of French modernity into Romanian culture, via women's self-fashioning. We are then thrown back in time by a group of scholars. In "Spatialized Intimacy: Literary Mapping in Writing and Reception of the Russian–Finnish Cultural Mediator, Marie Linder (1840–70)" Arja Rosenholm, Kati Launis, Natalia Mihailova, and

Viola Parente-Čapková explore the complex spatial connections in the novel *En qvinna af vår tid: karaktersteckning af Stella* [A woman of our time; 1867] by the Russian-Finnish author, countess, and feminist Marie Linder. Their joint literary analysis focuses on the representation of the real and imagined spaces/places of the novel and how they make sense of the world, in connection with Linder's transnationalism, multilingualism, and her social position as a Russian-Finnish noblewoman. The group of researchers, who are all collaborating in the Finnish-Russian transnational project "Texts on the Move: Reception of Women's Writing in Finland and Russia 1840–2020", also presents a model of analysis based on intimate geography and semiotics, which is designed as a system of spatial dichotomies that mediate non-spatial relations and ideological and moral values in the topos of the text.

A quick flight to Central Europe of the early 1900s then brings us to the company of the Czech author Růžena Svobodová (1868–1920), the Slovenian-born Zofka Kveder (1878–1926), the Croatian Adela Milčinović (1878–1968) and the Austrian-Jewish Grete Meisel-Hess (1879–1922). In "Stifling Intimacies: Middle-Class Marriage in the Short Stories of Central European Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", Katja Mihurko Poniž shows how transnational contacts between women impacted their literary writing, and moreover, that their works have common traits. By analysing short stories by these Central European writers who wrote in four different languages, Mihurko Poniž shows that their common characteristic is the combination of stylistic experiments and social and moral concern which is expressed in the relationship between intimacy and spatiality. All four stories depict the inner split in the protagonists, namely, the divide between their prescribed social role and their own intimate world. Mihurko Poniž points out that only by looking at the texts from the transnational perspective can this topic be seen as one of the most frequently recurrent ones in women's writing at the turn of the twentieth century.

In section two, "Spatial and Temporal Intimacies at the *Fin de Siècle*", the journey in time stops for a while for a closer inspection of the decades when the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth century. Birgitta Lindh Estelle guides us through the melodramatic Gardens of Eden in Swedish plays of the 1880s. "Melodramatic Spaces – Intimacy and Emancipation in Swedish Women's Playwriting" offers an investigation of the spatial strategies of representation in three plays by Anne Charlotte Leffler (1849–1892), Alfhild Agrell (1849–1923), and Victoria Benedictsson (1850–1888). Different variations of the melodramatic figure of the Garden of Eden from which the innocent heroine has been expelled interplay with representations of intimacy. In this chapter Lindh Estelle pays attention to the tension between national spaces and morally invested images of a cosmopolitan Europe, and she connects these

spaces to the notion of home as a real or imaginative space where the protagonists can expose their true and innermost selves. The analysis furthermore shows how the melodramatic contrasting of true homes and false homes is instrumental for the critique of conservative bourgeois gender norms. In the neighbourhood, but a few decades into the twentieth century we find Swedish Elin Wägner's (1882–1949) *Pennskaftet* (1910) [*Penwoman;* 2009]. In the chapter "Feminism and Darwinian Time: The New Women of Elin Wägner", Cecilia Annell shows how temporal aspects inform the debate about "the woman question" in Swedish feminist discourse at the turn of the twentieth century, which focused on intimate spaces such as love, motherhood and sexuality. Drawing on Judith Butler's theories of performative linguistics and proceeding from the writings of Ellen Key, Annell tracks the influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory in *Penwoman*, thus showing that the liberated "New Woman" is presented as an inevitable result of future change. In the neighbouring country Finland, Elsi Hyttinen acquaints us with Saimi Öhrlund's (1889–1959) novels and female working-class protagonists. By taking her point of departure in Laurent Berlant's concept of national heterosexuality, Hyttinen discusses intimacy as a space not only of failure for the female protagonists but as a space that is hurtful to them. Class translates into an inability to renegotiate the script, and the protagonists take to the strategy of living a life in close proximity to the kind of space that they feel incapable of entering.

The journey then takes us to the Mediterranean area. In "Intimacy and Spatiality in Three Novels by Regina di Luanto", Ulla Åkerström guides us through the intimacies of the gardens, homes, trains, and carriages in Luanto's fictional late nineteenth-century Rome. The Italian novelist, who was born in 1862 and died in 1914, quite candidly discussed intimate issues such as women's sexuality, the relationships between men and women, divorce, hypocrisy, and falsehood in society. Åkerström shows how different spaces are used to highlight key problems regarding the relationships between women and men in the novels *Ombra e luce* [Shadow and light; 1893], *Un martiro* [A martyrdom; 1894], and *Libera!* [Freedom!; 1895]. The idea of a green world, as a recurring topic and archetypal pattern in female literature, has a privileged position in the analysis. With a quick leap, Elena Lindholm then transports us to Spain in her chapter "Intimate Spaces and Sexual Violence in Two Novels by Carmen de Burgos" (1867–1932). Lindholm explores the realistic representations of rape in Carmen de Burgos's novels *Los inadaptados* [The misfits; 1909] and *La malacasada* [Woman in a bad marriage; 1923]. She discusses the fictional form which is blended with autobiographical elements and points to signs which suggest that the background to the motif of rape comes from the author's own experience. Thus, de Burgos moves the experience of rape out of her personal space

into a public space. Through a mixture of autobiographical doubling and fictionalization, de Burgos achieves a fragmenting effect similar to the collective storytelling of the #metoo and #cuéntalo movements. In the light of the writer's own biography, literature itself then appears as an imaginary space that offers a possibility for female vengeance for patriarchal violence.

In the third section, "Intimate Authorship in Space and Time" we turn back to Romania, where Roxana Patraș and Lucreția Pascariu explore "postures" as intimacy devices, taking into account the first Romanian Queen's – known for her pseudonym Carmen Sylva (1843–1916) – multiple personae as princess, queen, writer, musician, philanthropist, etc. Defined as a way of occupying a position in the social field, the concept of "posture" becomes the tool for investigating spatial and temporal coordinates of intimacy. Moreover, Patras and Pascariu examine the way in which, in this specific case, "the plurality of postures" has led to a discussion of spatiality and temporality under the larger concept of memory. Built on biographical information and also on the analysis of Sylva's wardrobe, the authors demonstrate an abstraction of Sylva's intimacy which is caused by her attempt to behave like a professional writer rather than by the limitations of her royal status.

At the next stop on the journey, we find ourselves back in Central Europe in order to meet the Slovenian poet Vida Jeraj (1875–1932). In "Discovering Intimacy: The Voice of the First Slovene Lyrical Poetess Vida Jeraj", Alenka Jensterle-Doležal introduces the intimate worlds in the poetry of Jeraj, a nomadic bilingual Central European woman. Jensterle-Doležal proceeds from the philosopher Henri Bergson's speculations on the nature and perception of time and its relation to space. From there she goes on to describe Jeraj's turn to modernity through her poetical discourse and through intimacy. The route goes from intimacy in love relationships via intimacy with death to the escape from intimacy. In the Netherlands – the final stop on our journey – we are exposed to a creative and innovative approach to how the very reading and writing between women evoke spaces of intimacy – even from one century to another. In "Intimacy and Influence between Women Authors: The Case of Isabelle de Charrière", Suzan van Dijk and Josephine Rombouts, herself a writer/novelist, take us from the eighteenth century to our own times. During the travel through time, they discuss feelings of intimate connections between women writers over generations. The focus is on the case of the Swiss-Dutch eighteenth-century author Isabelle de Charrière (1740–1805), for whom they see intimacy moving in two directions: to the past and to the future, being herself clearly inspired by female predecessors, and inspiring to younger friends, and even present-day women – among them Rombouts herself who speaks about the feeling of intimacy with Charrière.

As a map has now been provided, we hope that our readers are challenged to set out on the journey through intimate spaces and transnational crossings at the fringes of Europe, in the company of women writers.

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PART 1

Intimacies in Transnational Women's Writing

CHAPTER 1

Women, Writing, and the Cultural Politics of Intimacy in Modern Romania

Carmen Beatrice Duţu

Abstract

Taking on Jonathan Flatley's concept (2008), my stance is that the *affective mapping* of Romanian space at the turn of the 20th century emphasizes women's self-fashioning their identity through intimacy. I am examining the narratives of three Romanian-born French women writers to trace the developments of intimacy as a key tool of identity construction: from its traditional perception as a private sphere matter, to a public cultural category which permeates social roles and determines social judgements. The challenge is that when applied to specific contexts configuring a map requires a route, as well as boundaries, peripheries and fringes. What is the gendered reaction to all this, especially in the context of transnational mapping? In all three cases, the writers' (self)narratives of intimacy become transient spaces where both gender and political emancipation discourses are intertwined, an *in-betweenness* which underlines the subtle transfer of the paradigm of (French) modernity into the Romanian culture, via women. Thus, the contours of a politics of intimacy appear on the less defined boundaries between the personal and the public, between the masculine/public and the feminine/private divide, where intimacy shapes and is shaped by space – from the domestic to the national and beyond.

Keywords

affective mapping – intimacy – fringe – public – private – gender – cultural transfer – transnational

Ever since *Critical Inquiry* issued the inspirational volume on *Intimacy* (edited by Lauren Berlant), this concept has been regarded as one that "builds worlds, it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relations", closely associated with particular affects (Berlant 1–8). In *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (2008) Jonathan Flatley

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demonstrates that affects can actually determine people to sociologically remap their once defective relationship to the world they inhabit. The above open up the possibility to exceed the traditional spatial divide between the public and the private and allow the researcher to focus on how individuals interact and connect with each other through affects, while regarding spaces as continuums, u-topoi, imaginary places. Therefore, when employing a critique of modernity as seen through the lenses of gender, I see intimacy as a fundamental category associated with identity construction which, rather than being connected to any given content or placed in any given space, leads to an *intimate geography*.

In this chapter I am looking at the gendered reaction to the making of the Romanian modern identity, in the context of transnational mapping, whereby intimacy becomes a key tool of investigation. From sexuality and women's roles in the couple to the organization of the household and family, a plethora of what used to be regarded as intimate concerns in Romanian culture flooded the turn-of-the-century agenda, thus pointing to the new relevance of the concept for both the private and the public. My stance is that this *intimate geography* of Romanian space generates women's self-fashioning their identity through blending writing with the performativity of their own biographical experience. In this sense, I am examining the biographies and narratives of three Romanian-born French women writers in order to trace the development of intimacy as a key tool of identity construction, showing the transition from the private sphere to a public cultural category which permeated social roles and determined social judgements. In all three cases, the writers' narratives of intimacy become transient spaces where both gender and political emancipation discourses are intertwined, an *in-betweenness* which touches upon the subtle transfer of French modernity into the Romanian culture,[1] and vice versa, via women.

Elena Ghica (1828–1888) – pen name Dora d'Istria, Anna de Noailles (1876–1933), and Martha Bibesco (1886–1973) are three interesting and convergent cases, since all three chose to write in French, addressed Romanian and French culture at its most intimate, and all three fashioned themselves as belonging to a pan-European identity.

However, since my concern is to articulate how the politics of intimacy is mediated by gender and culture, this is not a straightforward account of women's participation in the making of modern Romania; the mode of exposition is

1 As stated in the Introduction to this volume, the concept of *in-betweenness* has not been coined as a concept per se. Here I employ this space of *in-betweenness* as a *fringe* space, a semi-peripheral locus, as explained in the Introduction.

more interpretive and textual in its sensibility than it is sociological or historical. I examine intimacy within the public sphere from the perspective of cultural politics, as an expression of the symbolic, a representation, a spectacle, and ultimately a discourse.

1 An Intimate Geography

Romanian culture may be regarded as an interesting case study for the recent developments in cultural theory; the shift from one civilization to another, from one paradigm to another, the Byzantine and Ottoman (pre-modern) one to the Western (namely French) modern one of the Romanian principalities (Moldova and Ţara Românească) in the nineteenth century, in just a few decades has concerned many Romanian (and not solely) scholars. Throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, debates concerning Romania's national identity focused repeatedly on the cultural heritage of the Roman Empire and the Latin origins of the Romanian language, as this *translatio* was considered irrefutable proof of a Western European identity and allegiance. Eventually, for most Romanians, Latin origins came to mean French and France was regarded as the most dignified heir of the late Roman Empire, not only economically and politically, but especially culturally.

As a consequence, France and its capital city became a Mecca for young Romanian intellectuals seeking a Western European identity. For the ethos of the present chapter, I will briefly mention what I believe are the most significant Romanian studies on the matter: the 1898 analysis by Pompiliu Eliade titled *De l'influence française sur l'esprit public en Roumanie* [The French influence over the public spirit in Romania], his PhD thesis at the Sorbonne and a much more recent one, first published in 1989 in French, and then in several editions in Romanian, by another Romanian scholar who studied at the Sorbonne, Neagu Djuvara. Both studies are concerned with the phenomenon of *acculturation* which occurred in the nineteenth century in two Romanian principalities,[2] namely the clash between the eastern and the western cultures; they both deal with this phenomenon from a non-eventful and cultural perspective. Pompiliu Eliade contends that the sudden shift to modernity is strictly indebted to the French influence over the public space in Romania. In his more recent study, Neagu Djuvara nuances Pompiliu Eliade's rather

2 Here, acculturation is understood as "assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one" (see Oxford Dictionary).

Manichean perspective detailing the more or less mediated French influence in the Romanian Principalities. He speaks of an “active minority in the very thin layer of the elite society which *passionately adopts the ideas and morals of the West* [my emphasis] and which, through its political and intellectual force manages, in less than two generations, to deeply alter the culture of an entire people” (Djuvara 10).[3] Feeling there is a lot at stake here, perhaps having feared explaining the unexplainable, Djuvara states: “I haven’t set myself to attempt any theoretical explanation of the phenomenon, but to merely offer an overview of the entire society at a given moment” (11).[4]

However, shock therapy was by no means the favoured method of acculturation. Romanian intellectuals programmatically rejected the endemic imitation of form with no substance, no localization. My thesis is that acculturation was possible due more to the sociology of the irrational, of affects, rather than to events and facts. As Jderu puts it:

> direct social interactions among individuals generate a sui-generis reality, different from the social reality generated by the influence of societal structures. In other words, the performativity characterizing direct contacts among individuals becomes a social reality in itself, a particular kind of social order which influences individual behaviour.[5] (19)

This is where I situate the present study, in the realm of the somewhat irrational, passionate forces that led to a true societal – spatial, cultural, political, and otherwise – metamorphosis. In the aftermath of the first period of acculturation (1800–1848), Romanian intellectuals admitted that they were following the model of French Western civilization as the beacon for their new cultural, political, and social identity and embraced a more organic, performative, both individual and societal transformation of their Romanian identity.

3 “<o minoritate activă> care adoptă cu pasiune ideile și moravurile Apusului și care prin acțiunea ei politică și intelectuală izbutește, în mai puțin de două generații, să preschimbe în adîncime cultura unui neam întreg.” The translations of all quotations in this chapter are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

4 “Nu mi-am propus să incerc vreo explicație teoretică a fenomenului, ci doar să dau o imagine a întregii societăți la un moment dat”.

5 “Interacțiunile sociale directe dintre indivizi generează o realitate sui-generis, diferită de realitatea socială generată de influența structurilor sociale. Cu alte cuvinte, performativitatea ce caracterizează contactele directe dintre indivizi devine o realitate socială în sine, un tip particular de ordine socială care influențează comportamentele individuale”.

In light of the above, the three women intellectuals who are the subjects of my study are relevant examples. They all wrote in French, their biographies share an intimate knowledge of both spaces (Romanian and French), geographically and symbolically, through their upbringing, their multilingual skills and travels. Also, they are highly cosmopolitan: European citizens *avant la lettre*, aristocrats by birth, born into families of regent princes or ambassadors, married to princes, they live both in Bucharest and elsewhere in Europe as socialites who attract and are attracted by the French culture. Paris, the literary hub of Europe, a crossroads of cultures, a city of massive fervour and constant creativity, attracted the Romanian intelligentsia at the turn of the century, as it was the dream destination for Romanian intellectuals, Francophones and Francophiles alike.

Further, I will illustrate how in the exile of these three women, displacement and deterritorialization are intimately negotiated: in Bucharest, Dora d'Istria, Martha Bibesco, and Anna de Noailles (through her family) seize French space and internalize it early on in their lives. Romanians living in Paris as well as other members of French high society are grouped in Martha Bibesco and Anna de Noailles' salons which showcase the most famous writers of that era: Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, Jean Cocteau, Paul Valéry, and Pierre Loti. Around these women, the Paris of the first half of the century became a non-place situated in a mythical *chronotope*, encapsulating transnational identities and generating a supra-identity, a European one. In this respect, the three Romanian-French women further brought into discussion will function as incontestable agents of change. The cultural dimension and intellectual power of their ideas, manifested both within and outside their *écriture*, triggered social or political empowerment, with strong symbolic significance. We will see how, through the power of their ideas, the three women writers' social and political intervention in their nation's destiny is rather mediated, subtle, and indirect, intimately intertwined with their experience of exile and melancholia.

As Flatley puts it:

> not all melancholies are depressing. More precisely, if by melancholia we mean an emotional attachment to something or someone lost, such dwelling on loss need not produce depression, that combination of incommunicable sorrow and isolating grief that results in the loss of interest in other persons, one's own actions, and often life itself. In fact, some melancholies are the opposite of depressing, functioning as the very mechanism through which one may be interested in the world.
>
> FLATLEY 1

2 Travelogues of Intimacy

The story so far starts with Elena Ghica (1828–1888) – pen name Dora d'Istria – who was the first woman to be placed in the wake of the great French intellectual tradition in Romania, concerned with metaphysical idealism and romanticism. Born in one of the most prominent and cosmopolitan families of the time, the niece of two princes (Grigore Ghica and Alexandru Ghica), Princess Elena Ghica was soon to be introduced to French culture, of which she remained a keen admirer throughout her life: her mother was both a writer and a translator of classical French literature. Her uncle being removed from the Wallachian throne by the Ottomans, in 1842, the entire family was forced into exile for political reasons.

Elena Ghica, whom I am going to refer to with her pen name from here on, was the first, in nineteenth-century Romanian culture, to have challenged the private versus public stereotypes, namely, the constraints of women's sexual agency. She wrote exclusively in French, on both the Eastern and the Western feminine agendas. She situated her agency against the prejudices that regulated intimacy, in the context of nation-building patriarchal policies. For instance, in the attempt to respond to Jules Michelet's *Du prêtre, de la femme et de l'humanité* [Of priests, women, and humanity; 1854], *Les femmes de la revolution* [Revolutionary women; 1854], and *La femme* [The woman; 1854], Dora d'Istria dedicates her most mature works to feminine emancipation issues: *Les femmes en Orient* [Women in the Orient; 1860] and *Des femmes par une femme* [Of women by a woman; 1865]. Michelet had regarded women as inferior citizens, their sole role in society being marriage and motherhood, divorce being a taboo concept, completely rejected by the author, in line with the Christian tradition and biblical precepts. Dora d'Istria counteracts these stark patriarchal views, advocating for women's independence and their right to control their bodies and their intimacy, including their rights to divorce and gender equality. Undoubtedly, the writer speaks from experience: she too was trapped in an unhappy marriage; nevertheless, she fights prejudice in her bold writing. One of the most pervasive objections to divorce was (and still is) that the practice is extremely damaging to children who thus lose the stability of their family. D'Istria is strikingly ahead of her time when replying that a family does not necessarily imply a mother, a father, and the children, a traditional family; moreover, she challenges the concept of traditional family if that is:

> a place of jealousy, disunion, of irreconcilable hatred, of the most terrible passions which torment the human heart? Do you believe that a young woman should be brought up in such a manner, or that a son should find

> himself disputed by the most irreconcilable contraries … not knowing which of the two, his mother or his father, is more despicable? (72–73)[6]

Although her work has been often dismissed as being superfluous,[7] lacking proper scientific input, Dora d'Istria is in many ways a pioneer: she dealt with the entire cultural inheritance of the south-eastern parts of Europe. This *fringe* of Europe, generally regarded as the monolithic "Other" was quasi-unknown to Western culture; as a keen traveller and "an organic intellectual" D'Istria felt it was her duty to map the intimate within the cultural particularities of the Orient via her extensive travelling experiences.[8]

Thus, she translates her experiences in writing her travelogues, ethnological in spirit, highly analytical and imbued with a Christian Orthodox doctrine.[9] The ethnological diversity of the women analysed in d'Istria's two feminist studies – *Les femmes en Orient* and *Des femmes par une femme* – is impressive. She attempts to reorganize the world in accordance with her own view of an intimate geography, a feminine one. Her view is larger-than-life: she gives accounts of Eastern women (Romanians, Dalmatians, Montenegrins, Turks, Albanians, etc.) in the former and western women (Latins – French, Italian, Spanish and Germanics – Germans, Saxons, Austrians, Anglo-Saxons, Dutch, etc.) in the latter. The majority of her travelogues deal with women's emancipation issues, advocating against the widely spread discriminatory and humiliating practices to which women were subjected. For example, when analysing the Ottoman gynoecium (harem), Dora d'Istria states: "sex is reduced to the most dreadful, the most degrading form of slavery" demanding urgent "equitable and liberal laws which could repair,[10] at least partially, the damaging effects caused by violence and despotism."[11] (d'Istria, *La Suisse allemande*, 107).

6 "un loc al gelozii, dezbinarii, urii ireconciliabile, dintre cele mai cumplite patimi care chinuiesc inima omului? Credeți că o tânără femeie ar trebui crescută într-o astfel de manieră sau că un fiu ar trebui să fie disputat de cele mai ireconciliabile contrarii … neștiind care dintre cei doi, mama sau tatăl său, este mai de dispreț?" (The English translation was based on the Romanian version).

7 See Bordaş, "Etnologie şi orientalism romantic" 695–716.

8 According to *Oxford Reference*, an organic intellectual is "an intellectual or someone of professional standing (i.e. a doctor, lawyer, or priest) who rises to that level from within a social class that does not normally produce intellectuals, and remains connected to that class. …. The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci develops this concept in his famous *Prison Notebooks*".

9 For a further account on this ethnological diversity see: Bordaş, 702.

10 "le sexe est réduit à la forme d'esclavage la plus affreuse, la plus dégradante".

11 "des lois équitables et libérales qui pourraient réparer, au moins partiellement, les méfaits causés par la violence et le despotisme".

Dora d'Istria overtly positions herself in the realm of *in-betweenness*. As a traveller and an exile, Dora d'Istria writes extensively about her experiences, about the outer world she discovers; but at the same time, she uses her writing as a source of self-discovery. She will write only in French (even to her own brother), but she is constantly preoccupied with performing a Romanian identity. This brings about the juxtaposition of the writer's cosmopolite view with the longing for her *lieu de mémoire* which is Bucharest. Despite her truly European if not universal spirit, Dora d'Istria has always been nostalgic for her birth place: "derived by faith, starting at an early age, from my beloved Dâmboviţa banks, I have never ceased to belong to my native country whose destiny is the object of my constant musings" (33).[12] However, d'Istria is constantly preoccupied with the broader European political context, with the formation of nation-states, and in particular, the role women had had in this process. As Homi Bhabha puts it, *in-between* space "provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 2). Through her travelogues, Dora d'Istria binds intimacy with the political. Her writing becomes a platform where she speaks of both gender and political emancipation as markers of modernity.

3 A Room of Her Own

Although she herself was not exiled (but her parents were), Anna de Noailles (1876–1933) is part of the Romanian (and by extension, South-Eastern and Christian Orthodox) diaspora in Paris. Born and raised in France, Countess Anna Elisabeth Brâncoveanu, born Bibesco- Bassaraba de Brâncovan, a Romanian-Greek aristocrat, was a celebrated writer (especially as a poetess) and not at all a keen traveller. Upon her father's death, the family travelled to Romania and there on to Constantinople to visit some relatives. This was in fact de Noailles' only encounter with the Orient but it was to be a mark of her later self-fashioning. In 1913 de Noailles finds herself confined in this intimate space due to health problems which immobilized her in bed, contemplating out of the window: "This room and the horizon beyond that window … Nothing prevents me from believing that, under that ardent sky, we're in Constantinople"

12 "Eloignée par le sort, depuis mon enfance, des bords chéris de ma Dambovitza, je n'ai jamais cessé d'appartenir à la terre natale, dont les destinées étaient l'objet des mes constantes méditations."

(Proust 6–7).[13] In contrast to Dora d'Istria who set out to conquer the world, in the case of Anna de Noailles the intimate geography encompasses her boudoir, reverberates from there on and remaps her entire world. Her boudoir becomes a locus, a space of *in-betweenness*, where she performs her social persona.

Proust, a great admirer of de Noailles' work and personality, is soon to be found in her intimate circle of friends visiting her salon and her boudoir. Anna de Noailles evokes her intimacy with Proust by means of correspondence. When in 1931 she published the fifty letters received from him, she insisted on their symbolic importance:

> Without Marcel Proust, without his hymns in the morning, his angelus in the evening, which reached me in envelopes overloaded with surcharges … I would not have written the poems that Marcel Proust's predilection demanded. His dazzling friendship influenced me, changed me, as only a noble love of the verb is capable of.[14]
>
> PROUST 6–7

Attracted by the outstanding persona of Anna de Noailles, Jean Cocteau, too, became one of her greatest admirers and was soon to be raised by her into the European stratosphere. He became her best friend for life. Denied any physical intimacy by the real Anna, he turned into *Anna-male*, her masculine variant: he imitated her mannerisms, her voice and outfits; eventually he started his own "salon" following her model to open his room to his guests.

Based on the writer's autobiographical experiences of love, its intimacies and complexities intended to be read one day by an (archetypal) man, Anna de Noailles become tremendously popular: she published three collections of poems and three novels, all negotiating with an intimate geography. Her prose includes *Les innocentes ou La sagesse des femmes* [The innocents or women's wisdom; 1923], a compilation of short texts in a variety of literary forms – love letters, declarations of love and narratives:

> The secret that I promise you and that betrays women, here it is, my love; please make sure of their passion, their attachment, take your heart away

13 "Cette chambre et l'horizon au-delà de cette fenêtre … Rien ne m'empêche de croire que, sous ce ciel ardent, nous sommes à Constantinopol".

14 "Marcel Proust, sans ses hymnes du matin, ses angélus du soir, qui me parvenaient en des enveloppes surchargées de taxes supplémentaires …je n'eusse pas écrit les poèmes que la prédilection de Marcel Proust réclamait. Son éblouissante amitié m'a influencée, modifiée, comme seul en est capable un noble amour du verbe."

> from them for a moment, torment them, make them jealous, infuse doubt in it, make them suffer, even a little, if only, and these happy and proud foreheads will bend helplessly under the awful yoke of lost confidence, and calm and astonished cries will descend on these beautiful faces, and you will see before you only the lamentable Eve who was humbly born of Adam's generous body.[15] (164–165)

De Noailles' identity construction is problematic. Describing her oriental exoticism, Proust makes use of the topos of the Orient, highly fashionable in the literary tradition at the turn of the twentieth century. However, her identity is much more complex than this performative, hieratic orientalism. French by birth and marriage, she confesses oftentimes her deep sense of belonging to the French culture as she held her (real) Oriental fragmented ethnicity as a sort of taboo in the social milieu of the French aristocracy. In effect, having a Romanian-Greek, Byzantine Orthodox lineage, Anna de Noailles' identity resides in her living *in-between* spaces As Claude Mignot-Oligastri (1986) remarks "For Anna, being French, Greek, or Persian is not contradictory; she seeks ubiquity, in space, and time" (Mignot-Ogliastri 225).[16] Proust describes with fascination her private space he found in the lavish Brâncoveanu household in Paris: "Her shining oriental boudoir …, tempting … like bazaar jewels, [which] preceded a gallery where portraits of ancestors carrying sceptres and crowns were framed in carved oak" (de Noailles, *Le Livre de ma vie* 12).[17] She was the Scheherazade of the French society becoming so utterly famous that everybody who wanted to be somebody in the elitist Parisian society,[18] Romanian or French alike, would come to her "salon" to be endorsed by a woman who had stirred their imagination through her striking new imagery and the suggestiveness of her lyrics. However, as is the case with Dora d'Istria, despite their tremendous contributions to literary and cultural history evaluation still fails to

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15 "Le secret que je te promets et qui trahit les femmes, le voici, mon amour; s'il te plaît de t'assurer de leur passion, de leur attachement, retire-leur un instant ton coeur, tourmente-les, rends-les jalouses, infuse en elle le doute, fais-les souffrir, fût-ce un peu, fût-ce à peine, et ces fronts contents et fiers ploieront sans force sous le joug affreux de la confiance perdue, et des pleurs calmes et stupéfaits descendront sur ces beaux visages, et tu ne verras plus devant toi que l'Eve lamentable qui est née humblement du corps généreux d'Adam."

16 "Pour Anna, être française, grecque ou persane n'est pas contradictoire; elle cherche l'ubiquité, dans l'espace, et le temps."

17 "Son boudoir oriental … brillant, tintant … comme des bijoux de bazar, [qui] précédait une galerie où s'encadraient dans le chêne sculpté des portraits d'aïeux portant sceptres et couronnes."

18 See Stoica.

do them justice. Anna de Noailles, too, awaits her contemporary recognition, both in France and in Romania, her rightful place in the history of literatures and in anthologies.

4 La Nymph Europe

In contrast to her cousin Anna de Noailles, who had tried to conceal her real ethnic identity (Romanian-Greek) by fashioning herself a mythical oriental persona, Princess Martha Bibesco (1886–1973) reportedly once remarked: "Nothing will make me an exile in France!" (Eliade 76).[19] Born in Bucharest of Romanian parents, her family of Byzantine descent moved to Paris in her early childhood where she was brought up in the spirit of Romanian and French nationalism; she became a princess by marriage and soon developed an illustrious career as a prolific writer and genuine intellectual. She was, indeed, a true European spirit, and beyond, a true salonière and an astute politician: all over Europe and the United States, she too had counted Marcel Proust (in 1928 she would write a book on her intimate friendship with the French writer: *Au bal avec Marcel Proust* [Marcel Proust at the Ball]), Paul Claudel, as well as countless artists, scholars, and heads of the Church among her friends. Unhappy in her marriage, she would often return to Romania, but for a long time she resided in Paris. The Second World War found her in her country. Then she wanders from Istanbul to Bucharest, before settling in Paris in 1945, this time as an exile, saving herself from the atrocities of the Bolshevik regime in Romania.

Her project of remapping European history from a different perspective than the classic centre versus periphery rapport had begun in 1923 when she published *Isvor, le pays des saules* [Isvor, Country of Willows], a novel dedicated to her beloved Romania, imbued with the traditions and folklore of her people. Here Bibesco depicts a mythical Romanian culture, constructing a space in which she invests affective meanings and memories. For instance, when describing profoundly traditional, ancient Romanian traditions, she will insert Romanian words in the original text in French (with further translation or explanations), in order to create a dramatic effect for the reader and confess to one's impossibility to translate one's deepest *lieux de mémoire:*

> This is what the traditional cake Romanians eat on the occasion of the most important Christian holiday of the year: Easter. The making of the *Easter cake* [*pâque* in orig., translator's note], a sweet cake made of wheat

19 "Rien ne fera de moi un exilé en France!".

> flour, as far as Outza has described it to me, involves a ceremony full of mystery. These people, as wheat growers, find a million ways to use wheat in their food. For them, the occasion has to be grand: it is either in death or in resurrection! In their noble vocabulary, they will denominate wheat as cinstea mesei, which comes to signify the *Honour of the meal*. And corn is simply called: the nourishment of the home, Hrana casei.[20] (109)

Marta Bibesco's writing contended that Romanian culture was not in any way peripheral. *Isvor* means "source"; it is the symbolic realm of the writer's reflective universe from which the narrator sets out to map the confluence of East and West, the very core of the European idea. In this projection of an intimate geography, Bibesco creates a mythical Romanian culture containing the very amniotic essence of an ancient spirituality, forging the indivisible European unity:

> I am passing through a phase of geological pride. I feel intimately tied with this land, one of the oldest in Europe. At a time when only a small part of Ireland had emerged from the waters, and only a small part of Scandinavia, this land upon which I am treading had already been here. This was already dry land and this dry land served its purpose! Is it not that the pride of noblemen is all about this: to have been served from immemorial times? I am very fond of this roadless country, although I deeply feel the poetry of grand avenues. I am fond of it because its entire spatiality is a wide road, a way of access, a huge way of access for the entire humanity to come into being. I love this land for its longstanding story and for its enduring sufferance.[21]
>
> BIBESCO, *Isvor* XLIV

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20 "Voilà pour ce qui est du gâteau traditionnel que les Roumains mangent à l'occasion de la plus importante fête chrétienne de l'année, Pâques: La confection de la pâque, du gâteau de fariné de blé, tel qu'Outza me le décrit, est une cérémonie pleine de mystère. Ce peuple, cultivateur de blé, trouve enfin l'occasion de manger du blé. Pour lui, il faut que l'occasion soit grande: la mort ou la résurrection! Dans son vocabulaire noble, il nomme ce blé cinstea mesei, ce qui veut dire l'Honneur de la table. Et le maïs est nommé simplement: la nourriture de la maison, Hrana casei".

21 "Je traverse une crise d'orgueil géologique. Je me sens attachée à ce sol, un des plus vieux d'Europe.Lorsqu'il n'y avait encore qu'un tout petit peu d'Irlande, à peine un peu de Scandinavie émergeant de la mer, cette terre où je suis existait déjà. C'était la terre ferme, elle servait! Tout l'orgueil nobiliaire ne se réduit-il pas à ceci: avoir le plus anciennement servi? J'aime ce pays qui n'a pas de routes, moi si sensible à la poésie des grands chemins. C'est parce qu'il est dans toute son étendue une grande route, une voie d'accès, une marche immense par où l'humanité s'en est venue. J'aime cette terre pour sa longue mémoire et pour son usure patiente".

In her later – but unfinished – *La Nymphe Europe* [The nymph Europe; 1960; 1976], Martha Bibesco takes on the same project of connecting Romanian archaism and the archetypal continental culture, in the attempt to create a European *chronotope* in the Proustian manner of recovering elapsed time. At the end of the first volume, imagining the divination offered to her at birth by local Fates, Martha Bibesco translates her autobiographical experiences into an effigy defining the features of a mythical *chronotope*:

> She has a citizenship, the one she chooses; she will not have, she will never have a nationality. All her allegiances will be voluntary, agreed to by her, and respected. She will love with a love that goes beyond the self-esteem of countries, people, things that only love themselves and will hate each other for as long as it takes to come back from the war to peace and vice versa. She will always be amazed, seeing the enemies of yesterday seek each other out, share the same cars and the same honours, whether it is always after and never before.[22] (38)

By presenting the European idea as a Nymph Martha Bibesco employed her gendered perspective laying out an *intimate geography* whereby time, European centres and peripheries are merged to reveal a feminine, bodily, cathartic affective experience.

Unfortunately, to date, despite Martha Bibesco's huge international popularity during her lifetime, Romanian scholars have consistently claimed that very little of this woman writer's literary achievements, or political for that matter, can be acknowledged, either before or after the Communist regime, primarily due to her linguistic inaccessibility.

5 Feminine Transnational Re-mapping of Fringe Spaces

Traditionally, women are the professional manipulators of symbolic objects, they are the main actors in the intellectual debate, they appear as instances of

22 "Elle a une citoyenneté, celle qu'elle a choisie; elle n'aura pas, elle n'aura jamais de nationalité. Toutes ses allégeances seront volontaires, consenties par elle, et respectées. Elle aimera d'un amour qui dépasse l'amour-propre des pays, des gens, des choses qui n'aiment qu'eux-mêmes et s'entre-détesteront tout le temps qu'il faudra pour en revenir de la guerre à la paix et inversement. Elle s'étonnera toujours, voyant les ennemis d'hier se rechercher, partager les mêmes voitures et les mêmes honneurs, que ce soit toujours après et jamais avant."

validation or rejection of cultural products; womanhood is both the bearer of tradition and the one which forces progress through bodies and intimacy. In the travelogues, letters and autobiographies of Dora d'Istria, Anna de Noailles, and Martha Bibesco, French culture (Paris in particular) and Romanian culture fashion a body of love and affects, becoming topoi of an *intimate geography*, metaphors charting the journey of intersubjectivity. These writers offer their own stories of experience in the female body, their own intimate experiences give them both intellectual authority and power over their bodies otherwise inaccessible. As bodies and cities involve seduction, the narratives and destinies of the analysed Romanian-French women gave rise to tales of passion: from Bucharest to Paris, and from Paris to Bucharest, they seized the French and Romanian cultures at their most intimate, internalizing them and transforming them into writing. Moreover, they grouped the Romanian intelligentsia in Bucharest and Paris alike: the road runs both ways and space is transformed and reconfigured in their narratives. Anna de Noailles fashioned herself as Oriental and her intimate private space hints less at a geographical topos or an ethnic lineage, but becomes more of an identity-formation game, a construct, whereby we may identify the performativity of her persona.

At the beginning of this chapter I illustrated the fact that throughout the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries Romanians' fascination with Paris and French cultural models, as well as their effort to transplant French culture to Bucharest, have taken many different forms: it has been a place of nostalgia, a mythical space situated somewhere between fiction and reality; the categories of centre and periphery, on one hand, and private and public, on the other, become a continuum. Intoxicated with the political and cultural fiction, the myth that was the French Revolution, Romanian intellectuals who came to Paris laid the foundation of what was to become the *u-topos* of France (and eventually Paris) in the Romanian cultural imaginary. Moving to Paris, they were adamant to prove to themselves and the world that they, too, could be Europeans through their social and cultural input, becoming symbols of European citizenship *avant la lettre*. Thus, territorial distance and traditional boundaries were made irrelevant and the fluidity of space between Bucharest and Paris attracted waves of exiles in search of a new performative identity.

In the cases of all three women writers discussed, an undercurrent binds intimacy and feminist discourse with a sense of displacement and deterritorialization: from their biographies to their writings, *in-betweenness* prevails in one way or another. Their gaze focuses both on the *centre* (Paris) and the *fringes* of Europe (Bucharest). Two of these women writers are consumed by a profound longing for their Romanian culture: Dora d'Istria and Martha

Bibesco. They are ardent nationalists and advocate feminine and national emancipation from their social positions, under the new paradigm of national identity. They employed narrative sophistication and yet became successful; they were analytical and speculative and yet demonstrative and passionate. They found balance within *in-betweenness*, by mapping their own intimate geography. Dora d'Istria, Anna de Noailles, and Martha Bibesco's cultural accomplishments testify to the fact that Romanians could be integrated into Western European circles, not despite, but *because of*, their exotic ethnicity which endowed them with a unique voice. Their cultural, social, and historical underpinnings shaped their way of thinking in relation to processes of intimacy. Originating from the fringes of Europe, they became truly European in their own right, opening unimagined perspectives to those they came in contact with. Under the auspices of such cross-fertilization, it is not surprising that, according to Luc Fraisse (2005), it was the very intellectual intimacy with Anna de Noailles that triggered Proust's famous theory of involuntary memory!

The contribution of these bilingual women writers points the spotlight at a matrix, an idealized Europe, which both encapsulates and replaces their national territory. Indeed, Dora d'Istria, Anna de Noailles, and Martha Bibesco's work is a testament to French, Romanian, and European literary history. Their (self-)narratives of intimacy become a space where both gender and political emancipation discourses are intertwined, an *in-betweenness* which underlines the subtle transfer of the paradigm of (French) modernity into the Romanian culture, via women, through the "intimate revolt".[23]

Thus, the contours of a politics of intimacy start to appear within the less defined boundaries between the centre and fringes, the personal and the public, between the division of the masculine public space and the feminine private space, where intimacy shapes and is shaped from the domestic to the national and beyond, in a continuum.

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CHAPTER 2

Freedom as a "Promised Land"

Marie Linder's En qvinna af vår tid

Arja Rosenholm, Kati Launis, Viola Parente-Čapková and Natalia Mihailova

Abstract

The chapter discusses the female *Bildungsroman En qvinna af vår tid: karaktersteckning af Stella* [A woman of our time; 1867]. The novel was written by the Russian-Finnish author, countess, and feminist Marie Linder (neé Musin-Pushkin, 1840–1870), and it details the development of the protagonist, Lucy Suffridge. As Linder was a cultural mediator and a carrier of cultural transfer between Russia, Continental Europe and the Nordic countries, space assumes a great importance in her real and imagined life. Since we claim that Linder makes sense of the world by narrating – i.e. mapping it through both real and imagined places – we draw on literary cartography and a semiotic model as a system of spatial dichotomies that mediates non-spatial relations and ideological and moral values. Besides the interplay between the public and private spaces, the gendered cartography involves a personal space of intimacy that appears as a contradictory, even paradoxical phenomenon: it is both empowering and oppressing. The restless mobility characterizing the female *Bildung* destabilizes the geographies of power, even if the dual architecture of the horizontal and vertical plotlines can hardly be called inherently liberatory. Lucy's journey to individual freedom is socially motivated, but it still appears as an abstract concept.

Keywords

transnational – intimacy – gendered space – Marie Linder – literary cartography

We begin with a quotation from Marie Linder's novel, *En qvinna af vår tid* [A woman of our time; 1867]. The protagonist of the novel, Lady Lucy Suffridge, begins to long for a new kind of world:

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> [T]he world, which she had not ever seen, but which she imagined as infinitely large, great, and free. In her fantasy, she created a world in tune with her own strength, and she believed that it really was the way she hoped to discover.[1]
>
> LINDER 124

The quotation informs the framework of our research question of how this novel, which was one of the earliest, if not the first one, representing liberal-feminist ideas in Finland in the mid-nineteenth century understands and uses both literary conventions and spatial categories in modelling a female *Bildungsweg* between private desire and publicly stipulated norms of gendered mobility (Launis, *Kerrotut naiset* 290; Launis, "The Vision of an Equal Nation"). The heroine's desire emphasizes the nexus of space, gender and imagination as constitutive of an intimate geography in both representational and historical terms. The protagonist desires to make sense of the "world" and the individual's place in it. In *Putting Women in Place* (2001), Domosh and Seager trace the modern separation of social spheres into the public vs the private and connect the dichotomy of public as male vs private as female to limitations in women's mobility (115–116). They state that the "unfettered freedom of movement through space" is a precondition for avoiding patriarchal control over women.[2] The 'proper place' of nineteenth-century Finnish aristocratic and middle-class women, who were to be enclosed in homes and marriages, is what the protagonist of Marie Linder's novel explores and desires to challenge.

Simultaneously, the gendered cartography does not only involve an interplay between the public and the private social spheres. The spatial model of Lucy's *Bildung* consists additionally of spaces that are intimate in the sense of personal space, including the level of personal contact and exchange with the public world:[3] the sense of an intimate space of closeness and familiarity is connected to the awareness of a reciprocal relationship between hiding and (self-)disclosure. A personal space as an "intimate space", where "exchange is a central feature of human existence" (Meares and Anderson

1 "[D]en verld, hon aldrig hade sett, men hvilken hon föreställde sig oändligt stor, mäktig och fri. Hon skapade i inbillningen en verld efter sina egna krafter och hon trodde den verkligen vara sådan, som hon önskade att finna den". The quotations have been translated from Swedish into English by Viola Parente-Čapková.

2 For more on the subject of gendered cartography, see Ganser; Massey; Rose.

3 For more on the relations between the intimate, personal, private and the public, global see Pratt, and Rosner (eds)..

595) is characterized by "what happens in the space between us" (D'Erasmo), i.e. by what allows communication and the exchange of physical and emotional confidence and secrecy. Through its disclosure in communication, (the hidden and invisible) intimacy becomes a contradictory phenomenon. Our analysis will trace some of the moments when Lucy becomes aware of the private senses that make – and unmake – her identity and underpin her life's experiences.

According to the opening quotation, Lucy "imagines" and creates "in her fantasy" a world equal to her inner potential. This interplay between real/historical and imagined/inner spaces is connected to hidden affection and its public disclosure. Our main focus is on those spaces where Lucy feels that she has the right and the possibilities to defy any intrusion from the outside world into her individual site. At stake are those spaces and moments which give her both social and emotional freedom and integrity, but which are also "slippery". This is the word that Donovan and Moss (12) use to characterize intimacy, or "messy" and multi-layered, as Ustundag (181) puts it, as an intimate space can be both empowering and liberating but also oppressing and discriminating. Lucy is both an ordinary and an extraordinary representative of her epoch while negotiating conservative and liberal-feminist ideas. Accordingly, her spatial development is also multi-layered and complex. This search for a personal space serves our analysis, which is based on two concepts: intimate geography, marked in both physical and emotional as well as in cognitive terms; and a semiotic model of a specific nineteenth-century epoch designed as a system of spatial dichotomies that mediate non-spatial relations and ideological and moral values in the topos of the text (Lotman 231–232).

Lucy's development 'takes place' – it is spatialized through the chronotope of the road as a site of her complex transition. While discussing the plot's topos, we ask how one should interpret Lucy's *Bildungsweg*, which is mapped by her dual movements between the horizontal level in the social spheres, and the vertical axis, which is associated with Lucy's cognitive mobility within the innermost world of the private senses. What does this moving out and coming back again, shifting between the lofty heavens of ideas and the restricted circumstances of historical reality, tell us of the *Bildung* of an aristocratic woman ambitiously tracing the "road of her own" (Ganser 61)? The question concerns both Lucy and the cultural self-description of the author, Marie Linder, both resisting unequal gendered spatialities while pursuing a personal life in creative agency (see Launis *Kerrotut naiset,* 244).

1 The Author and Her Novel

Marie Linder (1840–1870), née Musin-Pushkin, was a Russian aristocrat by birth. From the beginning of her life, Linder's second home country was Finland. Her mother, Emilie Stjernvall, was Finnish, and her aunt was the well-known Finnish charity patroness Aurora Karamzin, who took care of Marie after both her parents died. Later, she married the Finnish Count Constantin Linder and moved to Finland. According to her biographer, Katri Lehto (1986), she was a figure both admired and disapproved of in Helsinki society. She was disapproved of due to her unconventional behaviour as a well-known nobleman's wife and mother of three children. She was keen on acting, debating, dancing, drinking champagne – and writing.

Linder started to write stories for newspapers in 1866. One year later, she published her only novel, *En qvinna af vår tid*. As was typical of the period, she wrote under a pseudonym, even though her authorship was known, as the reviews indicate. Her pseudonym, Stella, mentioned in the subtitle of the novel, was already familiar to readers of her newspaper stories. The novel was written in Swedish, which was the language of the educated classes in Finland up until the 1870s, when the Finnish language began to rise as a language of literature. Swedish was not so familiar to Linder, but she studied it eagerly. The novel sold well and was translated into Danish in 1868;[4] a Finnish translation came out in 2009.

En qvinna af vår tid narrates the story of Lady Lucy Suffridge, a young English aristocrat. It tells about Lucy's childhood in the gloomy Abbey Hall, an ancient monastery, and her travels to America and France, her love for a Swedish baron, and finally her difficult choice: whether to choose freedom or marriage to the man she loves. The cosmopolitanism of the settings – England, France, and America – as well as the cosmopolitanism of the author herself, distinguishes both the author and her novel from other early female novelists and their works in Finland. The latter works are mainly situated in Finland or Sweden, like Fredrika Wilhelmina Carstens's epistolary novel *Murgrönan* [Ivy; 1840], which was the first novel published in Finland. In the figure of Lucy Suffridge – a name derived from 'suffrage'– Linder desires to construct the ideal new woman. The rebellious, strong-minded, intellectual figure of Lucy is described as a "bluestocking" or "a man in crinoline" by those around her who disapprove of her behaviour (Linder 7).

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4 Information about the (anonymous) Danish translation *En Qvinde af vor Tid* can be found from various sources, e.g. the collections of the National Library of Denmark. We thank Eeva-Liisa Haanpää of the Finnish Literature Society for her assistance.

2 Lucy's *Bildungsweg* – Out and In, Up and Down

The novel provides a spatial pattern that has been confirmed by feminist literary scholars to be part of the "distinctively female *Bildungsroman*" of transnational nineteenth-century women's identity-making stories,[5] which fuse with the mode of *Bildungsreise*.[6] The plot follows the paradigm of Lucy's enclosure and escape from her life in her father's house, with its walls and gloomy halls as the 'Gothic' architecture of her experience. The story shows the inter-relations of space and the construction of a gendered reality; the challenge to change reality and space are integral to each other. Lucy wants to be "free":

> No! A thousand times no! When we have strength, courage, and understanding, we should not sit at home like dolls and sew just to keep our fingers busy. … I want to be free, free like a lion in the jungle![7]
>
> LINDER 17

She wants to go along "a new path", towards "limitless domains":

> I *raised* my proud thoughts towards the *limitless domains* of the world's universe; I believed myself capable of *walking a new path*, on which so many others had failed.[8]
>
> LINDER 197, our emphasis

This will and wish shows how the positioning in space has both a realistic and a symbolic meaning for subject-making. Lucy, as well as the other characters, are identified through the space to which they belong and characterized by the ways they act in that space, what boundaries they cross and how they do so, whether they are mobile or static in their movements, and what values and hierarchies bound to each space are reflected, confirmed, or transformed (Hallet and Neumann 25). At the same time, the spatially structured aesthetic model represented by the literary text mediates an insight into the ways the corresponding culture, referring to late nineteenth century Finnish

5 See Gilbert and Gubar; Rosenholm and Savkina 161–208; Kelly.

6 See Summerfeld.

7 "Nej! tusen gånger nej! när man har kraft, mod och förstånd, skall man ej som en docka sitta hemma och brodera i båge för att sysselsätta sina fingrar. … Jag vill vara fri, fri liksom lejonet i skogen!".

8 "Jag höjde stolt mina tankar emot verldsalltets obegränsade regioner; jag trodde mig kunna inslå en ny väg, på hvilken så mången strandat".

high society, constructs the "world". Since the non-spatial values and meanings inscribed in the spatialities are culture-specific, we get an understanding of Lucy's outer and inner movements in the gendered world (Massey 179). The constant shifting between "the limitless domains" in the world of thoughts and the paralysing 'proper place' reflects an affective struggle waged within social, ethical, and aesthetic ideas and private, intimate experiences.

The variety of intimate affections allows us to take up the space Gillian Rose (1993) has termed "paradoxical", as "the possibility of a space which does not replicate the exclusions of the Same and the Other" (137). This space involves a "sense of space which refuses to be a claim to territoriality and thus allows for radical difference" (150). The "paradox" draws on the view that many women find themselves in several spaces simultaneously; while occupying both the centre and margin, they are given the opportunity to go beyond the Same/ Other dichotomy. Lucy does this, as she is positioned within a clash of several spaces, places, and cultures – private and public, male and female, secular and spiritual – as being both socially privileged (being an aristocrat) and subjected to patriarchal control. As we are going to show later, the restless mobility destabilizes the geographies of power (151) that are inscribed at the plot level in dual structures embracing both spaces (horizontal/vertical) and configurations (villains/benefactors).

As we suggest that literary spaces indicate real spaces and are performed through culturally dominant concepts of space (Neumann 116), cultural subjects are also spatially socialized. The geographical and topographical 'world', also corresponding to Marie Linder's own travels,[9] is mapped along the continents (Europe and "America"), countries (England, "America", France, Finland), cities (Liverpool, Paris), buildings (Abbey Hall), and landscapes. The topo*graphic* constructs are identified as topo*logical* constants that give a system of spatial relations, "the structure of the topos [which] emerges as the language for expressing other, non-spatial relations in the text" (Lotman 231–232). The escape plot is translated in the spatial semantification of abstract terms structured into a dual model of private-public. Two spatial plotlines intersect, namely the horizontal inside-outside and the vertical high-low. Equally fundamental non-spatial concepts with ideological values of social, cultural, and religious life are projected onto them in the form of semantic opposites. The spatial concepts "open-closed", "near-far", "demarcated-not demarcated", and "up-down" construct a gendered model of the "world". They come to mean "valuable-not valuable", "one's own/personal-another's",

9 See the map (Figure 1).

"accessible-inaccessible", "dynamic-static", "oppressing-liberating", "virtuous-indecent/improper", "cold-warm", and "profane-sacred" (see Lotman 218). The events brought about by Lucy and other characters are represented in the form of movements resulting in changes of location (233). An examination of the constraints and opportunities afforded by certain spaces illuminates the ways by which Lucy and Alice (a secondary character, an imprisoned and dying woman) as mirror-figures are invited to certain destinies at the given moment.

Finally, the text itself can be imagined as an intimate spatial dimension. Literature and writing denote an imaginary space parallel to that of the "promised land" of America, onto which Lucy projects her intellectual ideals. It is especially in this space of "fantasy" that the paradoxical implications become productive: Lucy's journey of discovery is parallel to writing and publishing when referring to the real-life situation of Marie Linder. On the one hand, writing and imagination can serve as an intimate shelter for reflecting one's desires. On the other hand, a woman who publishes texts in mid-nineteenth century Finland transgresses from the private sphere to the public sphere of authorship and publishing (Grönstrand 37–107). It follows that both Lucy and the author fall 'out of place', and as 'public women' grow vulnerable as objects of suspicion as enunciated by the Finnish literary authorities.

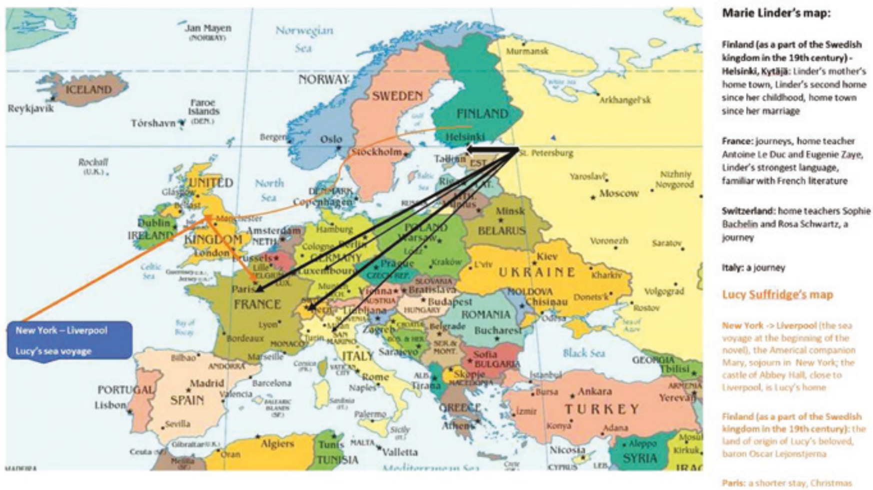

FIGURE 1 The map (made by Natalia Mihailova, Kati Launis and Jasmine Westerlund) of Lucy Suffridge's travels from Great Britain to America and France (on the left) and Marie Linder's travels from Russia to Finland, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy (on the right).
Note: See Katri Lehto, *Kytäjän kreivitär. Marie Linderin elämä* [The Countess of Kytäjä: The Life of Marie Linder]. Otava, 1986.

3 Lucy's Individual *Bildunsgweg*: From Inside towards Out

The setting of the plot, the characters, and the themes are mapped around the dual plot lines in between horizontal and vertical spatialities that organize the principles male vs female, private vs public, and profane outer reality vs the sacred inner world of ideas. The driving motifs – independence and the freedom of an inner world – are acted out in an interplay between a sentimental and realistic plot: Alice, as Lucy's mirror-character, represents the sentimentally vulnerable heroine passing through the paradigmatic stages by being seduced by Edvard, the rake-as-a-false-hero. She becomes a captive, then an invalid, and finally she dies. Contrary to Alice, whose inner and outer immobility is demonstrated by her captivity, Lucy's realistic upswing is motivated through her escape from the fate of her sentimental double: she does not become a seduced victim but undergoes a difficult and painful struggle for her spirit and soul as the true space for the 'new woman'. The struggle denotes her strength in spirit and willpower (63–64; 131–132), which resonates with the decentred love plot on the path to independence. Despite their differences, both Lucy and Alice share the same lexical referents of the soul and heart, which makes them alike; they are vulnerable as motherless daughters in a gendered world, ill-prepared to handle the menacing threats to female virtue. While Alice becomes a victim of a sexual catastrophe, Lucy's reaction to the threat is to rationalize her bodily awareness by moving into the world of abstract spirit and imagination, e.g. by studying the Classics and preferring Virgil to "everyday prose".[10] While Lucy shows strength and self-control, Alice lacks the inner willpower that would show her an alternative beyond the marriage plot. While both are captives and controlled by historical limitations, Lucy acts 'improperly' by moving out of the 'proper place' offered to her by the sentimental plot. Alice remains its captive, and her "broken body was no more able to follow her broken volition" (Linder 242).[11]

Linder's strategy of setting scenes produces various views on intimacy (cf. Donovan and Moss, 3). The opening scene already pre-empts the outcome in the ending: both scenes emphasize Lucy's strong spiritual orientation. On the very first page, we meet Lucy on board a ship sailing from America to Liverpool. The voyage resonates with Lucy's mobile character, and the metaphor of life as an "open sea" symbolizes her extraordinary but solitary state. Lucy is exceptional not only in the eyes of men; on behalf of the patriarchal

10 For the discussion of the intertextual features of the novel, see Kati Launis, *Kerrotut naiset* 311.

11 "hvars brutna kropp ej mera kunde lyda den brutna viljan".

order, women also disapprove of her independent travel without a male companion. Simultaneously, however, she is also admired for her capability of acting so "calmly" while comforting timorous passengers "like a true missionary" (Linder 5).[12]

This ambiguity in Lucy's character, which manifests in her self-control, will-power, and passion for independence, is equal to her mobility in crossing worlds. What she knows is the "cold reality" (Linder 196),[13] the enclosed "circle of everyday prose" (Linder 126),[14] where women "limit their talents for domestic happiness" (ibid.)[15] The world of confinement is set in the haunted and gloomy Abbey Hall, a house plagued by an ancestral curse, suspense, and mystery. The "home" involves many of the possible clichés of the Gothic setting, dominated as it is by awe and isolation and saturated with family secrets and faked identities.[16] This world is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown and ghost-like father who is tormented by the past and a guilty secret. The stories of the lord and his dead wives are examples of the so-called Bluebeard Gothic (see Pyrhönen 311), referring to the narrative cycle based on the French folktale. Linder's novel shows obvious traces of this cycle, as well as an explicit reference to the lord as the "Knight of the Blue Beard" (Linder 69). Tormenting past, the feeling of the uncanny as well as the gloomy space evoke what we may call the chronotope of the haunted house, inspired by that of the Gothic castle.[17]

Lucy's father dominates the space in the house, and only very few places give Lucy the feeling of personal intimacy; alongside the library (63–64), the "green room" which belonged to her dead mother (31) becomes a refuge where Lucy can withdraw for hours on end (53–54). "Home" is far from being a private place but rather a nexus where public discourses and social relations flow together and shape the woman's place according to the Law of the Father and arranged marriages.

Lucy's resistance is marked by her moving out and challenging limitations in terms of both identity and space. Gendered spaces are contested by relocating female privacy outside. Lucy dares to go out, first into the garden nearby, then by wild riding in the forest, and finally by voyaging overseas. The world

12 "som en hel missionär".

13 "den kalla verkligheten".

14 "den hvardagliga prosans sfer".

15 "inskränka användandet af sina gåfvor till den husliga trefnaden".

16 On the Gothic elements in Linder's novel, see Kati Launis, "From Italy to the Finnish Woods" 169 –186.

17 On the chronotope of the haunted house, see Ashleigh Prosser 1–19.

opens up, and the privacy and intimacy which Lucy desires is relocated outdoors. Inside, she favours the border zones that are semi-public, such as the transnational salons (in Paris) popular in nineteenth-century high society, but her favourite places she finds outdoors. Here, in the natural environments of the garden and the forest, Lucy also meets the male rivals, the false (English) Edvard, and Oskar, a Swedish man whose mother is from Finland, who becomes her male-equal soul companion. Both encounters denote the ambiguity of intimacy consisting of the text's awareness of sexually charged desire. This is encoded in both scenes by water imagery (wells and springs) symbolizing, with a fluid and ever-changing quality, the power of hidden desire projected onto and flowing through water (see e.g. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*; Jung, "Über die Archetypen").

The same intimate desire for change, encoded as an embodied mobility, is inscribed in Lucy's unmonitored horseback tour. The riding scene is an overwhelming bodily release of Lucy's emotional tension and points to a deep interpersonal affection:

> She was incredibly excited, her small hands were clutching the horse whip spasmodically; she was holding her head high and panting heavily. "Fancy, Fancy!" she exclaimed suddenly; "run, as far as you can! Take me away, – freedom, that is what I need. ... I want to be free!"[18]
>
> LINDER 137

The riding scene is likened to a catharsis of the body and soul brought together in the passion to become "free" and the bodily excitement associated with a sense of sexual intimacy. The riding scene and the horse are far from being unusual in nineteenth-century fiction, where horses serve as a generic symbol of sexuality and passion, especially in anglophone and Russian literatures. It is easy to adapt Dorré's (2006), argument that "[h]orses often signify beyond their literal function", and very often that signification is sexual (19). Riding in an unlimited 'openness', where Lucy is beyond any outer control, her growing awareness of herself and her private needs are allowed to become public; they are projected onto her horse, Fancy, who was "her friend, her companion during all her trips" (134).[19] Lucy's horse is her equal 'partner' and represents

18 "Hon var särdeles upprörd, hennes små händer omfattade krampaktigt ridspöet; hon bar hufvudet högt och andades tungt".
– Fancy, Fancy! utbrast hon med ens; spring, så långt du kan! För mig bort, – frihet, det är hvad jag behöfver. ...jag vill vara fri!".

19 "hennes vän, hennes följeslagare pä alla hennes utflygter".

Lucy's feelings and her internal world. The focal point of narration shifts over to Fancy, who mirrors aspects of Lucy's desire, and represents the internal feminine:

> The mane flutters; a quiver races through all its muscles and now it is gliding through the space, it does not want to touch the ground, it seems it has grown wings; not only does it understand the wishes of its mistress, *it shares them*. It does not want to know anything about other people, it just wants to carry this person away, away![20]
>
> LINDER 135–136, our emphasis

The horse enters Lucy's life after the story begins and appears synonymously with her awakening. According to Graysmith the horse "reflects a woman's social status, especially in regard to her level of repression or independence" (1–2). The horse also serves as "embodiment of an important change in her life, either social or psychological". Lucy finds herself in a transitional moment, and, as Graysmith has claimed, it is this partnership of the horse and woman that "indicates a transition for her into a state of greater independence, power, or maturity, and usually includes a sexual awakening" (59). Lucy's and Fancy's excited "flying over the earthen ground" anticipates the change brought in by Oskar and indicates a new kind of intimacy in Lucy's life – the introduction of the love plot. The intimate partnership with the horse serves as a symbol of Lucy's growing sexual awareness. That the intimacy is confusing, "lustful and intoxicating", is obvious from the identical rhetoric applied to both the horse and Oskar: both are objects of Lucy's affection. However, intimacy as an embodied experience is diminished by the idealization implied by their characterization as "noble" (Linder 134, 188),[21] which raises the intimacy into sublime spheres. Lucy's galloping "away, away" is a notion of transgression. Simultaneously, the flight "above the ground" denotes the unpredictable and unruly routes of escape. No stable identity is achieved, but instead there is a momentary, unstable unsettling of fixed hierarchical spatial and emotional structures.

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20 "Mahnen skiljer sig ifrån halsen; en darning genomilar alla dess muskler och nu genomfar han rymden, han vill ej vidröra marken, han synes ha vingar; han har icke blott förstått sin ryttarinnas önskan; han delar den. Han vill ej veta af andra menniskor, blot ten vill han fora bort, bort!".

21 "ädla", "ädel".

4 The Drive Upwards to the Other Spheres

The narrator sees a connection between Lucy's riding skills and "the work of a poet": "horse riding is similar to the creative work of a poet. The excited thoughts calm down, wild emotions become even and smooth in the intoxicating speed" (Linder 134).[22]

The comparison indicates intimate affections reserved for personal freedom in both riding and creative agency. Both activities are also spatially marked along the positive/negative axis of upwards and downwards. The narrator emphasizes that for Lucy, it is impossible "not to aim high" (204).[23] The spatial subsets of high/upwards vs below/downwards resonate with the non-spatial values of freedom, creativity, and harmony. Just as Lucy feels being free while riding "away" and "flying" above the ground, in a similar way she seeks to move upwards, to the "other spheres" in order to escape from the material world of women's duties (125).[24] The vertical plot-line – up/inner world vs down/outer reality – denotes the stages towards the world of intimate self-reflection above the controlled social reality. The upper worlds are marked by the innermost desire reserved for intimate activities of the heart and soul:

> In her thoughts, she began to empathize with *other spheres*, other circumstances. She was *walking back and forth* in her room; her *soul grew wings*, it seemed that her thoughts invaded the space; there, in the *unknown remoteness*, there lived other people, there was something great to be achieved. In her *imagination*, the air was full of political, scientific, literary, and great ideas; they were *crisscrossing*, they were fighting, they were embracing each other.[25]
>
> LINDER 125 our emphasis

All of these different "spheres" in Lucy's life turn out to be paradoxical in their simultaneous "crisscrossing", "fighting", and "embracing" of each other. The

22 "en sådan ridt likna skaldens dikt. Upprörda tankar lugnas, vilda känslor gifva sig luft i den berusande farten".

23 "för att ej syfta högt".

24 "andra sferer".

25 "började hon i tankarne lefva sig in uti andra sferer, andra förhållanden. Hon gick hela timmar af och an i rummet; hennes själ fick vingar, hennes tanke liksom genomträngde rymden; der, i det okända fjerran, lefde andra menniskor, der fans någonting stort att uträtta. I hennes inbillning var hela luften uppfylld af politiska, vetenskapliga, af litterära och stora ideer, de korsade hvarandra, de stridde med hvarann, de omfamnade hvarann".

discrepancy characterizes Lucy's "free nature" while struggling between self-restraint and "those feelings fighting inside her" (Linder 128):[26]

> There are people whose souls are without wings; there are other unlucky ones, who, because of their education and unfavourable circumstances, have had their wings cut; let them feel happy in the sphere of everyday prose, let them speak of a woman's duty to use her skills for the good of domestic happiness.[27]
>
> LINDER 126

Lucy becomes aware both of "individual liberty" (174),[28] represented by the new world of America which should guarantee women equal rights, education, and useful activities, and of "individual freedom" as an intimate world of hidden desires. The horizontal/physical movement of social liberty is complemented by the direction upwards into an imaginary space inhabited by creativity, aesthetic beauty, and philosophical and spiritual ideas. The vertical orientation, however, alienates Lucy, making her 'out of place' in terms of moral virtues or rather vices, embodied by her 'boundless' imagination contesting the physical borders and the restrictive reality. Specific power is given to two realms, the worlds of creativity and religion, both lived in the imagination and experienced as an intimate expression.

Religion and spirituality play an important role in Lucy's *Bildung*, as is typical of the genre of *Bildungsroman* in general. The 'flight' from material reality into a spiritual world was a permitted channel for women's projections of resistance. In this sense, Lucy's spiritual world is both a moral shelter and an extended space of her intimate desire for mental agency. Lucy is termed as a "true missionary" while declaring her faith in equality between men and women, according to true Christian virtues, morally, socially, and spiritually. Her relationship with God shares the intimate complexity of a love-relationship; Lucy trusts her most private feelings to God while expecting God to know her better than anyone. She trusts God, and she seeks acceptance for her deviancy from Him. The relationship is based on her innocent idealism. The declared innocence in the form of Lucy's "free nature" involves reciprocal

26 "fria natur", "de känslor som stredo inom henne".

27 "De finnes menniskor, hvilkas själar sakna vingar; det finnes andra olyckliga, hvilka genom uppfostran och ogynnsamma forhållanden fåt sina vingar afklippta, må de trifvas inom den hvardagliga prosans sfer, må de tala om qvinnans pligt att inskränka användandet af sina gåfvor till den husliga trefnaden".

28 "individuella friheten".

sharing with and coming to know about the private, innermost aspects closely connected to Christian authority and the ultimate confidant. Lucy's private faith in her God is a source of power that reflects her cognitive and emotional process on the way to cohesion and finding freedom that is not to be imagined without spiritual ideals.

"Soul" and "heart" are referred to as the spaces of imagination. Lucy "imagines" herself in a world which she has never seen but which she "creates in her fantasy" (Linder, 124).[29] By the power of imagination, she can see alternatives to gendered inequality, and, as the empathetic narrator states, from time to time she is happy being able to live "outside cold reality" (183) with the help of "fantasy" and "illusions" (182–183).[30] However, the "products of her fantasy" are empowering but also deceptive, causing a fragmentation of Lucy's self-image; she sees herself acting in "her imaginary world", but, as it happens, "the vision disappeared and – she was a woman again" (175).[31] The imagination correlates with creative ability, which is implicit in Lucy's search for beauty and harmony in the fine arts, but she also states that the imagination is dangerous: "I believe that the worst danger lurks in imagination" (142). The imaginary world is a refuge but also a dangerous place, since the boundless desire of imagination may flow into the spheres of intimacy with prohibited ideals, ideas, and objects of love that thus pollute the purity of the soul. Lucy's father asks her, "Do you believe that there is happiness on earth?" (130),[32] which makes the fragmentation obvious: the distance between her real possibilities for agency and the dreamworld that she nurses in her imaginary world is far too big to catch up, and the inner freedom as a private alternative is an illusion, albeit intermittently empowering.

5 Back and Down to Abbey Hall – the End of Lucy's *Bildungsroman*?

After spending time in America and Paris, Lucy returns home to Abbey Hall, a confined space – a "gloomy prison" (Linder 225)[33] – surrounded by "walls that imprison both her body and all her "mental capacities" (210).[34] Her return on the horizontal axis correlates with her vertical 'fall' from the lofty spheres

29 "skapade i inbillningen".
30 "ofvanom den kalla verkligheten", "inbillningen", "illusioner".
31 "i ett nu var hägringen borta och – hon var åter en qvinna".
32 "Tror du då att lyckan finnes på jorden?".
33 "dystra fängelse".
34 "de murar, som ej blott höllo min person fängslad, utan äfven alla mina själsförmögenheter".

of the ideal worlds down to the "dark chasm" of reality (232).[35] The return to her father's house is described as an immersion within the spatial tropes of confinement. There is a sense of claustrophobia where, according to Adrienne Rich (1972), a woman is not only placed into a "prison", but as Lucy predicts her "slow death" (Linder 210),[36] she herself becomes mortal, with her body turning into a "marble statue at a grave" (234).[37] The tropes mediate the painful struggle between the "will and heart" representing the fear that anticipates immobility and a life locked away from the dynamic world which Lucy has got to know during her travels (218).[38]

The return evokes the question about the possibilities of Lucy's self-formation and the success of a female *Bildungsroman*.[39] On her way out into the "world", she has managed to transcend the gendered private vs public dichotomy, but in the last stages, Lucy is brought back to her father's house, which indicates that the conventional 'proper place' is to be restored. Unlike the *Bildungsroman*'s male counterpart, who leaves the family home in search of an independent life, Lucy is expected to act according to what is socially acceptable for an unmarried daughter in a nineteenth-century formation plot: she must marry a man to whom she cannot feel anything but loathing.

Lucy's inner maturation is a major part of her *Bildung*. Intimacy as a private sphere matter is emphasized, since her *Bildung* differs from the male formation process where the "male hero learns by reason and by basing decisions on previous knowledge" (Brändström 16). The female protagonist grows by learning from life itself, and as Labovitz maintains, her *Bildung* "would function from her life experience rather than from *a priori* lessons to be learned" (246). Unlike Oskar, who has studied and is engaged in the academic study of individual freedom, Lucy must concentrate on her internal world.

In this process of coming to terms with social expectations, Lucy "becomes", in the Beauvoirean sense, a woman,[40] provided that she internalizes a "woman's duty". By giving space for the debate on duty, the novel discusses contemporary arguments in the construction of gendered incongruence. Although Oskar admits that a duty may "limit our free agency" (Linder, 207–208),[41] it is justified by "natural laws" (208),[42] implying a moral assessment. Thereby, if

35 "mörk afgrund".
36 "långsam död".
37 "marmorstod på en graf".
38 "[s]trider emellan hjertat och viljan".
39 For the discussion of self-formation and *Bildungsroman,* see Labovitz; Fraiman .
40 See e.g. Butler 35–49.
41 "staller sig som en gräns för vår handlingsfrihet".
42 "[n]aturens lagar".

Lucy's "becoming" is equated to "nature", her *Bildung* is predetermined against cultural alterations. The unavoidable ending of Lucy's plot would thus mean that she makes a sacrifice for her father's honour and accepts a marriage without love. The struggle of compassion, obedience, and submission confirms the "slippery" nature of an intimate space, as is made obvious by the close relationship between the father and daughter. Lucy's self-formation remains a dilemma: she is saved from an unhappy marriage by the interference of Edvard's mother, Lady Starling, but by her obedience in being prepared to sacrifice herself, Lucy also redeems her female honour. Lucy is rescued from an unhappy fate, although the narrative does not, and cannot, give any clear-cut alternatives for a "woman of her time". While struggling between independence and her love for Oskar, she vacillates between narrowing and developing herself.

Lucy's "becoming" a woman, which takes 'place' between two different worlds, the real and the imaginary, reaches its critical point in the open dénouement. The open ending calls back the dual value system corresponding to the horizontal and vertical plotlines and the double configuration: Lucy has her counterpart in the heroine of the sentimental plot, Alice, while the male characters Edvard and Oskar are also conceivable as mirror figures. This continuum of inter-relations with blurred binarities shows originality, but what makes the historical difference is the emphasis on the presence of women in Lucy's narrative. Mary as Lucy's travel companion is a devoted friend, Mrs Johns as the old house servant at Abbey Hall is her substitute mother, and Mrs Anna Rush, Mrs Johns, and Lady Jane Starling, Edvard's mother, act as female benefactors to both Lucy and Alice. Furthermore, the seemingly different heroines, Lucy and Alice, are connected by the strong female chain so crucial to the novel, suggesting the importance of intimacy among women in a broad sense of the word; as in many other nineteenth-century novels by women, an element of *Bildung* may be found precisely here (Downward 128).

The mirror images as well as the hybridity of crisscrossing spatialities resonate with the open ending of Lucy's journey. The openness can be interpreted as a permanent state of negotiation between the sentimental-romantic and realistic conventions. Although Lucy's navigations of space and her shifting between private and public, far and close, destabilize the opposition of a binary model of a safe home vs the public as potentially threatening, her journey to "freedom" faces an uphill battle to end in harmony. Since Lucy hesitates, the last word is taken by Oskar, speaking on her behalf: "United, inspiring each other, on the golden wings of freedom, let's strive to achieve the high goal: *The*

Truth of Life!" (Linder 269).[43] The upward movement to abstract freedom consists of the cognitive qualities of the imagination, which aids the process of self-discovery, but it also emphasizes the escape from the material world. The dissonance of "heart" and "mind" should be solved by turning to the higher assistance of the abstract Truth. It suggests that no emancipation in the present circumstances, or in the temporal world, is possible. If liberty as a human right equal for men and women cannot be achieved in the public world, individual freedom can be aimed for in the inner world of imagination and the spiritual intimacy of Truth.

6 Conclusions

The way Lucy's narrative is told and the way in which the narrator approaches Lucy's individual space has an effect on how character-reader intimacy is conveyed. The narrator adopts the omniscient viewpoint of someone who knows everything about Lucy's story. This intrusive narrator conveys subjective comments on Lucy's outer and inner development by revealing a lot about Lucy's character – things that only she would know, the inner struggles and embodied feelings. We come close to Lucy when the omniscient voice reveals things about Lucy that she would not reveal or admit to herself, such as the awakening of her intimate feelings for Oskar or her psychological difficulty in opposing her father. Simultaneously, we also learn a lot about the narrator's own position. The voice, which occasionally identifies itself as "we" (e.g. Linder 182), reveals its gendered empathy with Lucy in commenting on her development. The narrator remains her devoted confidant, since the narrator knows even more, as if having already experienced herself what will happen to Lucy: "What I have said now, Lucy did not yet know. She had only an inkling of it: the experience was going to crush her illusions" (182).[44] The narrator knows that Lucy is taking the "first steps", that her drive for freedom cannot be fully realized because of the limiting circumstances. Closeness and familiarity implicate the narrator's emotional affinity and increase the character-reader intimacy as part of the implied voice hovering over the narrative. The intense connection to music and art, the presence of classic literature, and the debates in the contemporary society construct the world of the implied author whose preferences coincide

43 "Förenade, lifvande hvarandras mod, skola vi söka att på frihetens gyllene vingar uppnå det höga målet: *Lifvets Sanning*!"

44 "Det jag nu sagt hade Lucy ännu ej kommit till insigt af, hon hade blott en aning derom; erfarenheten skulle komma att gifva hennes illusioner hårda slag".

with many of Marie Linder's own positions and known facts from the author's own experiences.

This parallelism of voices and positions becomes strongly visible in the space of religion. What makes Lucy's formation complex, even 'paradoxical', is her mobility in several spaces simultaneously. On the one hand, Lucy represents the 'margin' as a new kind of woman while advocating the liberal and proto-feminist ideas of "liberty and independence"[45] (Linder 64) becoming increasingly popular in Europe and Russia at the time (Launis *Kerrotut naiset*; Rosenholm). On the other hand, Lucy's formation is strongly affected by her religious and spiritual commitment, which points to a more conventional female "becoming". However, Lucy shows her 'restless' mobility also in her religiosity. The space between Lucy and her God is intimate, since it is highly private and individual. Rather than being imagined as a (father) figure with a "long beard" (Linder 53),[46] as the narrator disapprovingly comments on how God is depicted, Lucy's – and the narrator's – God is generous towards Lucy's radical deviance. Her God is "merciful" and "fair-minded" (54).[47] While the religious discourse becomes a major cultural reference for nineteenth-century women's moral virtues, its central role in the novel may also resonate with the author's own struggle for religious freedom and Lutheran sympathies (Lehto, 172–173).[48] The criticized role of the pope as "the shameful stain of Christendom" may point to the traffic in indulgences within the Roman Catholic Church and the dogma of papal infallibility (Linder 54).[49] Religion is a 'paradoxical' space where Lucy is bound to follow tradition, but at the same time it allows her an intimate dialogue about her deviancy and nurtures her innocent idealism. The Lutheran ideals of labour and usefulness, as well as a private, unmediated relationship with God, coincide with the liberalist ideals of individual freedom.[50] Hence, *A Woman of Our Time* manages to extend the discourse on female privacy to issues conceived of as public, official, and far from intimate.

45 "frihet och självständighet".

46 "stort skägg".

47 "Guds nåd och rättvisa".

48 As originally of Russian citizenship and belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church, Marie Linder wished to leave the Russian congregation for the Protestant Church as the faith of her Finnish husband and their children. She turned with this wish to the tsar, Alexander II, when he visited the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1863.

49 "skamfläck för kristenheten".

50 A woman's private relationship with God is central also in the adultery novel *Den Fallna, berättelse af Wendela* [The Fallen One, A Story by Wendela, 1848]. The novel, defending Pietism and written and published in Finland by a female writer, Wendla Randelin (1823–1906), was published two decades before Linder's novel.

The spatial multi-mobility corresponding to the non-spatial ideas of freedom as an individual right makes the narrative independent and radical in Finland's nineteenth-century literature written in Swedish (Launis, *Kerrotut naiset* 295). We also suggest that the transnational marginality of the author offers her a "paradoxical" space to cross over both national and cultural borders, especially in the way the author avoids subordinating the gender question to national premises. The protagonist is a cosmopolitan, claiming individual freedom as a citizen of the world.

Mobility as a means of resistance challenges the dichotomous relations between the men's world vs the woman's place. The crisscrossing mobility can, in the imagination, go beyond the limits of reality – Lucy in riding and the author in creating a poetic work. The way Lucy moves in the dual architecture of the horizontal and vertical plotlines can hardly be called inherently liberating, but, nevertheless, it makes the world unstable and has contesting power.[51] Lucy's journey to individual freedom in "borderless domains" is socially motivated, but it appears still as an abstract concept. She knows she does *not* want to be like the women who "sit at home like dolls and sew just to keep [their] fingers busy". However, she is unsure of where to go; this is as vague as the goal of her journey to America as the "promised land", which lacks any experiential and tangible depiction. The dilemma is confirmed by Lucy's self-reflection, her belief in being destined to be "a restless soul which wants to fly higher than its wings can bear" (Linder 212).[52]

This chapter was written as part of the research project *Texts on the Move: Reception of Women's Writing in Finland and in Russia 1840–2020*, funded by Emil Aaltonen Foundation.

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51 For more on geographical imagination and its intersections with power see Rose 160; Tally 134–135.

52 "en orolig själ, som vill flyga högre än vingarne bära!".

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CHAPTER 3

Stifling Intimacies

Middle-Class Marriage in the Short Stories of Four Central European Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Katja Mihurko Poniž

Abstract

The chapter investigates how four Central-European women writers (Zofka Kveder, Grete Meisel-Hess, Adela Milčinović and Růžena Svobodová) through formal features (the narrator, the focalisor, the depiction of spaces, devices of poetical language, combining aestheticism and social critique, symbolism and realism) display the middle-class marriage as a social institution that can be suffocating for women, especially if they are not able or not willing to perform the role of the mother. The article also shows that selected Central-European women writers were all rooted in the Catholic ideology and consequently problematize the role of a woman within it. The selected short stories have many common traits, so the interpretation of the writings of Central-European women writers of the *fin de siècle* proves to be more productive when applying a transnational perspective in the research.

Keywords

Zofka Kveder – Růžena Svobodová – Adela Milčinović – Grete Meisel-Hess – marriage of convenience – *fin de siècle* aestheticism – feminist geography

The concept of intimacy has always been associated with the concept of virtue. In the nineteenth century, with the rise of the women's emancipation movements, this topic became one of the most frequent in the discourse about the role of women in society. Feminists, especially women writers, questioned and contested the concept of romantic love and expressed delusions about the possibilities of its realization. They showed that love relationships were often sites of tyranny (Langford). The double moral standards clearly set limits for women of all social classes, but there had been differences among them (Hobsbawm 200). While peasant and working-class women enjoyed almost no

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leisure time, women from the aristocratic and middle-class circles, especially if they were not mothers, had quite some time at their disposal for various activities of their own. Moreover, they had access to education, books and periodicals that promoted women's emancipation, and many of them sought ways to accomplish themselves on different levels (Hobsbawm 200–207). On the other hand, they were faced with the "celebration of the 'true' bourgeois woman as a mother and an insistent denial of nonreproductive female sexuality" (Walkowitz 370). In the long nineteenth century, the bourgeois ideology separated the public and the private life into two spheres: "The theory of the two 'spheres', as interpreted by Ruskin in *Of Queen's Gardens* (1864), was a way of conceptualizing the sexual division of the world and rationally organizing, in a harmonious complementarity of roles, tasks and spaces reconciling 'natural' vocation with social utility" (Perrot 449).

The male citizen was perceived as a successful member of society if he performed his role in the public sphere but also as a father and a husband. Consequently, his position and reputation were directly related to the extent to which his wife fulfilled her social role: "with her body, with her beauty and elegance, and last but not least with her ability to converse, she did not represent herself above all, but the professional success of her husband" (Sieder 135). Moreover, "the domestic woman executes her role in the household by regulating her own desire. On her 'feeling and principle' depends the economic behaviour that alone ensures prosperity" (Armstrong, 81). Middle-class marriage is thus both a space of the intimate and a space of the public, whereby the intimate world of a man could also be realized outside the marital relationship, since the society had double moral standards as far as male sexuality was concerned: "[F]or men the tensions between romantic love and *amour passion* were dealt with by separating the comfort of the domestic environment from the sexuality of the mistress or whore" (Giddens, 43). While for a man a middle-class marriage was only one of the institutions within which he realized himself as an active subject, for a woman, it is the space where she was expected to experience confirmation and satisfaction as a sexual and a social being (with regard to the public space, middle-class women were often very active in the charity field). An unmarried woman, however, would occupy only the margins of society (Sieder 133).

For a woman, intimacy was a space where tensions and personal distresses took place, where traumas could gradually be formed. In the canonical works of literature in the second half of the nineteenth century (*Madame Bovary*, *Effi Briest*, *Anna Karenina*), adultery as an escape from an unhappy marriage became one of the most common motifs. Hence, a novel of female adultery "is a project peculiar to male writers" (Overton 97). While the novel of adultery

primarily hinges on the wife's betrayal of wedlock and displays a specific set of attitudes towards such conduct and women in general (Overton 96), women writers at the turn of the twentieth century focus on the female consciousness, emotions, and eroticism, explore female sexuality and criticize women's conventional position in marriage (Forsås-Scott 4–5).

This period also records an incomparably greater entry of female authors into the cultural field than previous centuries. Women writers established networks that are particularly interesting in the Habsburg monarchy (Jensterle Doležal 271), a multiethnic and multilingual state that had a common horizon of moral values and a family law that defined the position of women (Zimmermann 42). Within the Habsburg monarchy, the authors wrote in their national languages (many of them were at least bicultural), but at the same time they also closely monitored the activities of their contemporaries. Many magazines, e.g. Viennese *Dokumente der Frauen* [Women's documents] published translations from Slavic languages. Consequently, rich transnational exchanges took place between the authors, as will be highlighted in this chapter which investigates four short stories written by four writers (Růžena Svobodová (1868–1920), Zofka Kveder (1878–1926), Adela Milčinović (1878–1968), and Grete Meisel-Hess (1879–1922)) from the turn of the twentieth century. In the present chapter, I also aim to show that all four authors used spatial metaphors to render the contrast between the protagonist's inner, intimate life and the double sexual morals of the middle-class they belonged to. Moreover, I will illustrate how the aestheticism of all four stories is intertwined with harsh social criticism of the middle-class restrictions imposed on women. By combining *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism (especially the rhetoric of space) with social criticism and realism, Central European writers joined their English contemporaries whose short fiction "bears traces of both concerns: the dedication to art and literature as well as more political and ethical concerns about society and women's roles in it" (D'hoker 305).

Another aim of the present chapter is to reveal how transnational contacts between women impacted their literary writing in the sense that their works display common traits because the writers read each other's work and further discussed it in personal encounters or in letters. To start with, Zofka Kveder was acquainted with Milčinović and Svobodová: she wrote about their work and appreciated them; she was a frequent guest in Svobodová's literary salon (Jensterle Doležal 273) and when in Croatia, she paid visits to Milčinović and her husband before they migrated to Germany (Mihurko Poniž, "Stičišča v literarnih" 57–58).

It can be assumed that Kveder read writings by Meisel-Hess, but there is no evidence that she had known her personally. However, she discussed

Meisel-Hess's novel *Die Stimme* [Voice, 1907] with Martha Tausk, her lifelong friend (the wife of Meisel-Hess's lover at the time, Victor Tausk, the latter also being Kveder's friend). Meisel-Hess's novel was autobiographical, her sexual relationship with Viktor Tausk was an important part of the novel, which was a kind of *roman à clef*. Martha was depicted in the character of the betrayed wife, as well as some other friends of Tausk's (Dorfer 30–33). Interestingly, Kveder found this infamous.[1]

Even though these four authors wrote in different languages (German, Croatian, Czech, and Slovenian), they belong to a common political and cultural space which during that time could be referred to as Central Europe. Under the term Central Europe, I understand a cultural concept that is based on a common historical, social, and cultural identity, and within which the area of Central European literature, as noted by the Slovenian literary historian Janko Kos (1991), covers neither the geographical area of Central Europe nor the political concept of Central Europe, as shaped by political changes from the First World War onwards. From the point of view of literary history, a relation to Western European, Nordic, and Eastern European literature is relevant. The Central European literary space lacks the mutual, internal, and, at the same time, lasting cohesiveness that was essential for Western European literatures. Kos explains that what unites them into a regional unit is primarily their typological similarity. Typological structural similarities stem mainly from the similarity of non-literary bases, i.e., a similar geopolitical situation, socio-political situation, national development, related languages and ethnic origins, social structures, and, of course, from the same religious, moral, and cultural traditions. For Austria was a centre around which Central European territories, including part of Poland, were united into a larger unit of state law. In this centre, Latinism inhibited the development of vernacular languages and their national literatures as there was a complete dominance of Roman Catholicism from the seventeenth century onwards, as well as a strong national revival and emancipation of national literatures. Most of the Central European literatures were not fully developed and completed until the nineteenth century. The novel was formed in almost all Central European literatures late in the eighteenth century or even later – in the nineteenth century, moreover, short prose started to flourish only in the middle of the nineteenth century or later (Kos 48–50). Another Slovenian literary historian, France Bernik, states that the "general orientation of Slovene literature in the second half of the nineteenth

1 Kveder in the letter to Martha Tausk, National and University Library in Ljubljana, Ms 1113, 31 March 1907.

century was basically Central European – i.e., with a predominantly Austrian and German component" (Bernik 161).

In all four literary systems women writers entered the public space as a group quite late: in all three Slavic literatures (Hawkesworth) but also in the Austrian literary space this happened no earlier than in the second half of the nineteenth century. The timeline between 1890 and 1910 (in Slovenian literature up to 1918) covers the period of modernism (in German: *Moderne*, in Slovenian, Croatian and Czech: *Moderna*). The common features in terms of the content and form of literature in this period are "the fragmentation of the self, the ambiguity of the subject as a point of reference, and the disconnectedness and randomness of individual thoughts and experiences" (Thorson 19). However, as A. Schwartz and H. Thorson put it, "literary modernism should be viewed more in terms of a 'geography of mobility and interculturality' (Friedman 428) rather than as a unified movement or even as a set of literary movements based solely on formal experimental attributes" (Schwartz and Thorson 28). In their insightful study Schwartz and Thorson place "gender and geography at the forefront by addressing the role women writers played in shaping literary modernism throughout the ethnically and linguistically diverse regions of monarchy" (Schwartz and Thorson 29). Schwartz and Thorson rely on the concept of geomodernisms which proves "crucial for understanding the inner workings of modernisms within the vast territory ruled by the House of Habsburg and whether an author or literary protagonist portrays 'a sense of speaking from outside or inside or both at once, of orientating towards and away from the metropole, of existing somewhere between belonging and dispersion (Doyle and Winkiel, 4)'" (Schwartz and Thorson 29).

1 Suffocating Intimacy

All four short stories introduce as the protagonist an unhappily married woman. The eponymous protagonist of Kveder's *Vera* (1898) is a sensitive and intelligent person who feels trapped in the marriage of convenience with a brutal husband who perceives her as an object that he parades with in front of his business partners. The intimate relationship between them is mediated to the reader through Vera's words to her friend (who is also the narrator of the story); she complains that she has to bear his sexual abuses when he approaches her drunk and after being intimate with some waitress. She feels like a slave to his carnality. Viviane, the protagonist of Grete Meisel-Hess's story *Libelle* [A dragonfly; 1905] is married to an older man and she perfectly performs her role of the wife of a respected psychiatrist. However, she expresses her suppressed

passion through her piano playing: "And Mrs Viviane filled the glasses, she fluttered tirelessly around the table, and from there over to her warm, beautiful salon, where she fantasized at the piano so that all the guests were left speechless. Viviane, an artist, an acquisition of a good and clever doctor, she who was his pride and joy that played so gruesomely" (Meisel-Hess 4).[2]

Vera finds a counterpart to her husband in a sensitive man and plans to elope with him. Viviane also falls in love with a man who, as seen from her perspective, has a completely different personality from her husband. Hence, the life of both women ends tragically: Vera commits suicide when she realizes that that she would not be happy with her lover either, because she would suffer from slander. Furthermore, talking to the narrator of the story Vera comprehends that even her lover will not be able to give her the happiness she longs for. An inconsolable longing and yearning are typical features of the Slovenian *Moderna,* where sensitive literary figures are perceived as special beings, superior to others, with a special connection to the invisible spheres which they perceive through their souls (Bernik 167). Vera is presented not just as a sensual person who wants to be loved but also as a person who wants to establish a relationship that would fill the emptiness in her life.

Viviane, on the other hand, elopes with her lover to Basel where she realizes how egoistic and cruel a person he is, and the story ends with her nervous breakdown. She spends the rest of her life confined in her house, with her husband taking care of her when she suffers from her nervous crisis. The short story *O věrné paní* [About a faithful lady] (from the collection *Pěšinky srdce* [Trails of the heart], 1902) by Růžena Svobodová ends with the resignation of the protagonist. The story takes place on Christmas Eve. Viktoria, a bourgeois wife, hosts the company as a great and much-admired hostess. The conversation at the party revolves around everyday topics, love and affection. The reader learns that Viktoria had many plans in her life, but she gave them up because she wanted to have a comfortable life. She has never loved her husband and he does not love her, clearly this is a marriage of convenience, where she denies her sexuality, whereas he has an extramarital affair. Viktoria accepts this situation, since she believes that one day she will unite with the love from her youth; in her eyes, he is the ideal man. The story takes place in the evening when Viktoria's friend Irena reveals to her that she met this man and that he

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. "Und Frau Viviane füllte die Gläser, unermüdlich flatterte sie um die Tafel herum, und von da in ihren warmen, schönen Salon hinüber, wo sie am Flügel phantasierte, daß allen Gästen den Atem stockte, so schauerlich spielte Viviane, die Künstlerin, die der gute, kluge Arzt sich errungen hatte und die sein Glück war, das ihm von der Stirn strahlte."

had turned into a perfect philistine, the same as all other bourgeois men who care only about their own comfort. For Viktoria, the world collapses and she invites a frivolous man who is with them that evening to a car ride. That is actually a covert consent to the sexual relationship. Then she retreats and is overcome by crying, but as the husband goes to his mistress, she has to return to the guests and act as if nothing had happened. She wants to get drunk and the story ends with her pouring champagne into ice cream, glass after glass, and consuming it with a spoon: "All her desolation, a purposeless new life, turned into a single golden flickering bead, hot as any future, vengeful kiss …" (Svobodová 227).[3]

Adela Milčinović's story *Neddina povijest* [Nedda's story; 1903] (published in the collection *Ivka*, 1905) also introduces a literary protagonist who realizes the emptiness of her marriage. The first-person narrator begins her story with a retrospective. She remembers her childhood which was darkened by her missing her mother and father. Her mother had died early, and Nedda knows nothing about her father, obviously, as she is an illegitimate child. She was raised by her grandmother and aunt, who forbade her to have any social contacts with boys. Nedda feels resistance and even disgust towards her own body. She becomes a teacher and marries a physician. Nedda and her husband Pavle live in the countryside. She acts possessively and the realization that she is pregnant does not make her happy, as she sees the child as a rival in love. When a dead child is born, the husband begins to treat her differently. Nedda finds out that this is the love of a placid man, that she is no longer able to satisfy him, and therefore, he wants to move to the city. They become more and more estranged. For Nedda, the city and the obligations of a bourgeois wife represent nothing but sheer dread, but she has no choice. The story ends with their departure from the village.

All four stories feature a middle-class marriage as an institution that cannot bring long-term happiness and satisfaction to the female protagonists. Middle-class wives must act as objects of representation, as their husbands' status symbols. Their appearance is important, they fulfil their role mostly flawlessly, but at the same time, they have an inner life that at some point experiences a turning point, an epiphany. It is also characteristic of the female characters in *Vera*, *O věrné paní* and in *Libelle* they see the only possibility for a different life in a new sexual relationship and experience a psychological crisis because a man cannot fill the void in their lives. In *Neddina povijest*, the female

3 "Celý její pustý, bezúčelný nový život změnil se v jedinou zlatavou míhající se krůpěj, hořkou jako všechna budoucí, mstivá políbení …"

character is also deeply disappointed at the realization that her husband's love has changed and with it everything she considered meaningful in life.

2 Narrating Intimacy and Spatiality

All four stories focus on the moment of the heroines' realization of the emptiness or factitiousness of their marriage, or of the fact that adulterous relationships will not fill the emptiness nor bring peace and happiness into their lives. The focus on one moment or one slice of life, an epiphany as a moment of insight and the use of narrative techniques that foreground individual consciousness and subjective perspective, are the hallmarks of the modernist short story (D'hoker 292). All the selected stories except *Neddina povijest* transmit only an excerpt from the life of the protagonist. The past is revealed through retrospectives, mostly taking place in conversations or through mediation of memories. In all four stories, the emphasis is on the moment when the emptiness of their lives is revealed, causing a turnaround in their emotions and actions.

Individual perspective is emphasized in *Vera* through the first-person narrator who is Vera's friend; she understands her and feels with her. When Vera's husband enters her apartment, she feels the same disgust as Vera. In *Neddina povijest* the protagonist reflects her psychological development from the perspective of the married woman; she creates a distance to her youthful self. Through a retrospective review of her adolescent disgust towards her own body, she tries to understand the relationship with her husband. In *Libelle* and in *O věrné paní,* the story is told through the third-person narrator, however, the protagonists are often also focalizers and reveal their intimate thoughts, as in the excerpt below, where the author also uses the technique of spatialization:

> Mrs Viktoria did not think about what the corrupt man was saying in Vienna. Now, her memories were wandering far away, outside, past the snowy plains, past the woods collapsing under the white burden, past her home park, besieged by starving hares, round the old small dilapidating mansion, they were crawling along the snowbound paths by the pond, along the unploughed road, under the windows of the neighbouring manor house, along its garden disfigured by snow, under the muffled acacias and elders, under the lit Renaissance windows, resembling white eyebrows, to the door of the cold stone château which she could have owned. "Oh," she interrupted this memory, and thought, "what immense silence there must be on those plains, and what a terrible sense of orphanhood!" And, in her soul, she heard languid, monotonous, tiring

> jingle bells getting closer and disappearing on the endless roads under the high, lonely stars, under the breathtaking, immense heavens.[4]
>
> SVOBODOVÁ 218–219

The inner, intimate life of literary figures is often articulated through devices of poetic language, and in all four stories narrative and lyrical elements are intertwined, which is another hallmark of the *fin-de-siècle* short story (D'hoker 295). In *Vera*, the first-person narrator begins her story with her perception of the autumn day which is in harmony with her pessimistic mood. The language is imbued with poetic images, comparisons, and personifications; the narrator captures a moment of despair, an impression of the sadness outside her window, using spatialization to express her melancholy:

> Sunday in October.
>
> Yellowed leaves, grey sky, humid atmosphere … Fogs drag on the hills and spread ragged into the valley. Rain pours from under the sky and rustles monotonously on the roofs. Autumn fills the air, sways in the dim yellowish, uncertain dawn of the afternoon and fills the soul with all that emptiness and desolation with which it has veiled nature.
>
> The unspeakable desert lies in my soul. I once saw a painting called "Grey on Grey": The big plain spread, sprinkled with formation of rocks and stones, but above it hung fantastic piles of fog, some yellowish light coming from somewhere and embracing things with its dull corpse. The whole picture breathed a terrible sadness and abandonment, it was as if the faces of the patients were staring at me through the fog, as if the bones of corpses were scattered across the plain …[5]
>
> KVEDER 72

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4 "Paní Viktorie nemyslila na to, co povídal ve Vídni zkažený muž. Její vzpomínky bloudily nyní daleko, venku po sněhových pláních, po lesích, lámajících se bělostnou tíží, po parku domovském, který obléhali hladovějící zajíci, kolem starého neopravovaného zámečku, ploužily se po hustě zavátých cestách podle rybníku, podle cihelny, po neprojeté silnici, pod okny sousedního panského domu, po jeho sněhem znetvořené zahradě, pod zachumlané akáty a černé bezy, pod osvětlená renesanční okna se zapadlými stříškami, podobajícími se bílým obočím, ke dveřím chladného kamenného zámku, jehož mohla býti paní. „Ach," přerušila si tuto vzpomínku a pomyslila, „jaké tam musí být v těch pláních nekonečné ticho a jaká strašná siroba!" A slyšela v duši neznatelnou, ale stále víc a více se rozechvívající hudbu, unylé, jednozvuké, únavné rolničky, blížící a ztrácející se na nekonečných cestách pod vysokými nedružnými hvězdami, pod závratnými ohromnými nebesy."

5 "Nedelja v oktobru. Orumenelo listje, sivo podnebje, vlažno vzdušje … Megle se vlačijo po hribih in se cunjasto razpredajo v dolino. Dež lije izpod neba in monotono šumi po strehah. Jesen polni vzduh, se ziblje v medlem rumenkastem, negotovem svitu popoldanskem in

All four authors also use “ellipsis and symbols to suggest rather than state” (D’hoker 292). Svobodová engages typical *fin-de-siècle* rhetoric to render the death of Viktoria’s illusions. The middle-class woman whose life’s only vocation was to please others is paralleled with the typical *fin-de-siècle* flower which was cultivated in the glasshouse and which flourished only for a brief moment:

> Viktoria bit with her white teeth into the crimson silk pillow, and tore the gentle cloth. A tortured, stray heart trembled beneath the cushion, tears pouring on the silk.
>
> In the dining room, the servant served fruit, stored on Delphic majolica and interspersed with holly twigs.
>
> The white lilacs, artificially cultivated for this day from a silent devotee, quickly withered and died.[6]
>
> SVOBODOVÁ 226

In Grete Meisel-Hess’s story *Libelle* the whole narrative is built on the comparison between the insect which was a very popular object in *fin-de-siècle* art and a middle-class wife. Meissel-Hess, biologist by profession, skilfully compares a beautiful woman who has no other function than being an object of admiration in the eyes of her husband and his friends with the insect which pleases the senses of the *fin-de-siècle* aesthete. After Viviane has left her husband and met her lover, Dr Merluzzi, in Basel, they stop at a bridge over the Rhine river and a dragonfly lands on her bosom. Dr Merluzzi covers it with his hand, as if trying to strangle it. When he withdraws his hand, the dragonfly appears to be dead. He pierces it with a needle from Vivian’s hat and attaches it to her hat. Spending the night together, Viviane wakes up screaming because she has the feeling that the dragonfly’s wings are fluttering. Merluzzi removes the dragonfly needle from her hat, but the animal is still trembling, so he wants to get rid

napolnjuje dušo z vso ono praznoto in zapuščenostjo, s katero je zastrla naravo. Neizrekljiva puščoba mi lega na dušo. Videla sem nekoč sliko »Sivo na sivem«: Velika plan se je širila, posuta s pečevjem in kamenjem, a nad njo so visele v fantastičnih kopah megle, neka rumenkasta svetloba je prihajala od nekod in objemala stvari s svojim medlim mrtvaškim svitom. Vsa slika je dihala grozno otožnost in zapuščenost, bilo mi je, kakor da bi vame strmela skozi megle upadla lica bolnikov, kakor da bi bile mrtvaške kosti raztresene po planjavi ....”

6 ”V jídelně sluha podával ovoce, uložené na delfských majolikách a proložené větvičkami cesmínovými. Bílé šeříky, od němého ctitele uměle vypěstované pro tento den, rychle vadly a umíraly.“

of it, but Viviane stops him. The dragonfly crawls across the table, falls to the ground and dies.

The fragility of the dragonfly and Viviane, their exposure to the man who has the power to destroy them, reveals the social status of the woman and the text transcends the boundaries between aestheticism and social critique, which is another feature of the (female) modernist short story. By incorporating contemporary studies of female convulsive movements, typical for female hysterical patients in the state of nervous crisis, Meisel-Hess combines aesthetically accomplished depiction with the harsh condemnation of the middle-class ideology which can lead to the loss of identity:

> But from time to time there come days when the memory of some horrible experience seems to seize her; no one can explain the madness which possesses her. With flight-like movements begins her crisis. When she flies through the garden like that, flapping her arms – swaying and floating – then you know it has begun. Suddenly she collapses rigidly, stretches her limbs as if her poor body was being pierced. In such a mood, she stays dead for a day and two nights … then she wakes up. She seems to be tortured with incomprehensible torments. She writhes along in nameless misery, crawling on the floor – until a new sleeping pill, which is forcibly given to her, sinks her into unconsciousness again. Then Viviane wakes up the next day – and she has forgotten everything.[7]
>
> MEISEL-HESS 13

In Meisel-Hess's, Kveder's, and Svobodová's texts, the traditional structure of the story of adultery is subverted with an emphasis on the protagonist's inner life, on her perceptions of the world, and on the mental processes that take place within her. This can be seen as the effect of how the authors use the typical devices of the modernist *fin-de-siècle* short story. Another feature of the modernist short story can be seen in critical, realistic descriptions of the middle-class marriage. As D'hoker and Eggermont argue, at the turn of the twentieth

7 "Aber von Zeit zu Zeit kommen Tage, wo die Erinnerung an irgendein gräßliches Erlebnis sie zu packen scheint; niemand vermag zu erklären, unter welchem Wahne sie steht, mit flugartigen Bewegungen, beginnt ihre Krise. Wenn sie so durch den Garten fliegt, mit den Armen flatternd, – sich wiegend und schwebend, – dann weiß man, es beginnt. Plötzlich fällt sie starr zusammen, dehnt und streckt die Glieder, als würde ihr armer Leib durchbohrt. So bleibt sie wie tot einen Tag und zwei Nächte … dann erwacht sie. Unbegreifliche Qualen scheinen sie zu durchwühlen. Sie windet sich in namenlosem Jammer, am Boden kriechend, dahin – bis ein neues Schlafmittel, das man ihr gewaltsam einflößt, sie wieder in Bewußtlosigkeit versenkt … Dann erwacht Viviane am nächsten Tag – und hat alles vergessen."

century, the short story also suited the ambitions of new realists: "The aim of the new realists to give a more objective representation of contemporary reality resulted in a focus on character psychology and on ordinary realities, both of which would be recorded in a detailed rather than an expansive manner. Again, the short story seemed particularly suited to this close scrutiny of psychological processes and ordinary situations" (D'hoker 296).

Realistic descriptions of Vera's dead, drowned body, Viviane's madness, Nedda's disgust towards her body, and the reproduction of empty chatter in Viktoria's dining room testify that all four authors were deeply concerned with the social role of the middle-class women and combined *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic with social criticism.

3 Intimacy between the Realm of Domesticity and City Topographies

In her seminal study about women of modernity in the urban topography, Janet Wolff argues that "the real situation of women in the second half of the nineteenth century was more complex than one of straightforward confinement to the home. It varied from one social class to another, and even from one geographical region to another, depending on the local industry, the degree of industrialization, and numerous other factors" (Wolff 45). Indeed, in the cities, especially capitals, "women were promenading, driving in the park, going to the theatre or boating," they were present in the spaces of "bourgeois recreation, display and those social rituals which constituted polite society, Society, *Le Monde"* (Pollock 78).

However, for many middle-class women of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, home was often a place in which they did not feel comfortable, it was a place they made cosy for their husbands, "the private sphere was also (and still is) a masculine domain; although the Victorians characterized it as feminine, the domestic interior was organized often for the convenience, rest and recreation of men, not women" (Wilson 79). As G. Pollock points out, the public and private division functioned on many levels:

> As a metaphorical map in ideology, it structured the very meaning of the terms masculine and feminine within its mythic boundaries. In practice, the ideology of domesticity became hegemonic, it regulated women's and men's behaviour in the respective public and private spaces. Presence in either of the domains determined one's social identity and therefore, in objective terms, the separation of the spheres problematized women's relation to the very activities we typically accept as defining modernity.
>
> POLLOCK 98

This is the case in all the selected stories in this chapter. Their protagonists live in bourgeois homes decorated with objects which represent the good material status of their husbands: thick carpets, Japanese curtains (Meisel-Hess 3), silk cushions and marble bowls with grapes and bananas on the Christmas Eve (Svobodová 215). They receive guests in the luxurious dining and drawing rooms. Only in *Vera*, the first-person narrator enters the protagonist's bedroom, but it is no longer a space of retreat and intimacy. Her friend lies dead on the bed, examined by the physician who declares she committed suicide (the police officer and her husband are also there).

In all four stories the intimacy of domestic spaces is confronted with the alienation of the city as a place where a woman loses her identity: Vera plans to leave for Vienna, where she hopes to be an anonymous person, Viviane goes insane in Basel and Viktoria leaves her home village and heads to Prague, where she takes on a new identity as a banker's wife. At the end of her narrative, Nedda goes to an unnamed city which seems to her like "that great river of life, which without asking gathers everything that comes close to it and drags, drags without rest, without will" (Milčinović 185).[8] Presumably, Nedda will gradually turn into an unhappy middle-class wife. The metaphor of a river as a dangerous place occurs in *Neddina povijest* also in the beginning and is connected with a forbidden and unpleasant realm/topos. In *Libelle* the insect lands on Viviane's bosom when she and her lover cross the bridge over the river and Vera commits suicide by crossing the border between water and land, by drowning. In all the stories, the act of crossing the borders functions as a spatial metaphor. Svobodová's story in its entirety takes place indoors, there are just two exteriors: the imaginative winter landscape in Viktoria's home village and places she envisions when talking about the future car ride with her soon-to-be lover, after she has abandoned her romantic illusions.

With the exception of Nedda's home in the countryside, in the other three stories we are looking in vain for a space where protagonists would feel safe and happy. Home is a place where they experience boredom and even sexual abuse, yet the spaces outside are not perceived as spaces of freedom or serenity either. Vera, Viviane, and Viktoria want to abandon traditionally feminine spaces, transgress boundaries, but they fail since they remain dependent on the man.

8 "U onu veliku rijeku života, što ne pitajući kupi sve, što joj dodje u blizinu i vuče, vuče bez odmora, bez volje – ."

Through the rhetoric of space, the selected texts mediate the standpoint that as long as women do not change their social roles they are caught in the relationships and in the spaces which stifle their desires and personal growth.

4 Central European Women Writers Struggling with the Dominant Catholic Female Ideal

The women writers whose works have been discussed in this chapter belong to different nationalities; however, they all lived in an area where moral standards were rooted in the Christian religion and where the strongest figure of identification was the Holy Mother. In the selected stories the topic of motherhood is embedded in the narrative in a discrete way. Overtly, it is only touched upon in *Neddina povijest,* where the protagonist rejects motherhood and longs for a relationship free from the pressure of reproductive sexuality. As Milčinović shows, in accordance with psychoanalytic studies of the period, Nedda's attitude towards motherhood is connected with the absent mother figure in her childhood. In the marital relationship, Nedda overcomes the disgust towards her body that she had developed through her aunt's and grandmother's constant reminders that any contact with boys is sinful. But after the birth of a dead child, she comes to learn that her husband's view of sexual relationship overlaps with those she was confronted with throughout her childhood and adolescence, fostered by her being an illegitimate child: a woman has to silence her desire if it is not in the reproductive function within an institution of a marriage.

Childless Viktoria, Vera, and Viviane act in the same way. Viktoria's husband has a son from his first marriage, and as the reader can assume, they do not consummate love. Nevertheless, the narrator reports that Viktoria's husband finds his sexual pleasure outside marriage bonds. She, on the other hand, seems to replace marital sexual life with platonic romantic love, and the only way she can overcome this illusion is by having an affair with a handsome man for whom she does not have any affection. Although she knows that she had not committed any sin, Kveder's Vera temporarily finds happiness in an extramarital relationship, but is aware that the society would label her as a sinner. In the moment of epiphany, she realizes that sexual relationship alone cannot heal all the wounds she incurred during her marriage: "I am so mentally devastated, everything is so torn and crushed within me that I need enormous strength to heal. And Hanuš can't give me that much! … Oh, I need happiness,

wild happiness that would shake my every nerve and fill my whole soul, that would be as big as the universe and as strong as death!" (Kveder 76).[9]

Similarly, Viviane cannot find peace in the arms of her lover: "In dull anguish of the heart, a woman huddled in the arms of a strange man," writes Meisel-Hess (7) about the first night Viviane spends with Dr Merluzzi.[10] Viviane recognizes that by leaving her husband she is exposed to another man who is actually a stranger, as she has learned from the episode with the dragonfly on the bridge. Furthermore, by leaving the environment where her role was founded on the premises of the Catholic feminine role ideology (and therefore appreciated), she slipped into the role of a woman who follows her desire and is therefore a sinner in the eyes of her (Catholic) community.

Central European women writers shared common moral (Catholic) values, as Michela De Giorgio explains, "[W]omen's desire for the marital state, during the whole of the nineteenth century and until the First World War, derived from the world's equating the dignity of female social existence with matrimony" (De Giorgio 173). The consequences of this ideological basis of female self-perception had, as the selected texts witness, immense influence on their lives.

5 Conclusions

The selected writers explored the possibilities of breaking out of the domesticity and intimacy that they did not perceive as rewarding; furthermore, for them, conjugal intimacy is something abhorrent, due to their not feeling any love and passion. Women writers discussed the crisis of the female self in search of a new identity. In short, their stories mediate a message that the development of women's identity as a free human being can only happen when women step into the world on their own and are able to survive without male's support. Although my research is limited to only four authors, it indicates that the topic of middle-class marriage constraints was an important issue for women writers at the turn of the twentieth century.

The selected Central European writers combined stylistic experiment with a social and moral concern by focusing on the relationship between intimacy

9 "O, jaz sem duševno tako razdejana, vse je tako raztrgano in strto v meni, da potrebujem neizrečeno veliko, da bi ozdravela. In Hanuš mi ne more dati toliko! … O, jaz potrebujem sreče velike, divje sreče, ki bi mi pretresla vsak moj živec ter mi napolnila vso mojo dušo, ki bi bila velika kot vesolje in močna kakor smrt!"

10 "In dumpfer Herzensangst schmiegte sich ein Weib in die Arme eines fremden Mannes."

and spatiality. All four stories depict the inner split in the protagonists, namely, the divide between their prescribed social role and their own, intimate world. The emotional and spatial boundaries prove to be an obstacle which cannot be surmounted, as long as women are not able to overcome the Catholic feminine model which places them in the private sphere. Just by looking at the texts from the transnational perspective, this topic can be seen as one of the most recurrent ones in women writing at the turn of the twentieth century.

More in-depth research that would involve not only more authors but also women writers from other Central European literatures should follow up this study. It seems very likely that it would confirm what Agatha Schwartz and Helga Thorson have already convincingly stated:

> Placing literary modernism in a transcultural and transregional context within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy through this interplay of locational positionalities and intersectionality helps us understand not only the aesthetics of change at the *fin de siècle* but also our own way of theorizing it today. We can thus establish a more differentiated literary and cultural history of this vast geographical area, one that takes into account the marginalized voices of women in addition to and next to the established canonical writers and that discovers common modernist threads in their works across existing political, linguistic, and intellectual boundaries beyond the dominant narratives of national imagined communities.
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The author acknowledges financial support by the Slovenian Research Agency for the research project Transformations of Intimacy in the Literary Discourse of Slovene “Moderna” (J6-3134).

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PART 2

Intimacies in Fictive European Spaces at the Fin de Siècle

CHAPTER 4

Melodramatic Spaces

Intimacy and Emancipation in Swedish Women's Playwriting

Birgitta Lindh Estelle

Abstract

The Swedish female playwrights Alfhild Agrell, Victoria Benedictsson and Anne Charlotte Leffler were contemporaries of Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg and popular at theatres in the 1880s. Melodramatic elements are vital components in a dramaturgy representing the emotional and bodily experiences of the female protagonists in these women's plays. Different variations of the melodramatic figure of the Garden of Eden from which the innocent heroine has been expelled interplay with representations of intimacy. These melodramatic spaces render an emancipatory quality, depicting intimate relationships beyond the prevailing social structures and exposing women's "unique selves" (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*). This spatial strategy of representation is characterized by the tension between the notion of a true home and false ones, involving the childhood home and married life, the city and the countryside, Sweden and foreign countries. The aim of my chapter is to illuminate the function of these spaces in the mediation of intimate relationships by using examples from Agrell's play *Ensam* [Alone;1884] Benedictsson's *Final* [Finale; 1885)] and Leffler's *Elfvan* [Elf;1883]. How do these spaces structure the emancipatory exposure of 'women's selves' in terms of nation and gender?

Keywords

melodrama – spatiality – intimacy – emancipation – nineteenth-century plays – Swedish literature and theatre – the Scandinavian modern breakthrough

The Swedish female playwrights Alfhild Agrell, Victoria Benedictsson, and Anne Charlotte Leffler were contemporaries of Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. They also wrote novels and short stories, and are considered representatives of the Scandinavian modern breakthrough in Swedish histories of literature. At Scandinavian theatres Benedictsson had great success with

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the one-act play *I telefon* [On the phone; 1887] while Agrell and Leffler had their plays more frequently staged than Strindberg's in the 1880s. Their pieces for the theatre were also translated into several European languages during the years around the *fin de siècle* and some of them staged, for example, in London, Hamburg, and Frankfurt-am-Main (Johansson Lindh, *Som en vildfågel* 22; Johansson Lindh, "The British" 205, 217).

The three playwrights' successes did not last for very long, though; by the early twentieth century their plays were judged as low quality, recognized by historians of literature as simply constructed melodramatic pieces of indignation and frustration. However, it is precisely the melodramatic elements, at the core of this critique, that are vital components in a dramaturgy representing the emotions and ideas of the female protagonists in these women authors' plays. In this respect, different variations of the central melodramatic figure of the Garden of Eden from which the heroine has been expelled interplay with representations of intimacy. Christine Gledhill points out that in melodrama this figure represents the conditions of mental and social well-being and happiness that could have been, in contrast to the actual situation of the protagonist (16–17, 25). Contrary to the melodramatic nostalgic view of the Garden as a harmonious space forever lost, the variations in Agrell's, Benedictsson's, and Leffler's plays render a utopian emancipatory quality, depicting intimacy and its conditions beyond the prevailing social structures of the bourgeoisie (Johansson Lindh, *Som en vildfågel* 285, 296). Thus, the plays interfered in the social debate on marriage and female decency of the 1880s in Scandinavia.

Leaning on Jonathan Flatley's idea of aesthetic practices as mechanisms "through which one is interested in the world", my stance is that the melodramatic aesthetics of these women's plays can be regarded as instruments to engage in "the world" by expressing the emotional and bodily reactions to it from the perspective of bourgeois women (Flatley 1). The melodramatic strategy of representation, particularly in Agrell's and Leffler's plays, is characterized by the contrasting of different places involving childhood homes and married life, the countryside and the city, Sweden and foreign countries representing Gardens of Eden and their opposites. The melodramatic figure of the Garden can be connected to Maria Di Battista's and Deborah Epstein Nord's elaboration on the notion of a home in English women's literature. They find that women writers and their various historical and cultural avatars seldom feel at home at the place where they were born or that custom has allotted to them (Di Battista and Epstein Nord 5–6). In multinational writers' fiction, migration expresses a yearning for a place where life is better and where people, especially women, are freer. Citing Nadine Gordimer and Mary McCarthy, Di Battista and Epstein Nord call this place "the exact location of a person" and

"the home address of the self" (198). The longing for a home in this sense is a general underlying structure in the plays by Agrell, Benedictsson, and Leffler. These homes are spaces that allow relationships founded on new grounds between their inhabitants, which affect matters of intimacy.

Since the spatial turn, space has become a rather rich term. Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp state that space is an "increasingly ubiquitous term in critical thinking, where it is used in both material and metaphorical ways" (3). Domosh and Seager remind us of the simple fact that all of our actions take place in particular places and that the spatial organization and relations of those places are just not a backdrop but actually help to shape the actions (xxi). In this chapter I will move between the terms space and place, which will be used in different senses. Space refers to a discursive room inhabited by agents and structured by power relationships between them which are materialized and produced in concrete places. In the melodramatic spatial mimesis of the plays concrete places such as the protagonists' childhood homes, rural idylls, and countries abroad are turned into spaces allowing a better and freer life and where the individual feels at ease – the protagonists' visions of true homes.

The female protagonists look back to and struggle to create their Gardens of Eden anew. Their actual homes are often hostile spaces in which the female protagonists risk being broken down by suppressing their intellectual, physical, and emotional needs in order to meet the expected behaviour as wives and daughters. These very homes are perceived as places belonging to someone else, into which the protagonists are brought merely by misfortune or by their own mistakes. In this respect, in my chapter the tension between the bourgeois life of a Swedish city and places abroad is of particular interest. How are the Swedish city and places outside its borders, including the national borders, represented in the plays, and what discursive spaces do they represent? The aim of my chapter is to illuminate the function of these melodramatic places in the mediation of ideas of intimate relationships by using examples from Alfhild Agrell's play *Ensam* [Alone; 1884], Victoria Benedictsson's *Final* [Finale; 1885], and Anne Charlotte Leffler's *Elfvan* [Elf; 1883]. In the concluding section of the chapter, I will elaborate on the ideas on nation, gender, intimacy, and freedom that the space of the Swedish city and its foreign alternatives accommodate.

Places are contrasted at the level of the fictive environment in which the action takes place, as in Anne Charlotte Leffler's *Elfvan*. Here, in the first act, the protagonist's home with her husband is contrasted with a castle in the woods in the second act, at which Elf escapes the seduction of a demonic baron. Furthermore, places are contrasted at the level of dialogue, for example, in retrospectives of the protagonists' childhood lives, envisioning futures that are either open possibilities or have already proved to be impossible to reach.

The tension between spaces represented by the Swedish bourgeois city and foreign places is played out at both levels.

True homes and false homes are represented in the realistic settings and dramatic worlds in which the protagonists move; simultaneously, the melodramatic contrasting of those spaces helps to express the female protagonists' feelings and ideas provoked by the situation in which they find themselves. The melodramatic spatial mimesis thereby contributes to criticizing the gender norms of patriarchal bourgeois society. The three plays that provide the empirical material of this chapter are chosen to show different ways of representing the Swedish city and places outside its borders. To start with, in Benedictsson's *Final* the representation of Europe is realistic, without the melodramatic contrasting of good and evil spaces as in Leffler's and Agrell's plays. *Final* is included in the analysis to show that the absence of such contrasting spaces has consequences for the idea of a true home and the possibility of intimacy.

Spatiality furthermore informs the level of theory, in Adriana Cavarero's notion of a *narratable self*, which is exposed from birth within the interactive scene of the world. Cavarero's phenomenology draws on the difference that Hannah Arendt illuminates between *what* a person is and *who* she is. *What* a person is – for example, a woman, wife, or daughter – can be defined in philosophical terms, while *who* she is escapes such definitions and can be captured only in a narration of her life story (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 35, 60). While the exposure to other human beings in interactive scenes is constitutive, it also puts the individual at risk of being hurt, in the event that her unique *narratable self* is ignored. The narratability of every person is, according to Cavarero, a pre-political condition. Relational scenarios in which narratable selves appear have the same revealing and expositive qualities that Hannah Arendt gives to politics (Kottman vii–xxxii, x, xix–xx). In history, Cavarero writes, there has been a general absence of shared political scenes in which women could show who they are to their peers. The scenarios in which women could appear as *narratable selves* were situated within the domestic sphere (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 58–59). In addition, women have often been reduced to *what* they are, while *who* they are has been neglected in hurtful ways (58, 61). Consequently, exposing the narratable selves of female characters and portraying them as unique beings in contrast to someone's daughter, wife, mistress, and so forth has an emancipatory drive, which concerns both questions of identity and the status of being a full human being and worthy citizen.

The *narratable self* – "as the house of uniqueness" – is connected to the specific life story of an individual (33–36). Consequently, the *who* of a person is an experiencing being who activates emotions and bodily actions and reactions

as well as her spiritual and cognitive abilities in the exposure of her narratable self to others. In love, Cavarero states, "the expositive and relational character of uniqueness plays out one of its most obvious scenes. The questions 'who am I' and 'who are you' form the beat of body language and the language of storytelling" (109). Just like love, friendship is often characterized by a spontaneous narrative reciprocity (109). Drawing on Cavarero, intimacy in this chapter refers to scenes (in Cavarero's philosophical sense) of mutual exposure and reciprocity between two or more unique beings involving 'the beat of body language' and/or recognition of the *narratable self*. Both the status of being treated as a unique entity in its own right and sensual love and sexuality were complicated matters for women in Scandinavia of the 1880s. Through the melodramatic spatial mimesis of the plays, ideas of intimacy are mapped out.

1 At Home in Europe

Leffler's play *Elfvan* depicts the first erotic experience of a young girl. The seventeen-year-old protagonist Elf is married to the mayor of a small Swedish town but finds it difficult to adapt to the demands of being a proper wife and the bourgeois social life of the small town. On one of her daily walks in the woods she meets a baron, who has a shady reputation among the bourgeois community. In the second act of the play, she sits as a model for one of his paintings at his castle far outside the limits of the small town. Elf almost succumbs to the baron's attempt to seduce her but escapes his embrace and hurriedly leaves in a sleigh into the roaring snowstorm. After an adventurous ride she reaches her home and is reconciled with her husband. The play strongly opposes women's marital confinement but also the convention of middle-aged men marrying young women who are not in any sense mature enough for marriage.

Before ending up in the small town with the mayor, Elf has travelled Europe together with her musician father. In the first act she fails to entertain at a social get-together that her husband and mother-in-law have arranged for some women among the bourgeoisie of the town, because of the constant misunderstandings between her and the guests. Elf's experiences are those of a European cosmopolitan who knows about the cultures of foreign countries, and they clash with the environment of the small Swedish town. When, for example, Elf says that the mayor's house with its sealed windows in the autumns and winters feels like a prison, her mother-in-law immediately thinks that she is showing discontent with her and her son, and Elf has to explain that she is just complaining about the Swedish weather. She tries to entertain by singing an Italian song, but her audience asks for a Swedish one. The experiences that

have shaped Elf's *narratable self* are ignored by her mother-in-law and by the guests. The misunderstandings furthermore show the Swedish small town as a space of confinement and limited views. Elf's nomadic childhood life across European national borders illuminates and in a Brechtian sense alienates the conservative bourgeois norms and conventions of this space. In contrast to the Europe of Elf's childhood, the small town represents a national space.

The confinement of the Swedish town concerns matters of intimacy. Elf is clearly pictured as a young girl who is about to enter womanhood in the sense of discovering her own sexuality. She is unaware of what she is going through but has a strange worrying feeling "as if everything is coming to an end" (Leffler 66).[1] Her process of maturing happens in the crossfire of a morally uptight environment and the baron's seductive attempts, which allure and at the same time frighten her. Sexuality clearly is an area of conflict for the protagonist, as it was for most nineteenth-century young Swedish female readers or theatre-goers, and thus a sensitive topic to handle for dramatists, in particular, for a woman playwright (Johansson Lindh, *Som en vildfågel* 21–22). In the article "Fri kärlek – för vem?" [Free love – for whom?] Sandra Grehn attends to the construction of the idea of free love in Frida Stéenhoff's play *Lejonets unge* [The lion's cub; 1896]. She shows that love detached from marriage is carried out via Saga, the main character, who is pictured as a young European woman and thereby distanced from the Swedish bourgeoisie. By making Saga's position as "The Other" part of the construction of free love, bourgeois feminine respectability is not threatened, and at the same time the connection between marriage and love is questioned (35, 42, 53). By picturing Elf as an outsider to the bourgeois community of the small town, brought up at places in Europe by a bohemian father out of reach of proper Swedish bourgeois norms, Elf's breach of the norms of decency can be explained and forgiven. Elf can be looked upon as a homeless child that has finally come home, by the fictive bourgeois community and likewise by the reader or theatregoer. In that way she is made compatible with the moral codes of a conservative bourgeoisie and appropriate on the stages of Scandinavian high-prestige theatres.

Making Elf a cosmopolitan and contrasting Swedish morality to Europe as a space of immorality in the eyes of the other characters makes it possible to accommodate ideas of sexuality that clash with the moral codes of conservative Swedish middle-class readers and theatre audiences. In *Elfvan,* the representation of the young girl's sexual awakening and her expectations of erotic love are strictly located in places outside the town, out of reach of the

1 "som om det vore slut med allting." All translations of quotations in this chapter are mine.

bourgeois community. Elf meets the Baron for the first time on one of her strolls in the woods, and her erotic encounter with him takes place at his castle in the woods. Her experiences of sexual attraction are furthermore expressed in a comparison of Italy and Sweden in an exchange of words at the social get-together between Elf, the middle-aged Doctor's wife and young Malvina, her niece:

ELF:	Alas! If you just could see Italy!
THE DOCTOR'S WIFE:	Italy! I dare say! A country without religion and morals!
MALVINA:	Yes, there are so many bandits that you risk being shot in the middle of the day.
ELF:	But what beautiful, handsome bandits! You could not help falling in love with them! (*a stir among the ladies*).[2] (Leffler 30)

In this scene bourgeois decency is clearly connected to nation. What cannot be accommodated within the borders of the Swedish town is expelled to a Mediterranean country with a milder climate. Leffler makes use of ideas about Italy that were quite common in Swedish nineteenth-century literature and the dramatic arts. In romantic Gothic fiction Italy was represented as a dark and dangerous country inhabited by remorseless villains. In particular, the picture of Italy as a mysterious, terrifying place in Ann Radcliffe's early nineteenth-century Gothic novels influenced many generations of Nordic readers, which is reflected in the lines of the Doctor's wife and Malvina in the quotation above. Licentious passions in fictive Italian environments furthermore held an attraction for readers, and for authors they offered an opportunity to express what could not be explicitly spelled out in times when chastity and decency were celebrated (Lewan 18–19, 20–24). In *Elfvan* Italy is a fantasy space representing intimacy as an area squeezed between bourgeois norms of decency and the yearning for sensualism and passion. Elf's account of Italy demonstrates that the young protagonist embraces sensuality but also her innocent unawareness of the strict demands of female chastity and decency, denying her,

2 "Elfvan: Ack! Ni skulle bara se Italien!

DOKTORINNAN:	Italien Jag får verkligen säga! Ett land utan religion och moral!.
MALVINA:	Ja, där finns ju så mycket banditer, att man riskerar att bli skjuten midt på dagen.
ELFVAN:	Men du kan inte tro hvilka vackra, ståtliga banditer! Ja, du skulle inte kunna låta bli att förälska dig i dem! (*Uppståndelse bland damerna*)".

in Cavarero's words, the "language of the body" (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 109). For Elf, the Mediterranean country incarnates her longing for freedom, beauty, and sensualism, which she lacks in the confined dreary everyday life as a wife of the mayor of a Swedish small town. Making Italy exotic also signals how ill fitted Elf is for the demands of a proper wife in a Swedish small-town home that is not hers. She is a "hummingbird in a henhouse" at risk of being hacked to death (Leffler 36).[3]

In a scene of reconciliation at the end of the play, though, Elf's husband has realized that Elf must mature into a grown-up woman before she can "enjoy the greatest happiness of life, that of belonging to the man she loves without any guilt and remorse" (Leffler 100).[4] He entrusts Elf to the care of his mother, who at Elf's request promises to treat her as her own child. Hence, the play ends with a promise that Elf's childhood paradise can be reconstructed in a loving marriage in the future and that the mayor's house will turn into her true home.

2 The Rural Idyll as the Space of a New Sociability

In Alfhild Agrell's play *Ensam* the main character is Thora, who has given birth to a child out of wedlock. She lives on the outskirts of Stockholm in a nice neat little yellow house in a lovely garden, together with her daughter Yngva. Yngva has fallen in love with Allan, the adoptive son of Mr Eksköld, a wealthy aristocrat. When Eksköld finds out that Yngva is an illegitimate child, he says no to Allan's request to marry her. The only way this can happen is for Thora to marry Eksköld's cousin, the biological father of Yngva. Thora refuses. She pleads her rights as a human being over being a mother.[5] The play questions the unfair judgements of men's and women's moral mistakes.

In *Ensam* there is no lost Garden of Eden for Thora to look back to, as she has matured and looks back to her love of Yngva's father as a mistake of youth. She has created such a space for herself and her daughter, though, in their little house and garden, which is represented as a rural idyll of love and care on the outskirts of the adjacent city. Yngva wants to revenge herself on the city people who shame her because of her status as an illegitimate child, by getting "rich

3 "kolibri i en hönsgård."
4 "njuta lifvets högsta lycka – att få tillhöra den man, hon älskar med rent samvete och utan bittra minnen".
5 *Ensam* is a paraphrase of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Thora has refused to be ashamed of her situation and has made her daughter her scarlet letter to the world.

and superior in order to *dominate* and look down at those who have looked down at her" (Agrell 88, my italics).[6] Thora embraces her daughter "*to warm and protect her*" (87).[7] She kisses and caresses Yngva as if she wants to reinforce her with their intimacy to make her resistant to the shaming. She is afraid of losing her daughter to "the world" (87).[8] In Cavarero's philosophy traditional scenarios of maternal care like this are connected to her ideas of a relational subjectivity. She contrasts the scenario of an individual who, from a vertical position, leans over a child with the scenario of a rational, autonomous, isolated individual who stands upright among independent and equal others. The mother's posture represents a relation that is structurally asymmetric and unbalanced, and exposes the human being as vulnerable and dependent on the other (Cavarero, "Recritude" 229). The intimacy between mother and daughter in the protective act is, together with care and respect for human beings, irrespective of social positions, part of a system of norms that Thora has created in her harmonious home. These are also represented in her tolerant treatment of her mean cleaning lady and in her charity work as a nurse. Her house is the space of the relational subjectivity which the image of the mother bending over her child represents for Cavarero. Thora's warm, shielding embrace is contrasted with Yngva's words about ruling over and suppressing other people. Yngva wants to find revenge by prevailing in the competition over social positions and wealth in the surrounding city. Her strategy calls on Cavarero's image of the erect autonomous individual as a warrior who never feels greater than when confronted with the dead enemy on the ground. The lifeless body attests to the winner's own survival and victory (227–228). Thora's idyllic exile from bourgeois respectability represents the antithesis of city life, which is ruled by money and the competition for social positions. Her house and true home accommodates the idea of an alternative sociability involving relational subjects.

In Agrell's play, the European city outside the Scandinavian borders is pictured as the refuge for Swedes who have been forced to leave their country to escape the law and the judgement of their bourgeois social circles at home. Yngva's father, the unscrupulous married man who made promises to Thora when she was young, has been exiled in Berlin "for many years, yes, since long before he was widowed" (Agrell 95).[9] He had an "unpleasant experience" at his regiment, gambled "a bit too wildly" and was finally forced to resign to protect

6 "rik och förnäm, att få herska och se ned på dem som de sett ned på mig!"
7 "*som värmande och skyddande*".
8 "verlden".
9 "sedan flera år, ja, långt innan han blef enkling,".

the family name (95).[10] His cousin Mr Eksköld has since then supported him. When Mr Eksköld wants Thora to marry his cousin, she questions how marriage to a man who has "gambled away his wife's fortune, tormented her [his wife] to death with his debauchery, been forced to leave his regiment" can make Yngva worthy of Eksköld's son (98).[11] Both Thora's house and Berlin are represented as secluded places for social outcasts from Swedish bourgeois respectability, but while Eksköld's cousin in his far-away exile cannot be reached by the eyes of his former social community and can be included in new social circles, Thora is watched and judged constantly in a lifelong punishment that extends to her daughter. Besides freedom of movement, Europe also represents freedom from moral judgement and a possibility of social inclusion.

In Judith Butler's terminology, Yngva serves as an abject, which helps maintain the prevailing social order of the city. The shaming of her is part of an exclusionary matrix that maintains the limit of the discourse and forces social subjects to stay within those limits (Butler 39–41). Thora, on the other hand, turned her back on society when she was excluded. According to Lynda Nead, nineteenth-century society differentiated between two kinds of non-respectable women, the prostitute and the fallen woman. The latter came from the respectable middle class but had lost control of her chastity by being seduced. Nead points out that, to a certain extent, the fallen woman could restore her damaged position by presenting herself as the innocent, powerless victim (Nead 95–96, 101). Thora has refused to do so. Instead, she has made her house of exile the space of alternative norms of female decency and conscience. Decency is depicted as a matter between herself and God, and she restores herself by her good acts and decent living. Consequently, she refuses to be a victim of shaming and refuses to take part in maintaining the limits of the patriarchal bourgeois space of the city. Her yellow house is the dwelling of resistance. Within its space, female decency is moved from bodily chastity, which is passive to the mind, to active deeds in relation to other human beings. Thus, Thora's home accommodates new norms of femininity which can serve as the foundation for a sociability of relational subjects.

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10 "litet obehag", "litet för vildt".

11 "spelat bort sin hustrus förmögenhet, pinat henne till döds med sina utsväfvningar, nödgats lemna sitt regemente."

3 Homelessness in Life

In Victoria Benedictsson's play *Final*, the protagonist is Betty Bruhn, a beautiful woman who is no longer young, who is married to a wealthy and successful man. She is ill and depressed and cannot play the role as his entertaining beauty at their social gatherings any more. She finds her life empty and stops masquerading as the ingénue type that her husband wants her to be. Mr Bruhn is appalled and asks her to get her act together. The situation changes radically and suddenly in a melodramatic manner when Mr Bruhn's embezzlement to finance their extravagant living is revealed. Betty tries to convince her husband to leave Sweden together with young Saima to escape the law, as she believes that they love each other. But in the end, Saima lets Mr Bruhn down. Betty stays by her husband when the police enter their home to arrest him. Betty proves to be loving, strong, and loyal, which her husband finally appreciates. Stripped of their social costumes and exposed to each other as vulnerable human beings, genuine love between the spouses has a chance to grow.

In Benedictsson's play, there is no place that represents a true home for the protagonist. Certainly, the drawing rooms in which Betty and her husband have their parties and Betty's private room are contrasted with each other, but the drawing rooms are where Betty plays her role as ingénue, and in her private room her depression and tiredness are revealed. The drawing rooms constitute a space ruled by the unnatural demands of bourgeois social life, and Betty's private rooms the space of revelation of their damaging effects. They are two sides of the same coin. When the conditions of genuine mutual love between husband and wife finally have been reached, it is too late. Betty is ill and her husband is going to prison. Neither do Europe and a life in exile outside of the Swedish border offer any hope as the space for freedom and love.

In *Final* two kinds of love are contrasted with each other. Betty wants her husband to appreciate *who* she is under the mask she wears as his young beauty. She makes herself vulnerable by revealing her ageing, illness, and depressive state to him. When her husband's crime is disclosed, she never blames him. Instead, she supports him. She exposes her frailty and looks at her husband's vulnerability with a caring eye, instead of evaluating his qualities. In Cavarero's terminology, for Betty such mutual exposure and acceptance of two unique *narratable selves* are the foundation of love. *Who* she and her husband are to each other, rather than *what* they are or what they have is what matters (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 35, 60). Saima represents a different idea of love. She describes it as the sensation of dizziness in anticipation of a storm and an

"overwhelming pleasure" (Benedictsson 95–96).[12] To her, love involves strong emotions and sexual desire – in other words, "the beat of body language" (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 109). Not only the quality of love is different in Betty's and Saima's ideas but so also is the direction of the emotions. While Betty's love is directed towards the intimate space of narratable selves between her husband and herself, Saima's love is directed towards her own sensations and feelings that Mr Bruhn excites. He can give her something that she wants, and his social and financial position in the bourgeois community of the city is represented as part of the attraction.

Saima cannot in the end give full expression to her wild desire for Mr Bruhn. When she realizes that Mr Bruhn is ruined and risks going to jail, she rejects his proposal to run away with him for a life together somewhere in Europe. She asks what will happen to her if he gets caught and explains:

> You would be arrested and I would be left alone in a foreign country, without money and forever expelled from the world to which I belong. Stigmatized and put to shame, I would have to hide wherever I could. I would be remembered with pitying ridicule and be talked about with virtuous mockery. No, Hugo – I have already gone further than what is wise to do.[13]
>
> BENEDICTSSON 123

If Mr Bruhn falls, Saima will helplessly go down with him, as she would be dependent on his money and reputation. A life in Europe would not give Saima the freedom that it affords to Mr Bruhn. It would give her a risky dependence on one person only, as Mr Bruhn has the exclusive agency to establish their new life abroad. Europe does not provide a space in which Saima's passionate love can be fully expressed, because she does not have the financial and social space of movement. Status as an independent individual and citizen with full legal and economic rights appears as the structural and material condition for the freedom to experience Saima's kind of love. With a point of departure in the social position of a bourgeois woman, the concept of freedom conceived of as individual autonomy proves to be false. The freedom that a life in Europe can offer requires relations and dependence on other people even for a man,

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12 "något öfverväldigande skönt".

13 "Dig skulle man anhålla, och jag skulle stå ensam i främmande land, utan medel, och för alltid utstött ur den värld, där jag är hemma. Brännmärkt och utskämd, skulle jag få gömma mig hvar jag kunde. Man skulle minnas mig med ett medlidsamt löje och tala om mig med dygdesamt hån. Nej Hugo – jag har redan gått längre än vad som var klokt."

in order for him to find work and attain a position in a social community. In Saima's refusal to leave with Mr Bruhn, freedom for men as well as for women rather is represented as the social, legal, and economic agency to form new social relationships.

In *Final* there is neither place nor space for the intimate love between two *narratable selves* that Betty Bruhn yearns for, nor for Saima to experience the passionate language of the body. In the sense of a home being a space for the individual to express her true self and to have her yearnings fulfilled, both Betty Bruhn and Saima stand out as two homeless women.

4 The Bourgeois Competition of the City and Its Utopian Alternatives

Criticism of the conservative bourgeoisie is the backbone of *Elfvan, Ensam*, and *Final*, as in most of the plays of the Scandinavian modern breakthrough. In the three plays by Agrell, Leffler, and Benedictsson, the representation of the Swedish town or city and places outside its borders contributes to constructing this criticism through the spatial construction. The city is represented as the space of superficial competition over money and social positions in which the female body is commodified, as is clearly expressed in *Final*. The drawing rooms of the house are decorated with items from Betty's husband's collection of art, and at the beginning of the play Betty is represented as one of his showpieces. Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, who mainly refer to American and British cities, state that the parlours of the homes were upper- and middle-class women's principal spaces in the city in the late nineteenth century (88). In *Elvan* and *Final* the drawing rooms are spaces in-between the public life of the city and the private rooms of the domestic areas. They are semi-public spaces that are coded as male, in which the superficial competition over money and social positions of city life is played out. Hence, the traditional binary opposition of the domestic space as the domain of women and the public space of the city as male is deconstructed in these two plays and city life affords no space in which the female protagonists can feel at home (4).

Also, in *Ensam* the city is a space of destructive conquering. Furthermore, it is a domain in which female sexuality is regulated by shaming. Thora's illegitimate daughter Yngva is the proof of female premarital sex, and the shaming of her is presented as a mechanism to keep this disturbing element out of the system. In *Elfvan* the violations of female decency by the naïve young protagonist's openheartedness and her mobility outside of the city limits are disturbing elements. The plays thus show that the city is a space in which female decency requires a young wife to embody controlled behaviour, immobility,

and passivity. In *Elf* the confinement of the small town is contrasted to Elf's freedom of mobility in Europe, connecting the confinement of the city to nation. The strong resistance against female activity and freedom of movement as well as premarital female sexuality, as represented by the protagonists' hostile city environments in these two plays can thus be seen as representations of shared national conceptions. Consequently, by criticizing female decency as immobility and passivity, the plays not only undermine an uneven organization of gender; they also undercut the discourse of the national space.

In particular, Benedictsson's *Final* demonstrates that it is a commercial discourse combined with the bourgeois system of norms of the Swedish city that results in the immobilization and commodification of the female body. Jon Stratton states that the cultural fetishism of the female body was intensified during the last decades of the nineteenth century due to men's experience of the state's extended exercise of power and to changed patterns of consumption (Stratton 16, 25, 49). *Final* and also Agrell's *Ensam* show that loyal inhabitants of the space of the Swedish city take part in the consumerist culture by asking *what* a person is, or rather what s/he *has* to put into the competition for wealth and social positions in which women's decency provides a marketable currency. The plays highlight that this order contaminates human relationships and prevents honest, genuine, and profound intimate connections; in particular, it affects love in heteronormative relationships. Precisely this is what makes the female protagonists of the plays homeless in the sense of lacking space and freedom to fully express their intimate capacities and needs as unique *narratable selves* (Cavarero, *Relating Narratives* 35, 60).

Representations of places outside of the Swedish city help construct alternatives to the Swedish bourgeois system of norms. Europe outside of the Scandinavian borders is depicted as the space of behaviour that cannot be tolerated within the national borders. Europe is a gendered space. In *Ensam* Europe is the domain of deportation of men who threaten the bourgeois conceptions of male honour by financial irresponsibility, but it also offers men the possibility to start anew, far away from the judging eyes of the bourgeois circles of the Swedish city. Berlin as the exile for male immorality is contrasted with the melodramatic cliché of a rural haven of female neatness, industriousness, love, and care. The ethical decency of Thora's idyll is situated within the Swedish borders, actually on the city limits of the Swedish capital city. No matter how decency is defined, in accordance with the patriarchal bourgeois norms or with Thora's domain of relational subjectivity, it stays within the Swedish borders. In contrast, *Elfvan* represents Europe as a female space and as the true home of the protagonist. Italy, in particular, represents the beauty,

poetry, and sensual attraction perceived and sensed by a woman that cannot be tolerated by the petty bourgeoisie of the small Swedish town.

In *Elfvan*, Italy is exotically represented through the eyes of a young girl via intertextual references to Gothic literature and romances. The protagonist's lost childhood paradise expresses the kind of love that she longs for, but is not yet ready for and which is denied by the hostile bourgeois environment. Quite differently, in *Final* Europe is represented as a realistic realm for sensual love and sexual attraction, although not an attainable option for a woman. Anne McClintock states that as a representative of continuity woman is a bearer of nation but lacks national agency. Her political relation to the nation is submerged in a social relation to a man through marriage (411, 412). *Final* shows that this affects women's opportunities outside the borders of the nation as well. The unmarried Saima in *Final* lacks the political, economic, and legal agency of a full citizen of the state and is therefore also without agency to start anew abroad on her own. As a symbolic bearer she is the captive of a national space that does not truly belong to her. In McClintock's words, her situation demonstrates that "women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit" (410).

Final, with its destructive city life and the impossibility of exile in Europe, lacks the melodramatic contrast to a Garden of Eden. Consequently, it lacks a promise that the female characters Betty and Saima ever will experience true homes. Benedictsson has confined herself to pointing out the conditions for such homes, namely, in Betty's case, a changed relationship between husband and wife, freed of the social conventions of the city bourgeoisie, and for Saima, the rights of economic, legal, and social independence. *Elfvan* ends with the promise that Elf's childhood paradise will be created anew in her marriage as her husband recognizes Elf's right to love on her own conditions. In *Ensam* the melodramatic contrast of spaces makes clear that such a utopian home demands a new ethical sociability of the kind that Adriana Cavarero refers to as one of relational subjects. The liberating direction of Benedictsson's play is freedom *from* a destructive system, while in Leffler's and Agrell's plays it is a freedom *to* create a better system.

Through the melodramatic mimesis, Agrell and Leffler can dramatize what Benedictsson cannot with the sceptical realism of *Final*, namely, the foundational laws of an alternative space to the one shaped by bourgeois norms of decency and marriage of convenience. Toril Moi has found that the transition from the good everyday to the bad everyday is the great difference between Henrik Ibsen's early modern-breakthrough plays and his late plays. In his last five plays he investigates the various ways in which human life can become frozen, static, immobile, and meaningless. Emptiness and immobility are

connected to the "bad" everyday with a life dominated by complete stasis (320).[14] In the plays by Agrell, Benedictsson, and Leffler the bad everyday is the predominant condition of the protagonists' lives even in their plays of the early 1880s. The melodramatic construction of contrast and polarization of spaces of the bad everyday and utopian Gardens of Eden in Agrell's and Leffler's plays offers a way out of the state of living death. The melodramatic spatial mimesis provides the possibility to develop and give expression to Nora's dream of "the most wonderful", which Nora at the end of *A Doll's House* thinks is impossible (Ibsen) – that is, an intimate relationship built on the mutual exposure and reciprocity between two unique beings as the true home of the female self.

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CHAPTER 5

Feminism, Intimacy and Darwinian Time

The New Women of Elin Wägner

Cecilia Annell

Abstract

This chapter examines the relationship between feminist politics, Darwinian theory, and early-twentieth-century Swedish fiction and non-fiction prose. It investigates how Darwinian perspectives inform a debate about the 'Woman Question' that took place within Swedish feminist discourse around the turn of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the negotiation of issues relating to the domain of personal intimacy. Swedish women demanded civil rights, particularly the right to vote, and greater educational and vocational opportunities. At the same time, radical feminists of the period highlighted the urgent need to reform sexual morality and the legislation around marriage. Focusing on the writings of Ellen Key and Elin Wägner the chapter explores the strategic importance of historical thinking for the women's suffrage campaign and the differing ways in which these writers reconceptualized the present as a revolutionary moment. In a close reading of Elin Wägner's novel *Penwoman* (2009) [*Pennskaftet* 1910] that draws on Judith Butler's theories of linguistic performativity as well as recent scholarship on first-wave feminism in Scandinavia, I seek to demonstrate how notions of time and change, both in the Butlerian and in the Darwinian sense, obtain emancipatory potentials. I show how early Swedish feminists creatively repurposed contemporary scientific discourse for their own ends.

Keywords

1900 – women's emancipation – intimacy – darwinism – temporality – performativity – Ellen Key – Elin Wägner

At the end of the nineteenth century, Swedish women demanded civil rights, particularly the right to vote, along with greater educational and vocational opportunities. At the same time, radical feminists of the period highlighted the urgent need to reform sexual morality and the legislation around marriage.

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For many radical feminists, issues of intimacy – in the widest sense of interpersonal relationships, sexuality, and what might be called personal space – were thus crucial for women's emancipation and their vision of a better society overall. Their key demands included the need for reform of sexual morality, especially the double standard that held women to a different moral code from men. The problem of prostitution needed to be solved and the situation for single mothers needed to be improved. These questions were also taken up by the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sex Reform (*Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*), which was founded in Germany 1905 and affiliated with similar organizations across Europe and the United States. The League argued that the state should support single mothers and help with childrearing in order to enable all women to work, regardless of whether they were married. The League anchored its arguments scientifically, drawing on recent findings in demography, sociology, evolutionary theory, and, in particular, eugenics, and it campaigned for the rational management of reproduction, partly as a strategy to check what it saw as racial degeneracy but also as a means of remedying social problems such as poverty and alcoholism.[1]

In this article, I investigate how Darwinian perspectives inform a debate about the 'woman question' that took place within Swedish feminist discourse around the turn of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the negotiation of issues relating to the domain of personal intimacy. I examine the ways in which contemporary feminists were able to use the evolutionary concepts of time and change as an underpinning for their arguments. In a close reading of a Swedish novel written by an author active in the suffrage movement, I draw on Judith Butler's theory of performativity to demonstrate how notions of time and change obtain emancipatory potentials concerning issues of love, sexuality, morality, and female subjectivity.

I start by discussing the writer Ellen Key (1849–1926) as an example of a feminist who was inspired by evolutionary theory and eugenics. Thereafter, I examine a novel by the author Elin Wägner (1882–1949), in order to show how feminist discourse in Sweden shifted focus during the early years of the twentieth century with the advent of an organized suffragette movement that

1 From an early stage, there was a tension in eugenicist thinking between, on the one hand, a view of poverty and social misery as biologically determined effects of degeneration, and therefore impossible to remedy, and, on the other hand, the idea that social problems could be handled with political reforms, even if they were caused by degeneration. Eugenicist arguments were used both in conservative, deterministic ways and in radical ways: "reform eugenics." Ellen Key and the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sex Reform belonged to the latter. See Annell 70–73.

foregrounded the necessity of uniting all women. A leading radical voice in Swedish cultural life, Ellen Key had an international reputation, especially in Germany, where she undertook lecture tours in the early 1900s. In essays on education, childrearing, and the 'Woman Question', which were frequently polemical in nature, she took a stand against the church's influence on morality, often using science as the basis to argue for a "new morality."[2] Another significant feminist intellectual of this period was Elin Wägner, who was elected to the Swedish Academy in 1944. Wägner worked as a journalist and wrote short stories and novels as well as essays in which she dealt with pacifism and ecology. Key was one of the founders of *Mödraskyddsförbundet*, the Swedish section of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sex Reform, which Wägner later joined. While Key and Wägner were acquainted, they did not always agree on feminist issues. Thus, Key admonished Wägner, who was thirty years her junior, after the latter had complained, shortly after getting married, about the difficulty of combining work with marriage: "You, too, have been bitten by 'the Cause.' Think rather about your SPOUSE, I implore you" (quoted in Hackman 65).

Before I start discussing the works of Key and Wägner, I'd like to point to an interesting analogy between biological and social development, between Darwinian time and temporality in Judith Butler's sense. Time is fundamental to biological change. Nature is always creating new forms, individuals, and species out of already existing biological forms. For Darwin, biological development takes place across a vast temporal span as the result of a proliferating variation of individual characteristics from generation to generation. As Elizabeth Grosz observes in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (2005): "Darwin offers an account of the genesis of the new from the play of repetition and difference within the old, the generation of history, movement, and the dynamism of evolutionary change from the impetus and mobility of existing species" (19).

Time is also the most important ingredient in social change. In analogous fashion to the natural development, the social order changes over time. The gender order may seem stable and everlasting from the perspective of the present, but there are constant and repeated small changes in how people behave and speak that inevitably lead to changes in the social discourse. And language itself is inscribed in this temporal order. As gendered subjects, we are constituted in language as we are being called by our names, in Althusserian interpellation acts. "Hey, woman!", we are hailed, and when we turn around to answer, we are *always already* women, taking the subordinate place of woman in a

2 See Lindén; Ambjörnsson.

phallocentric symbolic or ideological order. On the other hand, Judith Butler has pointed to the performative possibility of resistance and change that lies in the temporality of language. Whenever one is addressed by name, one is also, paradoxically, given an opportunity for social existence and an invitation to perform differently when next reiterating a speech act.[3]

1 Ellen Key and Evolutionary Theory

Darwin's revelation in *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) of the evolutionary basis of human and animal life ushered in a veritable revolution in how time and change were conceptualized in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[4] The Christian understanding of history was based on the biblical account of Creation: God had created the universe in six days, with human beings only appearing on the sixth day.[5] As is well known, Darwin presented humanity as the result of an evolutionary process lasting hundreds of thousands of years. Darwinist theory thus gave birth to a new perception of history and historical change, which would prove extremely useful for feminists calling for radical changes to the social order.

In many ways, evolutionary thinking tended to buttress traditional cultural conceptions of the sexes. Darwin's followers used his theories to 'prove' women's inferiority to men, relegating women to a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder and thereby perpetuating structures that kept women in a state of subservience (Annell 62–64; Murphy 109). Darwin claimed that the history of natural selection and sexual selection had made men not only physically stronger but mentally superior to women as regards intellect, energy, and creativity. However, he did consider women superior in terms of intuition, perception, and imitative capacity, and attributed to them greater tenderness and selflessness than men. As he saw it, because many female characteristics were also present in 'lower' races, it made sense to describe women as belonging to a previous, more primitive stage of civilization. Women resembled both children and 'savages.' According to Darwin, women had not evolved beyond this earlier stage because their energy was needed for reproduction, which benefitted the

3 See Butler, *Excitable Speech* 1–41, and Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."
4 Several scientific and technological developments contributed to a new theorization of time in the nineteenth century, most importantly Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830–33), which presented geological evidence to confirm that the Earth was hundreds of thousands of years older than previous estimates (Murphy 11).
5 In the seventeenth century, Creation was even dated precisely to 4004 BC (Murphy 10).

whole 'race' (586–9). In human evolution, men and women represented innovation and tradition, respectively, for which reason women were the bearers of more primitive 'racial' predispositions (Annell 62–64).

In the wake of Darwinism, evolutionary theory became a transcultural point of reference for feminists all over Europe. Although science could be used to reinforce conceptions of women as inferiority, it could equally well provide evidence for the opposite, namely, women's superiority. Women's capacity for tenderness and love and their maternal traits could be seen not as a shortcoming, as so-called Social Darwinists liked to maintain, but as an ideal for humanity and an asset for society.[6] Most importantly, feminists saw in the notion of development a guarantee of women's liberation: the emancipated 'New Woman' was an evolutionary necessity whose emergence was inevitable.[7]

Ellen Key was one of many feminists who turned to Darwin in order to strengthen the argument for women's emancipation. As with other radical feminists at the time, her writing integrated evolutionary theory with the ideas of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God, and, with it, the possibility of true individual human freedom, made it possible to imagine a new future, one that featured a new kind of 'superhuman' being that Nietzsche called an *Übermensch*. For Key, this new being was synonymous with the New Woman or Woman of the Future whose personality was characterized by a uniting of opposites, an amalgamation of contradictory qualities which promised to overcome a Christian dualism that Key regarded as deeply destructive.[8]

According to Key, the hallmarks of a woman's individuality are her special capacity for love and a special relationship to *eros*. For her, *eros* is a divine element in human life and love is the new religion now that the old religion, Christianity, has revealed itself to be merely oppressive. Erotic life is connected to a higher sense of life, to spirituality, and also to sensuality, sexuality, and the continuation of the 'race'. *Eros*, Key proposes, is the basis for creativity: in

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6 Other feminists inspired by evolutionary discourse included the Austrian author Grete Meisel-Hess and the British authors Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Frances Swiney. See Annell 60–80, Felski 154–63, Pykett 154–57, Murphy 113n, and Repp. See also Elena Lindholm's essay on the Spanish author Carmen de Burgos in this volume. The emphasizing of feminine values has an obvious relevance to Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism. On "strategic essentialism," see Spivak.

7 "New Woman fiction" is an established concept above all in Anglo-Saxon cultural and literary studies, see for example Ardis, Pykett, Ledger, Richardson & Willis (ed.), and Jusová.

8 See Annell 52–59; Diethe. On Nietzsche's inversion of values as "transvaluation of all values," see Annell 53fn; Lindén 153–88; and Jusová 53–55.

the erotic encounter, men's and women's creative forces are released and validated. *Eros* has the power to change the world.

Key thus saw women as the embodiment of the new era, as the representatives of movement and change. However, because social constraints prevented women from developing fully in the present, Key imagined them largely in terms of the future. In her visionary essay "Framtidens kvinna" [The woman of the future; 898], she describes the woman of the future as a role model for humanity. An improved society should be built upon female qualities such as love and motherliness, and the smaller, private world of the home should expand and spread its values to the larger, public world.

For Key, it was vital that women retained their female individuality during this process. In another essay, *Missbrukad kvinnokraft* [Misused womanpower;1896], she argued that if women ventured into masculine areas in order to compete with men, they would endanger their female individuality. Instead of striving to be like men, women should gain influence in society *as women* and reform society according to feminine principles that privileged love and care (Annell 56–57). Key coined the term "social mother" to designate a woman's role in society. In this model, women's maternal identity was connected not to their biology but to their spiritual and social role, which had developed during centuries of caring for children. As Claudia Lindén observes, Key's "Social Mother" thus became a metaphor for women's larger political participation in society (Lindén 156).

In her critique of Christian dualism, Key strove to transcend the dichotomies of body and soul, and nature and culture.[9] Following Nietzsche, she viewed evolution as both biological and spiritual, a process of self-transcendence. In turn, sexuality is a means by which human beings transcend themselves in the production of successively 'exalted' human types:

> The human will is found to be a decisive factor in the production of the higher types in the world of animal and plant life. With what concerns our own race, the improvement of the type of man, the ennobling of the human race, the accidental still prevails in both exalted and lower forms. But civilisation should make man conscious of an end and responsible in all these spheres where up to the present he has acted only by impulse, without responsibility. In no respect has culture remained more backward than in those things which are decisive for the formation of a new and higher race of mankind.
>
> KEY, *Century* 4–5

9 See Annell 52–55; Lindén; Allen 159.

Darwinist thinking is here clearly redirected from the past to the future, from a striving to understand historical development and origins to a projection of an ideal onto the future: responsibility should replace impulsiveness. At the turn of the century, the ascription of teleological progress was a hallmark of eugenicist thinking, whose principal conviction was that society should improve the quality of the 'race'– as measured by the growth of a nation's population – through the practical application of contemporary theories of heredity. The bearers of desirable traits should be encouraged to procreate, while those regarded as "unfit" or "degenerate" should be discouraged or even prevented.[10] For Key, the most important issue is that men and women should make a responsible choice about the person with whom to have children, and she uses a Darwinian term for this choice: "love's selection" (*Love and Marriage* 217). The eugenicist influence can be detected in the way Key projects her Social Darwinist ideas on future generations.

The importance that Key placed on the erotic aspects of life led her to question traditional sexual morality and the institution of marriage. For her, marriage based on love is moral, whether or not it has been sanctified by the church, whereas marriage without love is immoral. This led her into conflict with liberal members of the women's movement, who insisted upon the forms of conventional morality.

Rooted in Christianity and its strict separation of body and soul, the liberal wing of the women's movement avoided the issue of sexuality when formulating its ideas about emancipation. Instead, it emphasized women's capacity for reason and their spiritual equality with men as well as their educational and vocational potential (Manns 86–88). Because it acknowledged that women, like men, had sexual urges, the biologistic nature of Darwinist discourse allowed feminists like Key to talk about the body and the various dimensions of intimacy, including female sexuality.[11] In the late nineteenth century, it was generally believed that a woman's sexuality, if she had one, could only be awakened by a man. By contrast, Key argued that a woman had a sexuality of her own, a claim she grounded in scientific thinking as well as in Nietzsche's writing. Both Key and Nietzsche were deeply critical of the way that society kept women in a state of ignorance about sexuality.[12]

10 See Annell; Bland 223; Allen; Repp.

11 See Annell 62–64; Lindén.

12 See Annell 58–59; Lindén 168–169.

2 Elin Wägner's *Penwoman*

Elin Wägner (1882–1949) may have shown less of an obvious interest in evolutionary theory than Ellen Key, but it is nonetheless clearly discernible in her writings. When the advocates of women's suffrage in Sweden began their campaign, she was twenty years old.[13] As they saw it, the time for action was now, and securing the vote would require the uniting of all women, liberals and radicals alike. Conflicts would have to be smoothed over.

In Wägner's novel *Penwoman* (2009) [Pennskaftet; 1910], women's emancipation is inscribed within a temporal dynamic that is deeply rooted in modernity. To be a New Woman, Wägner implies, is to be modern, up-to-the-minute. The novel thematizes modernity, in Zygmunt Bauman's sense, as the expression of a deliberate effort to change the existing order, towards the "new" (Bauman 10).

The novel contains several examples of the "Self-Supportive Educated Women" – teachers, doctors, and journalists – whom Wägner presents as the embodiment of a new social type. Her protagonist, Barbro Magnus, "Penwoman," works as a reporter for a daily newspaper, in which capacity she comes into contact with the suffrage movement as well as meeting princesses and proletarian women, the latter living in poverty and in some cases even driven to prostitution. Penwoman is a bold, outspoken young woman who is acutely aware of social injustice and expresses her solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.

The novel is narrated in a tone of dry irony. In focusing on the lives of active professional women and the daily work of the contemporary suffrage movement, it avoids the tragic dialectic that is a hallmark of Swedish dramas of the 1880s and novels of development of the 1890s, in which individual women strive to gain their freedom in the face of massive resistance from seemingly every quarter of society.[14] Although *Penwoman* also describes the reactionary discourse that prevailed at this time, Wägner's protagonist adopts a humorous and ironical attitude that often has the effect of disarming her adversaries.

Penwoman stays at a boarding-house whose lodgers include several conservative men and women. Following an animated discussion of women's suffrage

13 The Association for Women's Suffrage (*Föreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt*) was founded in 1902, changing its name to the National Association for Women's Suffrage (*Landsföreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt*) in 1903.

14 See Birgitta Lindh Estelle's article in this volume, which argues that, although the female authors of the so-called Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough were able to point to injustices in the contemporary society, they remained "homeless." On Swedish novels of development, see Annell and Järvstad.

at the dinner table, a young man named Tufve calls into question Penwoman's femininity:

> "No, it can't be easy for someone with such a pugnacious spirit to be a woman," he teased. "Tell me, Miss Penwoman," he said, squinting up at her, as she stood by the door, "Wouldn't you love to be a man?" Penwoman screwed up her left eye and pondered for a moment.
>
> "No, but wouldn't you?" she asked in turn. (30–31)

The satirical edge to Penwoman's witty reply points to the absurdity of masculine discursive privilege even as it imitates a masculine, seemingly universal, position of its own. Quoting his own words back at him and copying his body language by screwing up her eye, Penwoman turns her interlocutor's attack back upon himself. Her parodic imitation of the young man's condescending enquiry and body language makes an open challenge to his male authority.

The exchange invites analysis in terms of Judith Butler's theory of performativity.[15] The man's "Wouldn't you love to be a man?" is a performative speech act that implicitly communicates a hostile subtext: 'You are not a real woman.' In turn, Penwoman's reply, "No, but wouldn't you," performatively declares: 'You are not a real man either (for saying such grossly insulting things to a woman).' In questioning the notion of a 'real' woman and a 'real' man, their exchange challenges the gender dichotomy of phallogocentric discourse.

According to Butler, we are vulnerable to linguistic utterances because we are linguistically constituted as subjects in an Althusserian act of interpellation. In specific situations, however, a malicious or injurious speech act can offer individuals, even if they belong to a marginalized group, an opportunity to make an unexpected response and thereby exercise linguistic agency.[16] As Butler writes:

> One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain form for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus, the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response.
>
> *Excitable* 2

15 See Butler, *Gender*.

16 Butler, *Excitable* 1–41. Cf. Althusser 170–86.

What makes possible Penwoman's unexpected riposte to a misogynist speech act is the temporal character of language: the opportunity for the individual to say something else the next time. In a temporal perspective – in the reiteration of speech acts over time – the possibility of giving the 'wrong' answer, thereby queering the gender order, represents an emancipatory potential.

3 Questioning Gender Boundaries

The Swedish title of Wägner's novel is *Pennskaftet*, meaning pen-holder (i.e. the shaft to which the metal nib of a traditional dip pen is attached), which was a common slang term for women journalists in the early 1900s. Throughout the novel, Penwoman is represented by the pronoun "it" rather than "she" – a stylistic innovation that foregrounds the possibility of transcending the reductive dichotomy of gender. It is, we might say, queer *avant la lettre*.

Conventionally masculine and feminine attributes are likewise disrupted at a thematic level in the novel, as in the conversation between Penwoman and Mr Tufve quoted earlier as well as in the scene where Penwoman meets a gentleman who has come to a public meeting out of sheer curiosity about the suffrage movement. Penwoman encourages him to support the movement, telling him that "one has to keep up with the times" (150) and that women's suffrage is "awfully exciting" (150) because it is a novelty for which there is no historical precedent. After she walks away, Wägner relays the man's private thoughts:

> So that pretty little head concealed plans to transform the look of the whole world? She really did seem to have no thoughts of anything beyond this new and fascinating game. But what of women's mission in life, he thought, bewildered. When does a woman like that have time for loving, for us, for our joys and sorrows, our food and our socks? *Now admittedly, it is when men love that they most intently believe themselves destined to change the face of the earth, but surely it could not be the same for women?* (151, my italics)

Wägner inverts the sexual logic of Key's *eros* doctrine by presenting a man who thinks that men's capacity to love makes them want to change the world. The capacity for creative and transformative love that Key had portrayed as an exclusively feminine trait has here been reimagined as masculine.

4 Negotiations among Women

Penwoman soon finds herself enrolled in the women's suffrage movement, whose practical daily work is described in some detail: organizing group meetings, writing pamphlets, selling newspapers and brochures, holding public rallies, and talking to people with conservative views for whom the very idea of women in politics is unthinkable.

Within the movement there are also internal conflicts, mostly over issues of sexual morals. When an older comrade named Cecilia is nominated for election as member of the board, another character, Miss Adrian, objects on the grounds that her inclusion could compromise the movement's reputation. What she is referring to is the fact that Cecilia has had sexual relationships outside marriage. Despite Adrian's opposition, Cecilia is elected by an overwhelming majority.

In the character of Cecilia, Wägner represents the deleterious consequences for women of having sexual relationships before marriage. Cecilia has had an affair with a man who subsequently abandoned her, and she now finds it impossible to meet a new man. Socially stigmatized, she internalizes her disgrace to such an extent that she blames herself for her lover's shabby treatment. Emotionally, she remains in a permanent state of disappointment and entertains no hopes of ever finding love again in the future. As such, Cecilia is an example of a middle-class woman living under the yoke of the contemporary patriarchal discourse of morality and the double standard that tacitly condoned men having clandestine pre- and extra-marital sexual relations. What I find most interesting, however, is that Wägner juxtaposes Cecilia's situation with Penwoman's as a way of mirroring different positions with regard to how women in the early twentieth century chose to negotiate the issue of sexual morality.

In a discussion about premarital sexual relations and what having an apartment with a separate entrance of one's own might lead to, Penwoman and Cecilia represent different moral positions. According to Cecilia, a woman who gives herself to a man runs the risk of losing her self-esteem if he then leaves her. As she explains: "[W]e are not made of the same stuff as men, you know. For us, love is different: fraught with dire consequences" (86). Penwoman agrees that women take greater risks than men in relationships since it is they who can become pregnant, but she goes on to advance an alternative view of morality:

> All right, you mean if a man I had loved were to leave me and take with him the memory of my body. For that's what you're so afraid is going to

> happen to me, Cecilia, and there's no need to be so embarrassed about it. I'm not. That's what the new generation's like, you see. (86)

Although only ten years younger than Cecilia, Penwoman is very much part of a new generation. Wägner here uses a temporal construction to illuminate the workings of time in relation to emancipation. In the figure of Penwoman, she describes a new feminine identity as part of the new generation – young, fearless, and financially independent – that takes its freedom for granted, and even a degree of sexual freedom. Penwoman's youth is also a trump card in her interactions with those who hold conservative views because it makes her less susceptible to social condemnation. Her lack of experience and avoidance of disappointment in love become both a rhetorical tool for her idealism and an avenue to new perspectives (Annell 109). The dialogue between the two women continues as follows:

> "Women have not changed that much in the last ten years," said Cecilia, her cheeks flushed. "You think a person is who they wish they were, but you have no idea, have you, that this has to do with something mystical and inevitable in women's natures, which …"
>
> "You're wrong there," said Penwoman. "If the arguments for women's emancipation have taught me one thing, it's that there's nothing women have left behind them in their evolution that wasn't once called inevitable. Just think how many there must be, Kristin [Cecilia's maid] among them, who consider it one of the most inevitable things in women's nature to waste a whole day of our short lives grieving over a few rust-stained towels. You're as degenerate in Kristin's eyes, as I am in yours." (86)

Wägner here alludes to the eugenic discourse on degeneration as well as to Ellen Key's ideas about *eros*, according to which women possess a special capacity for love. Whereas Cecilia claims that love has "dire consequences" (86) for women because of their nature, Penwoman questions the very idea of there being something "mystical and inevitable" (86) in women's nature. With a view to elevating women's status, Ellen Key sublimized their qualities and their ability to love and care for others, which she proposed should be used to help formulate guidelines for the construction of a better society. Writing in 1911, Elin Wägner was able to relativize these ideas and emphasize how women's characteristics are time-bound rather than eternal, situational rather than essential. From an evolutionary perspective, what seems natural or essential in women is actually mutable, something that Penwoman herself is living proof of.

5 A New Morality

Penwoman is a novel about the suffrage movement, but it is also a novel about love. Penwoman's lover is a man named Dick. When they meet at the boarding house, he has already heard about her dubious morals, and during dinner at a restaurant he sets out to seduce her. After discovering his intentions, Penwoman engages him in a serious conversation about the New Woman and the new morality, which marks the beginning of their relationship. In fact, Dick's love for Penwoman leads him to rethink his moral convictions and he gradually develops into a New Man, someone who is supportive of the New Woman's efforts to change society, including sexual morality. He learns to navigate their relationship without seeing her as a 'fallen' woman.

Although Dick is changed as a result of love, this is not the case for many other characters in the novel. For Penwoman, it can seem as though gaining social acceptance for the new sexual morality is even more difficult than securing a hearing for women's demands for political rights. While Wägner in many respects depicts a kind of New Woman who can already be seen in the streets of Stockholm, there are other passages in *Penwoman* that locate her emancipation in the far distant future. In one scene, for example, Cecilia invites Penwoman to stay the night at her apartment. Penwoman declines on the grounds that it might harm her reputation at the boarding-house. However, she believes that *in the future* it will be possible for women to be open about their feelings and follow their own will without running the risk of societal condemnation: "We must be worldly, Cecilia, and help ourselves, if we are not to perish. Perhaps those who come after us will be able to steer a straighter course" (117).

In another scene, set in a suffrage meeting, a lively discussion takes place about the difficulty of securing sympathy and acceptance for the idea of female suffrage, at which point an activist named the General explains that she puts her own hopes in the women of the future: "Those that come after us will be greater than we" (130).[17] As can be seen, Wägner's characters conceive the process of emancipation as a movement forward in time; change is possible in a temporal, future perspective.

17 Cf. Mark 1:7: "And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me." See also Forsås-Scott's remarks on *Penwoman*.

6 Intimacy among Women

Where Ellen Key's *eros* doctrine had invested love with religious connotations, Wägner's *Penwoman* connects it to the struggle for suffrage itself. The novel likens the struggle to religion in several ways: the women describe themselves as Christian missionaries or apostles, and joining the cause of women's suffrage is compared to finding salvation. And in Penwoman's metaphorical description of the General – "she remained a cathedral" – Wägner presents one woman describing another in a manner that is charged with humour but also desire.

As scholars have already noted, the very first activists in the Swedish women's movement, which had been organized as the Fredrika Bremer Association (founded in 1884), had anchored their ideology of emancipation in a Lutheran intellectual tradition, and many of them remained active in the suffrage movement. Christianity was an obvious shared point of reference for suffrage campaigners at the turn of the century, but it also had a conservative side that could be repellent to modern, progressive feminists such as Wägner.[18] With characteristic irony, Wägner simultaneously inscribes herself in and distances herself from this Christian tradition. Yet the advance of secularization meant that she likely did not feel compelled to dissociate herself as stridently as Key had done from the Christian worldview shared by late-nineteenth-century liberal feminists. This made it possible for Wägner to depict characters whose relationship to Christianity was more relaxed and even light-hearted.

The feelings of fellowship among the women in the suffrage movement, which at times take on an ecstatic character, are imbued with powerful desires: a passion for the immediate goal of women's suffrage but also an erotic charge between the women themselves that serves as a driving force in their long and protracted political struggle. It is desire that lifts Cecilia out of her apathetic state, lying like a "horse who has collapsed in front of his load" (17), in order to join the movement.

Desire is also expressed in the novel as the form of a tenderness between Cecilia and Penwoman. They have an intimate friendship, listening to each other's sorrows and pains and having open-minded discussions about their differing views. (The conversation quoted above is a case in point.) When Penwoman sits down to write an article for the movement's newspaper, she is suddenly struck by doubt, only to be buoyed up again by a feeling of community:

18 Although Wägner was herself a Christian, she was more interested in mysticism than the Lutheran tradition and later joined the Quakers (Annell 118).

> Her heart began to beat hard; she was suddenly acutely aware of all those who were with her, sharing her hopes and dreams, maybe without knowing it; she became but a pinprick in a vast multitude, and for a brief moment a great horizon opened up to her, and light shone on the road as it climbed and wound its way to its distant destination. She took up the pen, the words seemed to come trooping up to the tones of a celebration march; with a shiver of joy she felt a flowing sensation run like rivers of fire through her right hand and down into the pen. When she reached the signature, she rose suddenly, went over to Cecilia and burrowed her hot head into a fold of her dressing gown. (79–80)

In this passage, Wägner fuses Penwoman's political desire to secure the vote for women with a personal desire to help her community, foregrounding the way in which the act of writing is accompanied by bodily sensations of arousal. Indeed, in the final sentence, Wägner explicitly connects the excitement of writing to feelings of intimacy between the two women. As Helena Forsås Scott notes, the erotic connotations of the scene are unmistakable (163–64).

At the end of the novel, Cecilia gives Penwoman an old pendant with opals set in gold. In describing it as "a broken link, to which no link can be fastened" (211), she is referring to the fact that she will not have children, in contrast to Penwoman, who is now planning her own wedding with Dick. After Cecilia has left, Penwoman, holding the pendant to her heart, speaks what will be her last words in the novel: "My heart's beloved." To whom are these words addressed – Dick, an unborn child, or Cecilia? The novel provides no answer.[19]

7 Conclusion: The Emancipatory Potential of Intimacy, Desire, and Humour

As I have shown, Wägner's recipe for successful – or, at least, meaningful – political struggle includes desire, humour, and intimacy.[20] Above all, it involves trusting in what the future holds. In a temporal perspective, the reiteration of speech acts and other acts provides a possibility of giving the 'wrong' answer to a provocative or injurious address. This might bring about a change in the gender order and thus represents an emancipatory potential.

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19 This has also been pointed out by Forsås-Scott (164).

20 The struggle for women's suffrage was only concluded in 1919, when Swedish women gained the vote; the action of Wägner's novel is set before 1910.

The novel describes an attitude of resistance in which humour and desire realize a political potential in the struggle for women's rights and in the dismantling of moral double standards concerning matters of intimacy. Wägner draws on Key's evolutionary and Nietzschean ethics while also deviating from Key's ideas in key respects. In depicting happy premarital relationships that accord with Key's *eros* doctrine, Wägner relocates Key's "woman of the future" in the present.

Where Key engages with evolutionary and eugenic discourses on women, Wägner exploits the performative possibilities inherent in language in order to offer new answers to old questions. In her novel, even the fundamental concept of evolution is itself subject to new and startling reinterpretations, as when Penwoman asserts that societal conceptions of women's nature change during the course of evolution and that the notion of degeneracy is a social construction which is dependent on the speaker's own perspective.

For Wägner, it was possible to question the rigid binaries of gender and even to universalize certain aspects of female subjectivity, but Key's 'particularizing' writings about women, what might be called her 'strategic essentialism', ought in fact to be seen as a condition for this, rather than as an incompatible strategy. Although Key's opponents were deeply influenced by either Christianity or Social Darwinism, she used the same premises when arguing against the latter, reaching opposite conclusions from theirs about what women's nature meant for their social status and role in society. Wägner, for her part, sought to disarm the enemy with humour, irony, and a dash of pragmatism – the blithe optimism of youth. Let's give it a try at least, and if it doesn't work now, who knows, it might just work next time!

I would like to thank Åke Wiberg's Foundation for their research grant which enabled me to write this article.

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CHAPTER 6

Failing Intimacy in Saimi Öhrlund's 1910s' Novels

Elsi Hyttinen

Abstract

In this chapter, I discuss two novels by Saimi Öhrlund (1889–1959) that depict young lower-class women failing in heterosexual relationships. Öhrlund is one of the forgotten minor authors on the field of Finnish literature, and both novels discussed here, *Mustat varjot* [Black shadows 1913] and *Yölepakko* [Night-time bat 1915] are self-published. In the novels, the heterosexual couple is a nexus of a number of social practices that concern how life in society should be organised. The couple form attaches these tiny novels to the larger questions of national belonging and viable humanity in 1910s Finland. To make sense of these scenes of unbelonging, the chapter draws from queer theoreticians Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's (2000) concept of national heterosexuality and Sara Ahmed's (2004) 'queer feelings' arising from bodily discomfort with norms. In Öhrlund's novels, the question of national belonging is addressed as a question of qualifying as the female component of the heterosexual couple. I argue that Öhrlund's novels should be read as depicting class: not as a narrative of coming-to-consciousness or finding your peers, but class at the level of affective experience. The women try to inhabit the national heterosexual matrix but fail to experience the intimacy the matrix assumes as its prepolitical core.

Keywords

Finnish literature – Saimi Öhrlund – national heterosexuality – intimacy – 1910s – working-class women

> He was not at all aware of Alli's fine, delicate inner life. He just longed for the time he could take Alli home as his wife, and he

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> assumed she thought the same. He had no idea tears had long ago washed such dreams from her heart.[1]
>
> ÖHRLUND, *Yölepakko* 8

In the 1910s, Saimi Öhrlund wrote two novels that depict young lower-class women failing in heterosexual relationships. They fail because their inner life does not fit what is expected of them. I find these novels intriguing because nothing in the novels suggests the heroines would not be sexually interested in men, and still, they fail in heterosexuality. In the novels, the heterosexual couple is a nexus of several social practices, expectations, and habits, most of them having nothing to do with sexuality and everything to do with how life in society should be organized. The couple form attaches these tiny novels to the larger questions of national belonging and viable humanity in 1910s Finland, the decade stretching from the installation of Finland's first modern parliament in 1907 to the country's declaration of independence in 1917. To make sense of these scenes of unbelonging, I will in this chapter be drawing on queer theoreticians Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's concept of national heterosexuality and Sara Ahmed's "queer feelings" arising from bodily discomfort with norms.

Berlant and Warner, writing about the US political culture a hundred years after Öhrlund published her novels, use the concept of *national heterosexuality* to discuss how national cultures presume heterosexuality: not just as a sexual preference but as a cultural matrix, the constituent parts of which get their legitimation through the ideology of national heterosexuality. The category of heterosexuality, Berlant and Warner argue, "consolidates as a sexuality widely differing practices, norms, and institutions" (Berlant and Warner 316). To succeed, this process relies on the idea of intimacy. "Intimate life is the endlessly cited elsewhere of political public discourse" (Berlant and Warner 317), something presented as immediately given that different types of politics claim to flow from and represent. Ahmed shares this understanding: "One does not 'do' heterosexuality simply through who one does or does not have sex with. Heterosexuality as a script for an ideal life makes much stronger claims. It is assumed that all arrangements will follow from the arrangement of the couple: man/woman" (Ahmed 147).

1 "Ei hänellä ollut tietoisuutta Allin hienosta, herkästä sielunelämästä. Hän vain toivoi aikaa milloin saisi Allin vaimonaan kotiinsa viedä ja sellaisia toivomuksia hän luuli Allillakin olevan." All translations of quotations in the chapter are mine.

Berlant refers to Jürgen Habermas' analysis of the formation of the bourgeois public sphere in the nineteenth century. The idea of public opinion and the sphere for communicating it necessitates an opposite, the private, intimate sphere of domesticity, where one prepares for one's critical function as a member of the public (Berlant 3–4). In the US today, Berlant and Wagner claim that the family trope serves to separate "aspirations of national belonging from the critical culture of the public sphere and from political citizenship" (Berlant and Warner 314). Similarly, in Öhrlund's novels, the question of national belonging is addressed as a question of having a certain kind of life, of qualifying as the female component of the heterosexual couple, not in critical, explicitly political terms.

Saimi Öhrlund is a difficult figure to place in the early twentieth-century Finnish literary field. First, she was self-published. During the era, the Finnish cultural field was divided in two in an unprecedented way. There was the hegemonic national-bourgeois field, and the emerging working-class culture with its own newspapers, amateur and semi-professional theatres, writers, and intellectuals. Even publishing houses were understood as committed to one side or the other. That Öhrlund was not approved by the gatekeepers on either side renders her without an obvious institutional context. The world she describes is that of women from poor backgrounds working to sustain themselves, but then again, theirs is not a world of industrial spaces but small privately owned barber shops – and the alternative realities of theatre stages or concert halls. An article published in 1924 in *Työväen kalenteri* [Workers' calendar] mentions Öhrlund as a working-class author. In my opinion, that she depicted the life of lower-class women combined with the judgement of her contemporaries would give enough reason for locating her on the continuum of working-class literature. However, here looms the second difficulty: as of the 1930s, if not earlier, the term "working-class literature" has had a very specific meaning in the Finnish context, referring not just to any literature produced or consumed by the working class, but to literature conveying class awareness, often dubbed as the authentic working-class worldview (Hyttinen and Launis). Raoul Palmgren, whose career as a critic and scholar lasted from the 1930s to the 1980s, was a particularly prominent theoretician of working-class literature, and his views were rather prescriptive in this respect. Öhrlund's novels do not conform to any political narrative of class consciousness, and thus fall outside his definition of working-class literature. Perhaps for this reason, Palmgren does not mention Öhrlund in his two-volume seminal work on Finnish pre-independence working-class literature *Joukkosydän I–II* [Collective heart I–II], although his describing the lives and works of as many as 168 writers active in the working-class field 1900–1917 suggests exhaustiveness. As Palmgren's was the first thorough study of pre-independence working-class literature in Finland, his choices as to who

counts as a working-class author have affected, consciously or unconsciously, the understanding of that field of many subsequent researchers.

Here, however, I propose reading Saimi Öhrlund's novels as depicting class: not as a narrative of coming-to-consciousness or finding your peers, but class at the level of affective experience. In the 1910s, Finland was at what Viola Parente-Čapková, referring to Miroslav Hroch and Michael Branch, calls "the final stage" of nationalism's development in small European nations. The era was characterized by "mass awareness of national issues" and led to the country's declaration of independence (Parente-Čapková 12). In Öhrlund's novels, questions of national belonging are negotiated through the heterosexual couple: it is this presumed intimate core of the national order that the female protagonists are incapable of entering. At the very innermost private area of domesticity, where one is supposed to be one's most natural self, they freeze. Ahmed writes about "queer feelings" one experiences when not fitting the heterosexual norm, and I suggest this is exactly what is happening to Öhrlund's heroines. They do not fit in. When Öhrlund's heroines fail to feel at ease with the cultural script of heterosexual intimacy, two things happen: it becomes evident that the place is designed for other kinds of women, and that their not fitting in causes them discomfort. "Discomfort is not simply a choice or a decision – 'I feel uncomfortable about this or that' – but an effect of bodies inhabiting spaces that do not take or 'extend' their shape" (Ahmed 152).

The way Berlant and Warner understand heterosexual intimacy, it is not the pre-political sphere of unmediated personhood it presents itself to be. On the contrary, only people befitting the good life script claimed to naturally flow from that core would ever experience it that way. Öhrlund's women, lacking the money, the upbringing, the education, the cultural capital, the wardrobe, and a few other things the script requires, do not really stand a chance.

1 Trapped in What Life Ought to Be

The first of the two novels discussed here, *Mustat varjot* [Black shadows; 1913], tells the story of Laina, following her trajectory from an amateur actress to a barber and, finally, to 'the newspaper industry' – though the nature of her occupation there is never detailed, nor her actual work described.

In early twentieth-century Finnish literature, the actress figure cuts across different, even contradictory understandings of the nature of theatrical mimesis: at one end, there is the view that an actor needs to be entirely void of a self in order to represent dramatic characters and their feelings, at the other, the actor as a creative artist expressing their inner 'soul': add to this gender

ideology that easily equates women's wilful public visibility with prostitution.[2] Quite often, placing the female protagonist on stage is a device for questioning whose scripts women must rely on for social legibility. Here, the figure is evoked for radically different purposes. The trope of acting in Öhrlund's oeuvre is connected to the question of working-class protagonists' possibilities for self-expression and, more precisely, the affirmation of them having a self to be expressed. In this volume, Birgitta Lindh Estelle uses Adriana Cavarero's concept of a "narratable self" to refer to what one is as a unique being, as opposed to what one is in terms of social roles. Women historically lack public scenes for exposing their narratable self and, consequently, opportunities to get affirmation for its existence. Lindh Estelle identifies an emancipatory drive in literature representing relations "in which the 'narratable selves' of female characters are exposed and they are met as unique human beings" (80). The way acting is depicted in these novels, the theatre stage seems like one of the rare places the protagonists can access where they have the chance, paradoxically, by taking on roles, to present themselves as having a private, unique self, a self that can be expressed in the arts and be publicly recognized.

That the protagonist should only be able to experience that they are in command of their own existence on stage is highly relevant from the point of view of how the novel depicts class as an affective experience. What the framework of national heterosexuality would suggest as the area for experiencing unmediated presence with oneself, the private sphere, is revealed in *Mustat varjot* as a space requiring constant efforts to fit in, and returning constant hurt and disappointments to the one who fails in trying to do so. The novel offers no emancipatory solution to the dilemma of the working-class woman. Rather, it concentrates on following with intensity how one is affected when forced time and again to experience without any alternative how the space of the national subject is not carved out to fit their contours.

In the novel, the question of national belonging is evoked through the trope of the heterosexual couple–or rather, one should be using the plural here. *Mustat varjot* depicts Laina's relationship to three men and approaches heterosexual couplehood from the perspective of passing: passing as a term refers to mimicking something one is not in such a way that it becomes almost impossible to tell one is pretending. "The mark of passing successfully is the lack of a mark of passing, of a signifier of some difference from what one seems to be"

2 For a thorough discussion of the various aspects of theatrical mimesis, see Viola Parente-Čapková, 132–135.

(Tyler 212). If one fails to pass as the female counterpart of the couple, one also fails to secure one's status as a worthy human being.

In a kind of preamble, Laina, then an aspiring actress, is hurt by an older actor. They have some sort of intimate friendship which involves a lot of kissing, a lot of crying on Laina's part, and a lot of comforting and wiping the tears by the man. One day, after another such scene in the theatre's dressing room, they decide to go for a walk on a hill on the outskirts of the town. Laina is happy and babbles about how she loves the man "the way one loves the Sun"[3] (Öhrlund, *Mustat varjot* 10), how she feels special that he prefers her company over everybody else's, and that she knows he knows she can achieve things in life. The man answers with a question that shatters the spell: "Laina, and what will *you* give *me*?" (11).[4] Both understand the question to be about sex, and Laina refuses. They walk back in silence, Laina thinking about her feelings and what she should say to him, until the man abruptly bids his farewell and enters a house by the streetside. "Feelings of surprise and pain arose from her chest like a silent scream to her lips, disappearing into a drop of reddish blood lingering on them" (14).[5]

Here, the man first refuses the trust Laina bestows on him, expressing only carnal interest, and then she gets quite literally shut out from his sphere of interest. Spatial exclusion is felt as physical pain. Later, she learns that the man is engaged to be married to another woman. She decides to leave the town, but before that, she takes on one more role and performs with remarkable success. In this first of her three formative relationships, she gets from the theatre audience what she fails to get from the man: an affirmation that she is a unique person worth of praise and admiration.

That a working-class woman seventeen years of age would have this kind of access to the theatre stage might sound unrealistic. However, as Mikko-Olavi Seppälä's meticulous studies in Finnish theatre history show, amateur theatre groups flourished all over the country during the era, and especially in Helsinki and Tampere workers' theatres were appreciated and regarded as offering artistically ambitious performances. Besides that, the boundaries between amateur and professional theatre were fluid, and workers' organizations hired professional directors, theatre pedagogues, and actors to work with the amateur ensembles (Seppälä 30). However, as the melodrama scholar Linda Williams has argued, realist effects often operate in the service of melodramatic affect

3 "Rakastan sinua kuin rakastetaan aurinkoa …".

4 "Laina! – ja mitä *sinä* annat *minulle*? –".

5 "Hämmästys ja tuska nousivat äänettömän huudon tavoin rinnasta, kohosivat huulille ja häipyivät siinä punertavaan veripisaraan."

(Williams 42). Here, the theatre serves as a context in which Laina can display her inner self and get confirmation of its existence. The inner soul revealed this way becomes a horizon against which to measure the violence the expectations and judgements of others confer upon her.

The real drama of passing begins when Laina moves to Helsinki and starts working in a barbershop. One day, two young students enter, one of whom she finds attractive. Later, she calls the man – Kaarlo – on the phone, making him guess who is calling, not wanting to reveal her identity. He guesses at one of his female acquaintances. Laina affirms and asks if the man will come to the seafront for a walk with her that night. In the evening, she arranges herself on a bench at the seaside, observing the man waiting in vain for his date to show up. They start chatting, and the man recognizes her from the barber shop. He also recognizes that she is attractive and asks to walk her home.

Laina, thus, has set the scene for the man to meet with a woman and then tries to assume the place of that woman. She does not literally pass as this other woman; she does not claim to be her. But she takes the place the man was reserving for her, as someone to walk by his side. Her success in passing as a viable companion for him is negotiated in spatial terms. Laina wants to walk where the respected citizens walk, the park avenues of the city centre. The man suggests they take a quieter side street. Laina interprets his suggestion as a signal of his not wanting to be seen with a lower-class woman: “This insult made her flush out of shame.”[6] (Öhrlund, *Mustat varjot* 28) To compensate for the hurt, Laina chooses the parkway anyway, and the man follows, but “he blushed every time he saw somebody he knew. Laina noticed that and her bitterness grew stronger, not towards him but towards her own wretched fate (28).”[7] This conforms with Ahmed’s understanding of how shame works: “I see myself as if I were this other. My failure before this other hence is profoundly a failure of myself to myself. In shame, I expose myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other” (Ahmed 106). Laina cannot feel intimacy with the man. She cannot sink into the situation she is in with him at that very moment. That possibility is foreclosed by the judging gazes: the strangers’, his, her own. She cannot concentrate on him, just his real or imagined reactions at being seen with her. What is at stake here is not really their mutual feelings: it’s not about whether he is interested in her or not. What gets negotiated in this scene is whether she qualifies as a person to be seen with. She reads his face and the

6 “Laina sävähti tuosta loukkauksesta punaiseksi hiusmartoaan myöten.”

7 “[hän] punastui korviaan myöten, kun joku tuttava sattui tulemaan vastaan. Laina huomasi sen ja suuremmaksi kasvoi hänen katkeruutensa, ei tuota nuorukaista, vaan omaa kurjaa kohtaloaan kohtaan.”

faces of the people they meet as a judgement of this, and their outside gaze merges with the gaze she directs at herself.

Despite this awkward start, they become a couple, but the norms Laina must obey to pass feel suffocating to her.

> Laina thinks about her life. Thinks and looks at it as if from the outside. Sees herself as the most insignificant of insignificant creatures, imagines herself getting married to Kaarlo, then children, and Laina sees how those walls of home would close out all outside world from her reach, even a step outside would bring about imbalance. Is that what her life would be like? – The idea felt suffocating and Laina cannot think about it further. [8]
>
> ÖHRLUND, *Mustat varjot* 62

To escape the suffocating contours of life as Kaarlo's partner, Laina tries to return to the theatre. But to no avail: Kaarlo's gaze follows her there, his matrix for good life distorting what the stage once meant for Laina. Kaarlo is faintly supportive of Laina's aspirations to revive her theatrical career, but only because of the social capital it might bestow on her. Again, the judgement of others for their performance as the heterosexual couple is evoked:

> Kaarlo cannot sense the excitement Laina feels; if anything, he is repulsed by the idea of the stage, he only agrees because of the change in her status theatre would bring. It … would be shameful if people knew her as one of them [barbers], in that respect even being an actress would be an upgrade.[9] (54)

Laina's attempts at fitting in fail repeatedly. The novel's title, *Mustat varjot*, 'Black shadows', has prepared the reader for this: all happiness fading, Laina feels trapped, and the little intimacy there had been between her and Kaarlo vanishes. Finally, she realizes the only thing she can do to fix their couple is

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8 "Laina ajattelee omaa elämäänsä. Ajattelee ja katselee sitä syrjäisenä. Näkee itsensä niin vähäisen vähäisenä, kuvittelee olevansa naimisissa Kaarlon kanssa, sitten lapsia, ja Laina näkee mitenkä nuo kodin seinät sulkevat häneltä kaiken maailman, askelkin ulkopuolelle otettuna saattaisi häiriötä aikaan. Sellainenko tulisi olemaan hänenkin elämänsä? – Se tuntui niin tukehduttavan ja Laina ei jaksa sitä enempää miettiä."

9 "Ei Kaarlo voi tuntea sitä innostusta, jota Lainassa on, enemmän tuntee hän vastenmielisyyttä näyttämöä kohtaan, mutta vain sksi hän suostuu, että Lainan työ-ala muuttuisi.

… tuntuisihan se alentavalta, jos Laina *sillä* työ nimellä [sic] olisi tunnettu, olisihan se näyttelijäkin parempi."

to replace herself. Even if one day she could pass so well she no longer feared the gazes of others, the inner sense of unworthiness would remain. She knows Kaarlo has had a romance on the side with a woman named Hely, and she goes to the woman's place to convince her to get together with Kaarlo. While there, she muses once more:

> Why was she unable to take life coolly, enjoy what she can and suffer whatever setbacks would occur. Was not that what people do? Did they suffer? Suffer like Laina? Why would she, Laina, not be able to be a mother of three, carry baskets filled with groceries from the market, sew swaddling clothes, celebrate christenings and smile at the small one, rejoicing motherhood. Why couldn't she, Laina, be that way, everybody else was. There, at Hely's apartment, she feels doubly unhappy.[10] (67–68)

Not only is she giving up the relationship with Kaarlo, but she is also giving up the lot. She did not fit the role of the spouse, and now she is stepping out, letting Hely try instead. The structures remain, only the people trying to pass as their subjects change.

The storyline with the third man takes up only five pages almost at the end of the novel and functions as a recapitulation of the novel's central theme, Laina's quest for acknowledgement for who she is, not what she is. After leaving Kaarlo, she floats about until meeting an artist. Only one discussion taking place between them is depicted. They are at the artist's studio, where the man praises her beauty. Laina asks if he is married. He is, with a son. He tries to caress her, but "[d]isgusted Laina removed his hands from around her and backs towards the door, her face deep red with shame" (74).[11] The man says he worships women. Laina retorts she despises men who only love women *as* women:

> – Don't you understand that *I* don't want it! She hisses in anger. –
> I know I would lose all my human worth.
> – Quite the contrary!

10 "Miksi ei hänkin voisi kylmästi elämää ottaa, nauttia elämästä sen minkä voi ja voimakkaasti kärsiä kaikki vastoinkäymiset. Niinhän ne kaikki ihmiset tekivät. Kärsivätkö nekin? Kärsivätkö niinkuin Laina? Miksi ei hänkin, Laina voisi olla kolmen lapsen äiti, kantaa torilta vasut täynnä ruokavalmisteita, ommella kapalovöitä, viettää ristiäisiä ja hymyillä pienokaiselle ja nauttia äidin onnesta. Miksi ei hänkin, Laina voisi niin olla, niinhän ne kaikki toisetkin. Siellä Helyn luona tuntee Laina itsensä kaksinkerroin onnettomaksi."

11 "Inhoten irrottaa Laina itsensä niistä ja peräytyy ovelle, kasvoillaan tumma häpeän puna."

> Laina sits down in a springy rattan chair, drums the side of the table with her fingers, and a shadow of hurt self-awareness lingers on her face.
> – I'm guessing I'm no longer welcome here?
> – You're not!
> Laina is bewildered at hearing such a firm negative answer. Her most holy feelings are thus torn apart without any mercy; they must die. … Is that how life was, and people? Why could she not just live on like people, why does she deviate?[12] (75)

The novel ends with Laina returning to the seaside where she first met Kaarlo and began the long quest to pass as his viable heterosexual companion. She sees no other solution than to take her own life. However, as she sits on a stone musing over her life in the darkness, she has an epiphany. "Now she feels clearly that Kaarlo was not for her. Those are human pleasures, those. As for herself, Laina feels a higher mission awaits."[13] (82–83) We never learn what this higher mission is, as this scene takes place on the last spread of the book. Much like many other turn-of-the-century women authors, Öhrlund relies on what Rachel Blau DuPlessis has identified as writing beyond the ending: not choosing to end a woman's story in death or marriage but suggesting there might be other possibilities available for women in the unwritten future (DuPlessis 4).

2 Adultery as an Escape Attempt

Yölepakko [Night-time bat 1915] has a similar initial setting to *Mustat varjot*: a lower-class artistically talented woman, an upper-class man, and a relationship that feels like a trap. However, the solution to the problem of a working-class woman not fitting the national heterosexual script is much grimmer than

12 "– Ettekö ymmärrä, että *minä* en tahdo! – sävähtää hän suuttuneena.– Tiedän, että kadottaisin silloin kaikki ihmisyyteni.
– Päinvastoin.Laina istahtaa joustavaan korituoliin, näpsyttelee sormillaan pöydänsyrjää ja loukattu itsetietoisuuden varjo lepää hänen kasvoillaan.– Nyt kai minä en enää saa tulla tänne?.
– Ette!Laina hämmästyy kuullessaan niin jyrkän kiellon. Säälimättä revitään hänen pyhimmät tunteensa ei vähintäkään armoa, niiden täytyy kuolla. … Sellaistako on sitten elämä, sellaisiako ihmiset? Miksi ei hänkään voi ihmisten tavoin elellä, miksi hän sitten poikkeaa syrjään?".

13 "Nyt tuntee Laina niin selvään, että Kaarlo ei ole häntä varten. Ne ovat ihmisen riemuja ne. Laina tuntee itsellään olevan suuremman tehtävän."

in the previous novel. At the beginning of this novel, the female protagonist is an aspiring musician and a composer. What follows is a story of how her self becomes fractured, distorted, and eventually annihilated. The price for fitting in is high: Only when there is no will or agency left in her a space opens for her to settle.

The novel begins with a scene of unhappiness. The heroine, Alli, leans on her piano, thinking that had she known how much pain she would feel loving Arvi, she would have fled.

> Bitter pearls of tears had taken away all the happiness of love she had tried to preserve in her heart. It had disappeared gradually, without her noticing. And now, however much she would have wanted to give him love, only empty, soulless tolerance was left. Instead, she had started to feel pity and an obligation to keep her word out of honour. She had, after all, when their love was still fresh, promised to be faithful forever after.[14]
>
> ÖHRLUND, *Yölepakko* 6

Arvi enters, and Alli does not know whether she should smile at him or not. Would it be better to return his friendliness with warmth, or would such gestures be pretentious, dishonest? She lets him hold her hand but averts her eyes. The narrator leaves Alli's thoughts for a moment and focuses on what Arvi is feeling:

> Arvi does, admittedly, feel guilty. He was not entirely innocent for Alli's misery. Back at home, mother, brother, and sisters had so wanted him, Arvi, to socialize with somebody his equal, not fix his eyes on some poor girl. But he would not exchange Alli for the owner of ten tenement buildings. … He did not know that those demands had already poisoned the bright-glassed chalice of their happiness.[15] (7–8)

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14 "Katkerat kyynelhelmet olivat sydämestä vieneet mukanaan sen rakkauden onnen, jota hän oli koettanut säilyttää. Se oli ajautunut sieltä hiljaa, huomaamatta. Kun sitä sitten olisi tahtonut tuolle toiselle lahjoittaa, niin olikin jäljellä vain tyhjää, sielutonta suvaitsevaisuutta. Tilalle oli alkanuut hiipiä sääliväisyys ja kunniantunto lupauksensa pitämisestä. Olihan hän silloin rakkautensa huumauksessa luvannut Arville olevansa uskollinen elämänsä iltaan asti."

15 "Kuitenkin tuntee Arvi itsensä syylliseksi. Eipä hän kokonaan viaton ollut Alllin kärsimyksien suhteen. Siellä kotona olivat äiti, veli ja sisaret, jotka olisivat tahtoneet, että hän, Arvi, vertaistensa kanssa seurustelisi eikä johonkin köyhään tyttöön silmiään jättäisi. Mutta hän ei olisi Alli kymmenenkään 'kivimuurin' omistajattareen vaihtanut. … Ei hän tietänyt sitä, että nuo vaatimukset olivat jo ehtineet myrkyttää heidän onnensa heleälasisen maljan."

Their lack of shared understanding becomes ever clearer as the scene unfolds further: Arvi concludes that his relatives' judgements cannot have hurt Alli much, nor the fact that he had not defended her, for he had apologized straight after. He goes on to muse on Alli's gifts as a musician, "He could use them to elevate her social standing". Even though in his thoughts he swears unfaltering love, he also recognizes Alli as unfit to be his companion. But this could be overcome, he could help her raise the class ladder, and without concern he dreams about their future together. However, Arvi is badly mistaken. The judgement of his family combined with the way he views her as needing social elevation has suffocated her feelings.

> They had won. ... What did she care if Arvi loved her, what satisfaction would that give her, if her own feelings would be left aside. ...Warmth whispering silently attempts to wrap those two in its grey, misty nets, but it cannot enter Alli's heart. The heart is forever closed from Arvi.[16] (10–11)

What Alli feels inside her is a mismatch for the position she is trying to inhabit. This time, too, the inner reality of the heroine is communicated to the reader through art. Alli gives a debut concert of her own compositions. The audience is excited, and as they walk out, they whisper about the uniqueness of the experience. Aili has revealed her inner self in the music, but Arvi fails to receive the message. Alli notices he claps, smiles, and rejoices more than she does at the end of the concert, but for him, the concert is a successful performance. For her, it is about baring her soul. After the concert, a stranger appears in the backroom, bringing a bouquet of flowers with a card. Alli interprets the flowers as communicating that her message has been received, her selfhood recognized, in a much different way than Arvi ever could, or would, recognize it. In the next chapter, Alli is at the man's place, committing adultery for the first time.

Adultery becomes Alli's method for fleeing the expectations of the heterosexual intimacy she cannot feel. The relationship with Arvi becomes one of pure passing: "When Arvi is gone, she feels like the curtain has been dropped – and only then she feels like her true self" (29).[17] In a melodramatic vein, however

16 "*Ne* olivat kuitenkin voittaneet. ... Mitäpä siitä, jos Arvi häntä rakastaisikin, mitäpä tyydytystä hänelle siitä olisi, kun omat tunteensa jäisivät sivuun koskemattomiksi. ... Hiljaa kuiskiva lämpö liihottelee alkaen hymyillen kietoa noita kahta harmaan, utuisen verkkonsa sisään, mutta Allin sydämeen se vain ei pääse. Se on Arvilta ikuisesti suljettu."

17 "Kun Arvi on mennyt, tuntuu siltä kuin esirippu olisi laskenut – ja vasta sitten tuntee Alli olevansa oikea minänsä."

much she seeks the company of other men, she remains, in her eyes and in the eyes of the narrator, innocent. It is she who has been wronged, and all her misery flows from that original scene of being judged as unfit as Arvi's companion. She does feel shame, but even then, she perceives it as pain inflicted on her by him. Still, she does not leave him, perhaps because this is a story about the impossibility of the heterosexual pact, not about its alternatives.

Three quarters into the book, "the worst Alli has been fearing"[18] happens: Arvi proposes to her (57). That this should happen so late in the story, after Alli has been with several other men and only acted as if she loved him, highlights again how their matrices for interpreting reality differ fundamentally. They share no real intimacy; there is no space for them to appear to each other as they are. The wedding launches a downward spiral. After three months of marriage, Alli feels more trapped than ever before.

> Why had she, Alli, been afraid of breaking her promises. It would have been just a tiny atom among the many crimes committed in the world every day. And now, now she had committed a crime against herself saving the other, protecting, sheltering him from disappointment.[19] (60)

Still, she cannot bring herself to talk to Arvi. Instead, they decide she should take some time to rest and travel to the countryside. Alli chooses not to return and disappears for two years.

The two years are covered in two pages, describing in sweeping gestures her life abroad and in the homeland, playing the piano in cheap coffeehouses for her living until she becomes too unfit even for that, and how she has now reached the point where "she is collected from the street as a street-sweeper would collect the trash" (65).[20] One night she knocks on the door of the man who brought her the flowers after the concert, and who became her first secret lover. She anticipates warding off, but the man takes her in and nurses her "like a small child" (70).[21] One day after having gained strength in his care, she meets Arvi again, and they have a final emotional scene. The narrator reports that they both think the other is the love of their life, but they fail to communicate

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18 "se pahin, jota Alli on pelännyt".

19 "miksi oli hän, Alli sitten pelännyt lupauksiensa rikkomista. Se olisi sittenkin ollut pienen pieni atoomi siinä rikosryhmässä, joita jokapäivä [sic] sadoittain, tuhansittain maailmassa tehdään. – Ja nyt, nyt oli hän kuitenkin itseään kohtaan rikoksen tehnyt pelastaen sillä uhrauksella toisen, säästäen, varjellen pettymykseltä."

20 "Kadulta hänet korjataan niin kuin lakaisija paperiroskat."

21 "Ja häntä hoidetaan kuin pientä lasta …".

this to each other. Instead, he is hostile, calling her a traitor. "After this, Alli knows she has lost everything. What would she live for? What would attach her to life? Everything was gone now. What to live for? Death was better than a life lived in dishonesty" (75).[22] The death she chooses, however, is only metaphorical. The endings of the two novels are reversed images of each other, but both signal the impossibility of living a life that conforms to the matrix of national heterosexuality. In *Mustat varjot*, the heroine rejects the matrix and in hopeful tones expects to be able to reach something higher in life. Here, in *Yölepakko*, the heroine renounces herself. The novel ends in a scene of a peculiar kind of self-annihilation. After the final reckoning with Arvi, Alli returns to her lover. She abandons herself to his care, giving up all desires and efforts of her own.

> Now she knew she rested in the arms of a man who really understood her. How subordinate she longed to be for him. Oh, she had so very little to give. Just her worn-out life but with that, he was content.[23] (77)

3 Conclusions

Failing heterosexuality as a script for a liveable life is the unifying theme in Saimi Öhrlund's novels. The protagonists do not fail in the sexual practice: after all, it is to the arms of other men that Alli flees the suffocating structures of couplehood. What they fail at is taking part in the project of national heterosexuality, which Berlant and Warner argue is a script for the privatization of citizenship (Berlant and Warner 314) and serves to make the question of national belonging into a sentimental rather than a political question to be discussed in explicitly political terms. At the time these novels were published, the drawing of the contours of proper Finnishness was a project not solely advanced in explicit politics. True, the introduction of universal suffrage in 1906 had turned Finnish folk into a body of citizens, but that alone did not suffice to define what Finns were as a nation: literature from the era eagerly seeks different symbolic solutions to the situation. The cultural script of national heterosexuality operates by projecting an imaginary space where

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22 "Tämän jälkeen tietää Alli nyt kaiken kadottaneensa. Mitä varten hän eläisi? Mikä häntä vielä kiinnittäisi elämään? Olihan kaikki jo mennyttä. Mitä varten elää? Parempi sittenkin kuolema kuin valheellinen elämä."

23 "Nyt hän tiesi, että lepäsi miehen sylissä, miehen, joka todella häntä ymmärsi. Kuinka alamainen Alli hänelle tahtoisi olla. – Voi, että niin vähän saattoi hänelle lahjoittaa. Vain kuluneen elämänsä ja siihenkin hän oli tyytyväinen."

we are just ourselves, immanently present to ourselves, our feelings authentic and non-mediated. That space is the sphere of intimacy, which thus, against its own claims, can be seen as a product of social and spatial relations (cf. Lindh Estelle, Parente-Čapková and Duţu, 2). According to the script, in this state of immediate intimacy, we are naturally drawn towards the opposite gender (the presumption that there are only two is essential to this logic), and this natural course of events is the pre-political area of humanity that society is organized to protect and represent. Intimacy, thus, becomes "a promised haven that distracts citizens from the unequal conditions of their political and economic lives" (Berlant and Warner 317). The thing about Öhrlund's protagonists is that they fail at being distracted. The spell of intimacy does not work for them. Where they should be feeling safe and intimate, they just experience their unequal conditions with heightened accuracy, painfully alert to the degree of their divergence from what a proper 'person' should be like.

Of course, in the 1910s, the bourgeois model of couple-family-national belonging, while promoted on many fronts in the modernizing world, was also dismantled on various fronts. Sexuality offered one front of organizing such resistance: Victorian England had the upper-class aesthetes (Friedman 2019), New York had a vibrant fairy scene (Chauncey) and even in the train-hopping culture of hobos, sex between men was widely acknowledged and understood as a conscious rejection of bourgeois family values (Hyttinen). Gender and spatiality formed another front: in Finland, women had already won the vote in 1906, thus gaining access to the public sphere of politics. To mediate between the domestic ideals of woman as a mother, and their public roles, many Finnish women with political careers identified as "social mothers" (Parente-Čapková 13). And then there was of course the emerging field of class politics: in Finland, the social democratic party was founded in 1903, demanding visibility and recognition for how working and living conditions differed from one group of people to another. But none of these emancipatory discourses are languages that Öhrlund's heroines speak. Ahmed notes that while one's discomfort with the script one is trying (or not) to fit may lead to reworking the script, this is not inevitable: "It is dependent or contingent on other social factors (especially class) and it does not necessarily involve conscious political acts" (Ahmed 152). In these novels, class translates into an inability to renegotiate the script. Öhrlund's heroines experience the script available to them as hurtful and as not allowing their true self to be recognized but see only two solutions: rejecting the script altogether or renouncing their own will and adapting to whatever shape the structure holds up for them to fill. Öhrlund's novels take the national-bourgeois heterosexuality very seriously: the novels

do not try to come up with an alternative order. They just describe how impossible that matrix is for working-class women to inhabit.

As the novels are so obviously about class differences in the Finnish society of the 1910s, why bring sexuality up at all? Why read the novels as illuminating from the point of view of national heterosexuality? The short answer is: to denaturalize heterosexuality as a cultural script (cf. Berlant and Warner 326; Halperin10). We easily make the categorical mistake of assuming that for heterosexuals, heterosexuality comes naturally. That is, after all, how national heterosexuality as a hegemony works, presenting itself as the natural order of things, rendering deviations from its own logic as exceptions to the rule. National heterosexuality ought to be recognized for what it is, a particular cultural formation, arising from historical conjectures, with a force to "prevent the recognition, memory, elaboration, or institutionalization of all the nonstandard intimacies that people have in everyday life" (Berlant and Warner 324). Öhrlund's novels convey how assumptions of intimacy were mobilized in the 1910s to produce viable national subjects. While doing that, they also show that it is entirely possible to prioritize the man-woman-couple in sex, and still fail at the heterosexual project.

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CHAPTER 7

Intimacy and Spatiality in Three Novels by Regina di Luanto

Ulla Åkerström

Abstract

This chapter focuses on three novels by the Italian writer Regina di Luanto and explores how she used spatiality as a narrative strategy to reinforce her critique against hypocrisy and falsehood in post-Risorgimento Italian society. In these novels, the writer investigates the relationship between men and women, in the first two with disastrous results and death. In *Ombra e luce* [Shadow and light; 1893], the ties of matrimony ruin the life of a young wife, as she moves between the two main spaces that eventually tear her apart. In *Un martirio* [A martyrdom; 1894], a diary novel, a young wife strives to share intellectual thoughts and intimacy with an uncomprehending husband, while she suffers within the walls of a suffocating home. Finally, in *Libera!* [Free!; 1895], although the relationships between men and women fail, the novel presents the ideal image of an inviting home, depicted as a space where literature, ideas and intellectual thoughts are discussed among friends who share a positivistic view of the world, mixed with a profound belief in science and art as a means to create a better world.

Keywords

Italian literature – late 1800s – Regina di Luanto – spatiality – love – death

The Italian writer Regina di Luanto, *nom de plume* of Guendalina Lipparini, who is today almost completely forgotten but who was widely read during her lifetime, was born in 1862 and died in 1914, a period of great changes in Italy.[1] National unity was achieved in 1861 and, as in the rest of Europe, modernity challenged ancient values and convictions. New forms of communication such

1 Guendalina Lipparini also used other names in private during her lifetime, such as Anna Roti and Lina Gatti, but since this article does not deal with her life, I choose to stick to her pen name throughout the chapter.

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as the telegraph and the railway narrowed distances and new ideas spread faster and more easily. The systematic study of man and the world had led to new scientific discoveries, from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to the social Darwinism promoted by Herbert Spencer, from positivism to Cesare Lombroso's anthropological criminology. In 1889, the year before the publication of Regina di Luanto's first book, two emblematic novels of the two most important literary currents of the time, *il verismo* (the Italian form of naturalism) and *il decadentismo*, were published, namely *Mastro-don Gesualdo* [Master Don Gesualdo] by Giovanni Verga and *Il piacere* [The pleasure] by Gabriele d'Annunzio. It was also a flourishing period for literature and Italy was experiencing a virtual boom of newspapers and journals. The request for a female point of view from the editors of these publications, presumably with the intention of attracting a new audience, was a stimulus to female writers to publish articles and short stories, and they did not hesitate to collaborate (Zancan 10). Writers like Matilde Serao, Neera, Marchesa Colombi, Regina di Luanto, and many others became well known for their articles and short stories in the press, as well as for their novels.[2] The period also witnessed intense debate on the so-called female question. The debate on marriage included both the struggle against marital authorization (finally abolished in 1919 after a long parliamentary battle) and the issue of divorce. The changes in female identity, the relationship between men and women, and the transformations of intimacy within a society that was rapidly changing (Giddens 3), were obviously too important not to have strong repercussions even in literature. These questions recur in the novels of Regina di Luanto, who published her books in a time spanning from 1890 to 1912, works full of modern ideas and discussions regarding love and marriage. The author puts the discourse of intimacy and romantic love at the centre of attention, challenging old values in favour of new ideals. Regina di Luanto was in fact later defined by the critic Luigi Russo as an "audacious" writer known for her "morbid success" (Russo 122), presumably because of her open ways of discussing intimate issues such as women's sexuality, the relationships between men and women, divorce, hypocrisy, and falsehood in society (Åkerström, "La donna nuova"), all topics that are treated in the three novels that are at the centre of this chapter, namely *Ombra e luce* [Shadow and light; 1893], *Un martirio* [A martyrdom; 1894], and *Libera!* [Free!; 1895].

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2 Neera is the pseudonym used by Anna Radius Zuccari (1846–1918), a famous Italian author and journalist in her time; see for example Ramsey-Portolano.

The real name of Marchesa Colombi (1840–1920) was Maria Antonietta Torriani; see for example Benatti and Cicala

Regina di Luanto was an able storyteller who often used spatiality as a narrative strategy to reinforce her reflections, which she expressed with a positivistic view of the world, mixed with a profound belief in science and art as a means to create a better world (Åkerström "Arte e scienza"). As a narrator, Regina di Luanto knew how to weave a story by using different narrative techniques and recurring motifs, and occasionally melodramatic clichés of the novelistic genre, but basically she always had a purpose with her texts beyond the actual stories she told. Her ideas seep through her texts, sometimes overtly, sometimes more hidden. Simultaneously, she used spatial imagery and themes of intimacy to highlight the key problematics regarding the relationships between women and men, as exemplified in the three novels which are the object of this study.

As has already been noted in the introduction to this volume, the word *intimate* "invokes a cluster of related ideas" (Pratt and Rosner 4), including privacy, family life, love, sexual intimacy, and other personal relations. Even if the wide concept of intimacy certainly can relate to other kinds of contacts, this chapter focuses on "the sphere of the inmost" (Yousef 1), in particular female-male relationships. Linking intimacy to the concept of *space*, with the perhaps somewhat simplistic but at the same time distinct definition used by Silvia Ross, which states that "space implies the environment or the surroundings in which human subjects find themselves" (Ross 9), I thus intend to explore the interaction between space and intimacy in the three novels mentioned above, focusing on how the depiction of space reflects the representation of the characters and their relationships with each other. I will also use the concept *green world* to characterize an ideal world, which in Regina di Luanto's novels is usually far from a realistic alternative. The *green world* and *the green-world lover* have been identified by Pratt as recurring topics and archetypal patterns in female literature (Pratt 16–24). The *green world* is equivalent to nature, a place where women can find independence, solace, and companionship, and where they can also imagine *the green-world lover*, an ideal male figure who "almost always includes a rejection of social expectations concerning engagement and marriage" (23).

Most important in this chapter are the interiors in the domestic sphere, which represent different kinds of homes, but also external settings, which can be the urban environment, or its opposite, nature, in various forms such as a garden or a river. Spaces can also be represented as movement between places in a train or in a carriage. Intimacy, and the lack of it or distorted forms of it, are significant elements in the three novels, which go from a utopian love dream in a place similar to Eden in *Ombra e luce*, to the suffocating solitude of a young wife in *Un martirio*, and finally to the longing for a life free from the conventions and oppressing ties of society in *Libera!*

1 Ombra e luce

Ombra e luce, Regina di Luanto's second novel, was published in 1893. The book, told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, tells the story of the passionate love between Roberto Montigliago, an eccentric and extremely rich man, and Marcella Varioni, a beautiful well-off bourgeois woman, married and a mother of two children. The basic plot of their story is simple: they fall in love, he wants her to live with him, but she, divided between the love dream and her life in Rome with her family, friends and position in society, finds neither the courage nor the strength to leave everything. In the end, he kills her in order to release her from her dilemma and to preserve their love.

In this novel, Regina di Luanto moves towards the themes that she would develop and accentuate in her subsequent authorship. A significant part of Marcella's dilemma is, implicitly, the impossibility, according to Italian law at that time, to maintain contact with her children in case of a separation, if the father/husband was against it. She would also risk becoming a social outcast and being totally dependent on her lover for her living. Roberto, a man similar to Gabriele d'Annunzio's decadent aesthetic *superuomo* Andrea Sperelli in *Il piacere* (1889), has lived a life of fulfilment, studying philosophy and religion, travelling in India, having various love affairs in Paris and seeking faith in Assisi. After building his luxurious home in an orange garden in Sorrento, he feels that the only thing he lacks is a true love to share his life with. He does not necessarily seek a wife, but primarily a woman to love. Marcella becomes that woman, but while he, in his egocentrism, feels that their love is more important than everything else, she is unable to free herself from her ordinary life.

Regina di Luanto, known for the *high life* settings in her novels about mostly rich and aristocratic people (Morandini 392), carefully uses the various spaces in the novel to emphasize the emotions and thoughts of her characters, accentuating the relationship between them and their surroundings. Throughout the novel, she uses the dichotomy of shadow and light from the title as a narrative strategy, in which the tensions between internal and external settings illuminate the story that is told. The elegant drawing room of Marcella's friend Oretta is the warm and welcoming place where the story has its beginning and where Marcella and Roberto meet. The reason why the friends often gather there is the pleasant feeling of intimacy that the hostess creates in her salon, where they are treated in a friendly manner and feel sure of finding tranquillity and well-being. The salon is also a neutral ground, where Marcella, not fulfilled in her life as wife and mother, is surrounded by admirers who court her and with whom she flirts, as a way of compensating for something in her life that

she feels she is missing. It is also in Oretta's home that Roberto sees the fine qualities in Marcella, when she cares for her friend who has become ill.

The urban space in the city of Rome is also a neutral ground. The choice of city is hardly coincidental. Rome had finally become the capital of Italy in 1871 and during the following years the city was modernized and was steadily growing, thus representing modernity and belief in the future. Marcella's and Roberto's love affair starts during a walk in Rome one evening, when he accompanies her from Orietta's home in Via Venti Settembre to Marcella's home in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, both well known addresses in the centre of Rome with names that are linked to the creation of the young state.[3] The weather reflects their emotions. The season is described as different from the usual, with frequent rain, and on that particular day a violent storm had passed, leaving the evening with a blue sky and streets drying in the sunset. When they pass through the crowds in the Via Nazionale, they do not care about the confusion of busy or indifferent persons, and they do not notice that people often turn around to stare at Marcella's beauty.[4] They pass the Corso and the Piazza Venezia with the turbulent comings and goings of carriages and trams, thus contextualizing the event in the modern world, with all its new lifestyle and its impact on people. While Marcella seems to be more rooted in the city, being among its inhabitants, Roberto says that there is nothing that he loathes more than to be in the midst of so many people, preferring the lonely countryside, where he feels calm and where nature offers relaxation. Feeling attracted by the man and his attitude, Marcella finds herself telling Roberto things about herself and her thoughts in a way that she has never done with anyone before, finding immediately the affinity and intimacy she feels is lacking with her husband. The city becomes, in this way, the place where the two find each other in an intimacy arising through communication, more than a physical intimacy. The mutual understanding between a couple is in fact a recurring ideal in Regina di Luanto's text, and it is significant that the intimacy between Marcella and Roberto begins in this way.

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3 Via Venti Settembre, previously called Strada Pia, has its name from the day of the Capture of Rome in 1870. The date marks the defeat of the Papal States and the final phase of *il Risorgimento*, the process of the unification of Italy. https://www.romasegreta.it/sallustiano/via-venti-settembre.html (accessed 24 October 2020). Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, which bears the name of the first king of the united Italy, was constructed in the post-Risorgimento period. https://www.rerumromanarum.com/2016/04/corso-vittorio-emanuele-ii.html (accessed 25 October 2020).

4 Via Nazionale was also constructed in the post-Risorgimento period, with the purpose of connecting the train station Termini to the centre of the city. https://www.romasegreta.it/castro-pretorio/via-nazionale.html (accessed 24 October 2020).

The relationship continues with writing and reading, in the form of four letters that Roberto sends to Marcella while she is on holiday with her family in Anzio. The epistolary form can also be seen as a way of performing intimacy at a distance, while the small rented apartment where she stays clearly reflects her sad feelings, with closed shutters and lowered curtains which create darkness in the silent place. Back in Rome, Marcella finds her home empty and deserted and the walls fill her with a feeling of oppression. Devoured by her passion, everything about her familiar surroundings makes her feel a violent aversion and she finds it a torture to have to act normally among others.

Having made a pact with Roberto to come and visit him in Sorrento, and while there, not to remind him of her other life, she finally finds a way to visit him secretly, first stopping at her mother's home in Ancona. As both Rome and Sorrento are situated on the Italian west coast and Ancona on the east coast, it is clear that Marcella needs to take a circuitous road to get to her lover, a fact which also well describes the emotional difficulties she has to get through, with a long journey by train where she is forced to stop for a night in Foggia in a cheap hotel, dining in a squalid atmosphere. During the journey, Marcella ponders over the situation and the arduous journey, with its negative settings, in an image which reflects the hardships she has to overcome to reach her lover, or, in other words, the shadow she has to go through to get to the light, which is her lover's home. Roberto's villa in Sorrento, with its surrounding garden and orange grove, is described in detail like a sort of Eden, with the light of the sun by day, and even the light of the moon at night, in which Marcella's eyes do not show even a shadow when she is in the delight of her intimacy with Roberto. Playing together in the garden, they find another kind intimacy, like that of two siblings. When it rains, they sit in the library studying together, reading, among other poets and classic writers, Heine, Byron, Leopardi, and Carducci, as well as the history of mankind, science, and the benefits of positivism. The image of two loving persons reading together is the ideal image of a happy couple, a recurring image in Regina di Luanto novels.[5] Roberto certainly qualifies as a *green-world lover* as well, while his garden can be seen as a *green world* where

5 Intellectual understanding as an ideal in a successful relationship between man and woman is also present in Marchesa Colombi's writings. In her novel *Prima morire* [First die;1881], Leonardo, a secondary figure in the plot, marries the insignificant and poor Mercede solely to save her from becoming a nun. The man suffers from not being able to love her, but when one day he discovers that the girl has intellectual qualities and that she has tried to educate herself to get closer to him, he falls in love with her. A marriage that was based on practical realities becomes an ideal union based on mutual love and understanding. When spouses begin to communicate on a common intellectual level, the possibilities for a functioning marriage are created.

Marcella can experience an intimacy of fantastical proportions and an alternative to her real life in Rome. In Regina di Luanto's texts, nature in this sense is thus contraposed to the city, which is a real world with real problems that nature cannot solve.

Back home, the contrast is complete. Marcella's husband is described as the opposite of Roberto, an insensitive and simple man, who eventually forces himself on Marcella. She does not want to make love to him, but finds herself obliged to silently accept that form of unwanted intimacy, defined as "legal prostitution" by the narrating voice (Luanto, *Ombra e luce* 195).[6] After some other events, the city of Rome becomes again the place where decisions are made. Marcella and Roberto walk together on the Pincian Hill in Rome and watch the city from above. Marcella promises that she will leave her family and come to live with him. But the dream crashes with reality and eventually, when they are together in his home in Sorrento and he realizes that she is unable to leave her habitual life, he kills her after a night of passion. Regina di Luanto uses scenes similar to those in decadent literature to demonstrate the clash between romantic and decadent ideals and reality. The refusal of the 'superman' Roberto to accept the rules of the mundane world leads to disaster when he cannot have what he longs for. Instead of offering light to Marcella, he puts her in the eternal shadow of death, as their ideal intimacy is impossible in the society they live in, while at the same time his idea of love is based on an unrealistic fantasy.

2 Un martirio

Un martirio, published in 1894, is a novel about the lack of intimacy between a married couple, written in the form of a diary by the wife. In *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (1984), H. Porter Abbott argues that one of the great advantages of the diary form is its limitation to the inner world of a single person, where the form itself invites a renunciation of other possible points of view. One of the important functions of the diary that Abbott mentions is precisely the possibility of self-analysis that the form offers, that is, the reflexive function of the genre; however, in the context of this chapter, the emphasis lies on another recurring trait of the diary genre, namely the isolation and loneliness of the narrator (Abbott 24). The writing of the diary is closely related to the space in which it is written, in Laura's case in her home, where she feels secure but

6 "prostituzione legale".

also threatened. The hypersensitive young wife begins writing to combat the loneliness she suffers from, and gradually her perception of life becomes more and more claustrophobic. The closed environment is thus emphasized by the diary form and Laura decides to use the diary as a confessor and to keep it hidden from her husband Corrado, so as not to risk being laughed at and mocked by him. The secret diary becomes an obstacle between husband and wife, as does her decision to always write the truth which she does not dare tell him, and consequently the secret diary turns into concrete proof of the lack of communication between the two spouses. Laura soon discovers that the illusions of love and the expectations she had before getting married do not come true. Her husband has no understanding of the needs of his wife; while she would like to be a companion and friend, he requests a servant wife. When she reads books and tries to educate herself in order to be able to converse with him (he is a university professor), he reacts with irritation, since he despises women who study. The ideal image of two people who sit together reading and studying, as Marcella and Roberto did in his fabulous home, is represented in *Un martirio* by the lack of it.

Corrado therefore embodies the opposite position to the ideal of Regina di Luanto, according to whom intellectual interests are perceived positively by women. Cortopassi notes, in a comparison with the prolific novelist and journalist Matilde Serao, who had the tendency to depict women's relationships with various forms of culture as a source of corruption, that the interest of Regina di Luanto's female characters in studying, reading, and scientific culture instead has strong positive connotations, which are connected, to varying degrees, to the women's sense of personal dignity and their capacity for analysis independently of the surrounding reality (Cortopassi 264).

The window, with the city of Pisa outside, and especially the River Arno, forms a recurring image of space in the novel. In literature, the liminal figure of the window often represents the boundary between the internal and the external, the private and the public, reality and fantasy (Ross 51). In *Un martirio* the contrast between the interior settings, where Laura feels most at ease, and the external spaces, where she feels awkward and different, is accentuated. The internal space is also the female space, while her husband moves about outside, whereas the external represents the masculine space. She talks about the Arno as her friend and the river becomes an entity to reflect herself on. But while the river is outside and continuously alters, changing colour and form, she finds herself lacking that variety in her life, where the days pass monotonously, tranquil and alike. When she thinks of visiting Bologna, where she used to live with her mother and sister, and to be in her old own room, she realizes that she will have to stay in the guest room, a fact that establishes a

barrier between her and her family. Having finally visited her old home, and returning to her new home in Pisa, it at first makes her feel that she is entering into a prison. When she opens the windows, she finds that the sun brings in gaiety but also the feeling of an overwhelming sadness, and the view of the River Arno, which she had left placid and serene, is changed; the river is "swollen, with the muddy yellow waters, gurgling with a dull noise" and it does not answer her greeting with its "usual sparkle" but with a "messy ride, grumbling a threat" (Luanto, *Un martirio* 45).[7] The state of the river seems to her to be the indication of evils that will happen. She later feels that an abyss opens between her and her husband, when he and his misogynist and cruel friend Stein force her to act, against her will, as a medium in spiritual exercises. Unable to avoid the séances, she begins to pretend that she perceives things, to satisfy the men. This leads to a growing madness in her. At night, she starts to imagine the furniture moving in her room, while shadows and horrible visions rise in front of her. She tries to avoid Stein by hiding in her room with the door locked, but then she feels hands touching her, sees shadows that come out of the curtains and the silhouette of a stiff human body on her bed. The resemblance to parts of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, published in 1892, is intriguing, with both stories being written in diary form and depicting the growing madness of a young wife in a restrained space. There is no evidence that Regina di Luanto knew Gilman's text, but the similarity is striking since the texts depict similar, even though far from identical, cases of young wives who feel oppressed in marriage and who respond to the condition with a growing insanity.

Finally, Laura has a nervous breakdown. When it turns out that she is pregnant, she believes she has found consolation and compensation for the missing love in her life, a recurring image in Italian female literature contemporary with Regina di Luanto, resignation being followed by motherhood as a positive element in a woman's married life. A well known example of this in Italian literature is the novel *L'Indomani* [The following day; 1889] by Neera, where a young newlywed woman goes through various stages of disappointment and disillusion to finally find comfort in motherhood. But Laura's happiness is of short duration, as she loses the child when she tries to flee from yet another spiritual session. The diary writing stops for three months and begins again in her convalescence.

7 "gonfio, con le acque foscamente colorite di giallo fangoso, gorgoglianti di un rumore sordo"; "consueto scintillìo"; "corsa disordinata, brontolando una minaccia". All translations of quotations in this chapter are mine.

When she starts to write again, it is in front of the window, where she sees the river calm and clear, and the room is filled with the pleasant smell of flowers, which makes her dream of filling her room with flowers. For a while, she is able to escape into her particular *green world*, the same that she had dreamt of before marrying, when she had thought that her future life would lead to something wonderful: "I believed that love should lead to an enchanted garden, in which no misfortune, no pain could penetrate" (Luanto, *Un martirio* 46).[8] Later she realizes that this belief was only an illusion. The doctor who treats Laura and becomes her friend tries to convince her to forget and make the best of the situation, but she refuses all physical contact with her husband, especially after having found him in bed together with one of their servants. She experiences the wish to talk to the doctor about everything, while at the same time having an overwhelming aversion to Corrado. An outdoor excursion with the doctor and Corrado in a carriage takes her out of her isolation for a moment and she is filled with an immense, almost exaggerated happiness and love for all living creatures when she sees the beautiful nature they pass by in the vehicle, again showing her need to take refuge in the *green world*. Left alone in the carriage with the doctor, she feels free to talk to him and tells him about a dream she has had, where she felt like a bird in a cage which had escaped, and that she finally felt free. The limited space inside the carriage becomes a safe room for Laura, when she is together with the doctor, with whom she feels that she can speak freely and be understood. Later, Laura and her husband go to a villa near Bocca d'Arno (Arno's mouth), the outflow of the river into the sea, together with the doctor, his frivolous and dishonest wife and their children. Laura's nervous suffering grows when she is forced to take part in the social events, and the only time when she is happy is when she is talking to the doctor or sitting alone at the window looking at the sea and writing in her diary. When Laura is unjustly accused of being the doctor's lover, her husband decides to end their friendship and obliges her to leave the villa and follow him to another place, a squalid hovel. Corrado forcefully tries to regain intimacy with his wife, and Laura, to defend herself, kills him with a shot from his own gun.[9] The fate of the woman is sealed. From this dark and gloomy place, which corresponds well with Laura's mood, she ends up in another even more

8 "[…] credevo che l'amore dovesse condurre in un giardino incantato, nel quale nessuna sventura, nessun dolore potesse penetrare".

9 Precisely because of this violent end, the uxoricide, repeated by Alba de Céspedes in *Dalla parte di lei* in 1949, and because of the diary form, an article by Daniela Curti compares *Un martirio* with two novels by Alba de Céspedes, *Dalla parte di lei* [On her side; 1949] and *Quaderno proibito* [Forbidden notebook; 1952]. See Curti.

depressing place, an asylum, where she eventually dies. Murder is a desperate act, which cannot be interpreted in a liberating key since it involves ruin for both the husband and the wife; in it there is an overt denunciation of a society that forces young women, completely unprepared, to marry men whom they do not really know, but which also forces serious and loyal men to remain tied to dishonest women, as in the case of the physician.

3 Libera!

Libera! published in 1895, is both a novel of ideas and a story of love and betrayal. The title page presents a quotation in English taken from the famous *On Liberty* (1859) by John Stuart Mill, about the human mind, placed under the yoke without freedom of thought. The omniscient narrating voice of the novel explores, in long analyses, the thoughts, feelings, and reasonings of the protagonist Antonia and to a lesser degree also those of her partner Riccardo. The plot, narrated in the third person, takes place around two parallel couples: Antonia and Riccardo, and Antonia's brother Ubaldo and his perfidious wife Elisa, who functions as the antithesis and negative force of the story. The setting is once again the rich and aristocratic Rome of the late nineteenth century, a fact that well reflects the modern ideas of Antonia, a young countess, widowed after an unhappy marriage, who struggles with the contrasts between sentiment and reason. Antonia surrounds herself with intellectual friends with whom she reads, discusses, and develops her modern ideas on science and art, fulfilling all her desires for a free life full of intellectual interests. The novel's strong positivistic spirit is accentuated with the appearance of a German sociology professor, who cites the English philosopher and liberal Herbert Spencer as "the deepest thinker of our times" (Luanto, *Libera!* 68).[10] A considerable space is dedicated to contact with the professor and also to the intellectual discussions of Antonia and her friends, including a long analysis on literary theory, in pages that seem to reveal beliefs belonging to the actual writer. With her critique against marriage, "forced slavery" (39),[11] Antonia is unwilling to be persuaded to marry her lover, who is unable to share her intellectual interests; however, she eventually accepts.

The most important space in the novel is Antonia's home, in which she receives her lover (who later becomes her husband), her brother and

10 "il pensatore più profondo dei tempi nostri".
11 "forzata schiavitù".

sister-in-law, and also her dear intellectual friends. After an opening scene, where Antonia explains to Riccardo that she has decided never to marry again, the novel starts with a journey by train in which the two of them return to Rome after having been abroad for several months. The movement of the train, a signifier of spatial movement as well as of modernity, represents the passage from their life in Switzerland, a place where they were unknown and where it was therefore possible for them to live together freely, to their life in Rome, where they are obliged to respect social decorum and hide their relationship, since they are not married and thus have to "avoid a too obvious intimacy" (7).[12] They come back from Lucerne, where they have spent time loving each other "in the deep blue of the lakes and in the immaculate whiteness of the eternally frozen peaks" (6), with an air of a fantastic *green world*, as opposed to the urban environment and all its social control.[13] In fact, back in Rome, they will again be forced to live in different places. This is the first obstacle to their intimacy as a couple. The second obstacle, no less important, is the intellectual differences between the two, namely he being incapable of understanding her. She had hoped to unite with him "in a complete communion of ideas and feelings" (63),[14] the ideal image of a happy couple in many of Regina di Luanto's texts, but realizes that this is not possible with Riccardo. Back in her own home, Antonia is delighted to wake up the next day in her own room, which she herself has decorated with nuances of blue and green, with silk cloths on the wall, fine objects, and sculptural reproductions of Venus and the pastoral loving couple Daphnis and Chloe, who seem to smile happily in their eternal love, once again with an allusion to a utopian *green world*.

In this novel too, the window has a significant role, but different from its role in *Un martirio*. The morning of her return from Switzerland, Antonia gets up from her bed and runs to the window, where she feels "an acute sense of well-being" when she looks out and sees movements outside in the city (28).[15] Later in the story, when she has ended her relationship with Riccardo, he starts to keep watch at night down in the piazza that she sees from her window. This causes great nervousness in Antonia and the window becomes a barrier,

12 "evitare una troppo palese intimità".

13 "nell'azzurro profondo dei laghi e nella bianchezza immacolata delle cime eternamente ghiacciate".

14 "in una completa comunione di idee e di sentimenti".

15 "un senso acuto di benessere".

not only between her home and the outer world, but also between her and Riccardo and the possibilities for the two of them to live happily together.

The other couple in the novel are Antonia's brother Ubaldo and his beautiful, selfish, and deceitful wife Elisa, with whom Ubaldo is blindly infatuated. Elisa, like Emma Bovary in Flaubert's famous novel of 1856, is obsessed with spending and wastes large parts of Ubaldo's fortune on luxurious clothes and objects for the impressive building where they have their home. In one episode, Riccardo by chance runs into Elisa, who is on her way to a department store, which well illustrates her obsession with conspicuous consumption. She invites him to take a ride with her in her carriage, with "walls padded with deep violet satin" like a "precious box", and he accepts (73).[16] The carriage as a vehicle of seduction is a recurring motif in literature (Moorjani 50), and it has precisely this function in *Libera!* Within the confined space of Elisa's *coupé*, Riccardo's knee inevitably bumps into her legs, and after a while he cannot resist taking her hand, then they unite in voluptuous kisses. Meanwhile, the carriage goes to San Pietro Montorio, a church on the Janiculum Hill in Rome, from where one can see the city's houses, churches, and *campanili*, "wrapped in the gold that the sun rained on them, high above the blue, serene horizon" (Luanto, *Libera!* 76).[17] The name of the church is a short form of "Monte d'Oro", the golden mountain, which emphasizes Elisa's taste for luxury. The scene contains an echo of Madame Bovary's mad ride in a carriage with her lover Leon, but at a certain moment Elisa reminds Riccardo of the fact that they are in a carriage and they stop. While the carriage in *Un martirio* had a function as a safe refuge, in *Libera!* its function is thus that of an eroticized vehicle similar to the one in Flaubert's famous novel (Moorjani).

The marriage between Antonia and Riccardo soon collapses and ends in separation. Likewise, the marriage of Antonia's brother is a failure, of which the main victim is the son. Antonia sees her little nephew neglected both by his selfish and frivolous mother, and by his weak father, who is blinded by his passion for his unfaithful wife Elisa. The fact that Elisa's latest lover is Riccardo adds to the somewhat melodramatic traits of the novel. The two lovers escape and leave Ubaldo and Antonia, brother and sister, to bring up Ubaldo's young son together.

16 "pareti imbottite di raso violetto cupo"; "scatola preziosa".

17 "avvolti nell'oro che pioveva su loro il sole, alto su l'orizzonte turchino, sereno".

4 Conclusion

As we have seen, in these three novels Regina di Luanto explored the difficult relationships between the two sexes, a recurrent topic in the Italian debate, as in other parts of Europe, during the decades leading up to 1900. Through the couples that she depicts, her critique against society and its hypocrisy is evident. Viewing emotions as an analytic tool to perceive social injustices (Pratt and Rosner 5), it is notable in the case of Regina di Luanto that the different negative experiences of matrimony portrayed in her novels represent something beyond the mere suffering of many spouses, namely, the image of an oppressing society in need of improvement. Both *Ombra e luce* and *Un martirio* contain a strongly pessimistic vision of marriage, emphasized by stifling spatial settings. The relationship between Marcella and her husband is completely lacking in mutual understanding and a deeper feeling of intimacy. On the other hand, Roberto and Marcella are impossible as a couple for different reasons; not only is she married but she would risk everything in case of a separation, becoming an outcast who would lose her position in society and any contact with her children. Furthermore, the love dream as proposed by Roberto, a decadent *superuomo*, is a utopian illusion, since he demands that she live with him in his Eden-like villa, ignoring the social context in which she leads her life, in this case represented by the city of Rome and its inhabitants. His fantasy seems dearer to him than his feelings for the actual woman, which explains his drastic solution to Marcella's dilemma. The decadent hero is linked to the outside world by his long journeys, but also to an inner world with spiritual exercises and to the *green world* that he has created for himself. With his egocentrism and search for a quintessential love, he is a reincarnation of d'Annunzio's protagonist, the noble aesthete Andrea Sperelli, in *Il piacere* (1889). With his murder of the woman he loves, the narrator emphasizes her critique of utopian solutions and of the decadent hero, describing him as incapable of having a normal relationship.

In *Un martirio*, the inexperienced and vulnerable young wife is incapable of dealing with a chauvinistic and selfish husband and the incomprehension between the two is insuperable. This negative image of the lack of intimacy is reinforced by the claustrophobic setting. The doctor's advice to Laura, that she should accept the situation and try to make the best of it, is impossible for her to accept, which leads her to homicide and madness. In this case, the narrator's critique of a society that forces people to endure unhappy relationships without true intimacy is underlined by the murder as a representation of the protagonist's blind revolt against it. The *green world* alternative, which is nature and especially the River Arno, represents an ideal that the woman experiences

only with longing gazes through her window, but which she is incapable of obtaining. In *Libera!*, Regina di Luanto presents an alternative to the miserable women in the two previous novels, by depicting a woman who is fully aware of her own situation and of the dangers of unhappy relationships. Even if, against her own true will, she ends up in an unsuccessful marriage, she is capable of breaking out of it without having to kill or be killed. She has managed to create her own ideal world in her home, in which intellectual interests, friends, and freedom of thought are essential, creating another kind of intimacy that is more true. Intimacy with a husband who is not capable of sharing these things is impossible, but she is free, "libera", at last.

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CHAPTER 8

Intimate Spaces and Sexual Violence in Two Novels by Carmen de Burgos

Elena Lindholm

Abstract

In the novels *Los inadaptados* [The non-adapted; 1909] and *La malcasada* [The badly married woman; 1923], Carmen de Burgos recreated the intimate spaces of her childhood in southern Spain while depicting sexual violence. This chapter focuses on Burgos' realistic representation of the experiences of the rape victim through fictionalizing the intimate spaces of her past and through her two fictitious doubles in the novels. Both are young women named Dolores, who share some characteristics with the author but also differ from her in social class or origin. In her recreation of childhood spaces, Burgos also includes elements from her later political activism. Burgos' use of the intimate spaces of her own past, and a fragmented doubling of the self, to bring experiences of sexual violence into the public space, is here compared to the collective narrative strategies of the recent #metoo and #cuéntalo movements. There, as well as in Burgos' novels, a multitude of voices retrieving painful memories of the intimate sphere is used to break the traditional silencing of the victims of sexual violence.

Keywords

feminism – #metoo – #cuéntalo – Almería – Spain – rape – *Los inadaptados* – *La malcasada*

The constant crossing of borders between the private and the public spheres is a characteristic of the development of feminism. Women have broken the boundaries that relegate them to the home, but also the ones that have kept women's suffering from sexual violence hidden in silence. The #metoo movement that shook societies around the world in 2017 and 2018 was an example of this on a global scale. There, the global met the intimate, challenging conventional barriers between the public and the private in the manner described by Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner in *The Global and the Intimate*. In the

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#metoo campaign, women used testimonies about violence from their own intimate spheres to collectively change the way that their bodies were perceived as fair game. A revolutionary feature of this movement was how it channelled what Sianne Ngai would call "ugly emotions", such as shame and anxiety of a silenced victim, into a collective cathartic anger (Ngai, 1–37).

In Latin America and Spain, the protests of #cuéntalo, driven by a gang rape in Pamplona in Spain in 2016, were a parallel to #metoo in its denouncing of the public blaming and silencing of the victims. Both movements created platforms where women together and collectively returned to the intimate spaces of their past in order to publicly share traumatic moments of their lives. They did so to combat prejudice about rape and sexual violence, such as the idea that the passivity of the victim is a sign of consent (McGregor) or that male sexuality is an incontrollable force of nature.[1]

The novelty of the #cuéntalo and #metoo movements was their global impact, which was made possible by the communication technologies of today. However, as the writings of the Spanish author and women's rights activist Carmen de Burgos (1867–1932) demonstrate, the phenomenon of women writing about their own experiences of sexual violence and sharing them publicly is not new. In this chapter I will focus on representations of sexual violence in two novels by Carmen de Burgos, *Los inadaptados* [The non-adapted] from 1909 and *La malcasada* [The badly married woman] from 1923. In these novels, Burgos returns to her own intimate childhood spaces of the Almería province in southern Spain to share experiences of sexual violence in fictional form, blending it with autobiographic elements. She recounts the experience of rape from the victim's perspective, sketching a realistic portrayal of the traumatic moment.

Both novels depict a young woman whose name is Dolores, which means pain in Spanish. The women are both young and both become victims of sexual violence, but despite these similarities they are women of different backgrounds and social classes. This simultaneously connects them and distances them from the author's own background. As Burgos' biographer, Concepción Núñez Rey, points out, the author's childhood spaces play an important part in many of her novels. Throughout Burgos' career, she recreated the environments of the Almería province to explore various problems related to women's existence in the world. Núñez Rey has called this literary endeavour the Rodalquilar cycles (Núñez Rey, "Introducción"). The works recall the village of Rodalquilar, where Burgos' family used to spend their summers at the family

1 The definition of rape used in this chapter is 'sexual intercourse with an individual against her or his will'. Sexual violence is understood as a broader concept that includes rape and any other acts of sexually intimidating or harming another person.

estate, La Unión, which would later appear under exactly that name in some of her fiction (Núñez Rey, *Carmen de Burgos* 41–42).

In both *Los inadaptados* and *La malcasada*, Carmen de Burgos depicts the protagonists as women who traverse spaces, both socially and geographically. Both her versions of Dolores cross spatial boundaries in their attempts to accomplish a happy life as married women and make a place for themselves as loving and desiring subjects in their intimate relations. The novels also depict sexual violence as a part of the patriarchal customs that prevent women from having free and fulfilling love relations with men. A common and peculiar feature is the final vengeance scene of the novels, where the male perpetrator dies. This motif reverses that of the death of the fallen woman, common to French realist novels of the nineteenth century, such as *La Dame aux camélias* or *Madame Bovary,* which in many ways constitute Burgos' literary background. The vengeance motif is also a parallel to how today's global movements against sexual violence break the victims' silence and instead channel the collective anger towards the perpetrators.

As we will see, in addition to the very obvious spatial setting of *Los inadaptados* and *La malcasada* in the environments of Burgos' native Almería, both novels contain elements of the author's own biography as well as reflections of her political stances as a feminist activist in Madrid. Nevertheless, any attempted claim that the stories about sexual violence can be linked to a truth about the author's own person is contrasted with other, obviously fictional, elements that contradict known facts about Burgos' own life. Interestingly, Burgos herself gave proof of a rather evasive attitude towards the role of a truthful autobiographical subject in a response to a request from her partner, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, that she would tell the story of her life in his magazine *Prometeo*, in an issue from 1909:

> My life is complex; I have changed phase many times; so many that I seem to have lived in many different generations … and I too have changed my ideas … my thoughts … What do I know! … I laugh at the unity of the *self*, because I carry many *selves* within myself, women, children … Old people …[2]
>
> "Autobiografía" 40, original italics

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2 "Mi vida es compleja; varío de fases muchas veces; tantas, que me parece haber vivido en muchas generaciones diferentes … y yo también he cambiado de ideas … de pensamientos … ¡Qué sé yo!… Me río de la unidad del *yo*, porque llevo dentro muchos *yoes*, hombres, mujeres, chiquillos … Viejos …". All translations from Carmen de Burgos' original texts in this chapter are my own.

The playful manifestation of multiple selves certainly suited the modernist aesthetics of the Madrid avant-garde where both Burgos and Gómez de la Serna were well known, but it also constitutes an interesting backdrop to the creation of her two fictional doubles, Dolores, in the novels. Furthermore, the way that Burgos avoids relating the truth to her own self – both in her response, above, to her partner's request and in the portrayals of sexual violence in her novels – reflects the logic of the patriarchal order. Claiming as truth that which is connected to an individual self is a privilege owned by Western masculine subjectivity: being the *one* that represents the universality of *all* human experience (cf. Flax 190–92). As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point out, the privilege of creating an autobiographical subject by manifesting an authentic and individualistic "I" in public discourse, is owned predominantly by white men (XVII–XVIII).

In this chapter I will show how Carmen de Burgos' novels achieved an effect similar to the #metoo and #cuéntalo movements in the way the collective storytelling characterized them, which permitted a universalizing of the experience of sexual violence. In Burgos' case, this was achieved by fictionalizing the intimate spaces of her own past, as well as by the multiplication of her own self through two different fictional versions of the suffering Dolores, which both mirror Burgos' own self and evade any such recognition. The fragmented narrative creates the voices of a myriad of selves, rather than just one, telling the story of the powerless rape victim and transferring it from the private sphere into the public space.

As we have seen, Carmen de Burgos herself avoided writing her autobiography, and after her death the Franco regime in Spain (1939–1975) made serious efforts to wipe her memory off the face of the earth (Núñez Rey, *Carmen de Burgos* 624–25). Nevertheless, thanks to the assiduous efforts of scholars and archivists documenting her life and work during the last four decades, we may now have a glimpse of a life that was truly worthy of being fictionalized. She was born into a liberal bourgeois family in Almería, and spent her summers in the village of Rodalquilar and winters in the provincial capital, Almería. As we will see, she maintained this contrast between the rural and urban spaces of her childhood in her literary portrayals of them. She married young, at only sixteen, and little is known about the details of her life as a young married woman in Almería. However, there is reason to believe it was not a happy marriage, but no documentation exists that could prove that the depiction of sexual violence in *Los inadaptados* and *La malcasada* is based on Burgos' own experiences.

Burgos separated from her husband when her only surviving child was born, managed to get a teaching degree in Granada in 1895 and moved to Madrid

in 1901, as a single mother, to earn her living (Núñez Rey, *Carmen de Burgos* 69–85). For the rest of her life she combined working as a teacher with a successful career as a journalist and writer under the pseudonym of Colombine. The pseudonym was given to her by her first newspaper employer, Augusto Figueroa of the *Diario Universal*, where she was hired to start a weekly women's column combining advice on beauty and fashion with reflections on women's politics. Already in 1904, Burgos became known as "la divorciadora" (the divorce lady) throughout Spain, after she published an inquiry into the legalization of divorce in which she asked various prominent Spaniards to give their opinion on the matter (Burgos, *El divorcio en España*; Núñez Rey, *Carmen de Burgos* 115–33).

Through her newspaper columns and popular short stories, Burgos became a well-known public figure in Spain, where she strenuously fought for women's right to divorce and suffrage. She also put much effort into the fight to abolish the 'passionate crime' clause in Spanish legislation, which permitted mitigation of the sentence for husbands who went on trial for killing their unfaithful wives. She even wrote a short story on this issue, with a title referencing the legal clause, *El artículo 438*, and an epigraph quoting the text of the clause (Burgos, *El Artículo 438*). In what follows, we will observe how Burgos wove traces of her early life experiences into the two novels where she portrayed experiences of sexual violence, as well as elements from her later political activism in Madrid.

1 *Los inadaptados* (1909)

The centre of the action of Burgos' first full-length novel, *Los inadaptados*, is the young village woman Dolores, who lives in the village of Rodalquilar and is happily married to Víctor with whom she has a child. When Víctor is arrested by the authorities, Dolores decides to leave the safe environment of her village to visit their landlord in the main town of Níjar to plead for Victor's release. The landlord then rapes Dolores, who gets pregnant and gives birth to a sickly boy who later dies of lung disease. The rape creates a split between Dolores and Víctor, when Dolores avoids telling him about it, but they continue loving each other. Nevertheless, the couple's intimate life ceases after the incident with the landlord, and after the boy's death Victor's resentment grows. He then ends up killing the landlord in what appears to be a hunting accident, with the whole village giving its silent approval of his act of revenge.

The Rodalquilar environment that Carmen de Burgos created in *Los inadaptados* adheres to the aesthetics of the naturalist novel, with detailed accounts of nature and the antiquated lifestyle of its inhabitants.[3] The villagers of Rodalquilar are depicted as a prehistoric contrast to the Catholic customs of the rest of Spain, especially regarding their love relations which are described as free and equal, where marriage is based on old pagan traditions and mutual consent, without involving a priest (Burgos, *Los inadaptados*, 48–51). In the portrayal of mutual consent and the absence of the Church in marriage, the fictional space of Rodalquilar in *Los inadaptados* stands out as an archaic vision of the free love propagated within progressive feminist circles in Madrid, where Carmen de Burgos was already an established feminist debater by the time of the publication of the novel. Famous opponents of traditional marriage at the turn of the twentieth century, such as Gustav Bebel or Friedrich Engels, were known for their evocation of archaic cultures and ancient civilizations as a contradiction of the idea that men's supremacy over women is a law of God or Nature (Eller). Carmen de Burgos herself was no exception. In her programmatic feminist manifesto, *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*, she would highlight the status of women in ancient cultures and religions as a contrast to the patriarchal oppression of women in modern society (Burgos, *La mujer moderna* 212–14).

The creation of the fictional Rodalquilar as an archaic projection of Burgos' own feminist ideals is further developed with the absence of the Christian concept of honour among the villagers, in the sense that married couples who do not love each other may dissolve their relationships freely by mutual consent and find new partners. This is based on the honesty that Carmen de Burgos held out as the secret of the harmonious equality that ruled the love life of her fictional Rodalquilar. Lying is not accepted between spouses, because men should not have to work to provide for the children of other men: "What was not tolerated was deception or lies. The woman who did not love her man should tell him, but not make him work to support the offspring of others" (Burgos, *Los inadaptados* 143).[4] This view of infidelity as a betrayal of men's efforts to support their own offspring is reflected in Víctor's rage against the landlord towards the end of the novel, when the silence that surrounds the

3 In many ways, the detailed accounts of the village people's work and habits bring to mind the literary *constumbrista* style of nineteenth-century Spain. This was a type of literature focused on everyday life motives, which was refined by Mariano José de Larra, the subject of an acclaimed biography by Burgos, entitled *Fígaro* and published in 1919.

4 "Lo que no se toleraba era el engaño o la mentira. La mujer que no quisiera a su hombre que se lo dijera, pero que no le hiciera trabajar para mantener hijos ajenos."

landlord's crime has not only deprived him of intimacy with Dolores, but has also made Víctor accept the child born of the rape as his own.

This archaic bliss of Rodalquilar stands out as an image of eternal harmony, a backdrop to the tension Burgos creates between the harmonious village life and the outside world. This enters the village like a foreign menace when the landlord's violation of Dolores becomes the centre of the action. Burgos made use of a true event for the origin of the disastrous course of the novel: the shipwreck of the steamer Valencia on the coast of Almería in 1892 (Núñez Rey, "Introducción" 15). In *Los inadaptados*, the steamer Valencia, a harbinger of the modern outside world, is wrecked on the beach of Rodalquilar on its way carrying oranges from the Spanish east coast to the foreign consumer markets of Europe.

When the steamer smashes into rocks near the shore, oranges from the cargo get dispersed along the bay and the village women gather on the beach to collect them before the fruit starts to rot. When the steamer, in the midst of general turmoil, is robbed of other valuable goods, Dolores' husband Víctor is suspected, arrested by the authorities, and taken from the village to the main town of Níjar. This is when Dolores decides to leave the village accompanied by one of the two village beggars, Antonio Diego, and a donkey, to plead with the landlord, Don Manuel, for Víctor's freedom. On their way out of the village, they meet the other village beggar, the anarchist Luis Márquez, who expresses his suspicion that it was the powerful men from town who robbed the ship of valuable goods while the women gathered the oranges. With the "accents of a prophet" (acento de profeta) he warns Dolores against entering the unknown space of the civilized world:

> Go back, go back home, poor woman. Behind these mountains misery lurks ... There are great cities ... civilization ... educated men. You don't know what that is! ... No, do not go there ... They are worse than the beasts ...[5]
>
> BURGOS, *Los inadaptados* 118

Dolores ignores the beggar's warnings, continuing her journey towards Níjar and when reaching the landlord's house, she enters alone to plead for Víctor's freedom. This is when the landlord suddenly forces himself on her, telling her that her husband's freedom depends on her behaviour. Carmen de Burgos

5 "–Vuelve, vuelve a tu casa, infeliz; detrás de estas montañas acecha la desdicha ... Hay grandes ciudades ... civilización ... hombres cultos. ¡Tú no sabes que es eso! ... No; no te acerques allí ... Son perores que las fieras ...".

describes the perpetrator of the act as a beast or a wolf and consequently she depicts Dolores' reaction as similar to the freezing behaviour of a prey animal:

> A cold veil rose from her heart to her head, she no longer felt anything … she vanished, inert, between the arms that oppressed her.[6] (128)

In sharp contrast to her romantic portrayal of the arcadian, prehistoric bliss in the village, Carmen de Burgos offers a realistic portrayal of Dolores' psychological reaction to being raped by the landlord: the victim shuts down her feelings, mentally vanishing from the scene. The way that Burgos lets the victim freeze instead of fighting back demonstrates her insight into the behaviour of a victim. Research in trauma psychology has identified such behaviour as common in women facing the threat of sexual assault (Mason and Lodrick). Even today, women's rights activists around the world are trying to transmit this knowledge about the behaviour of rape victims to legislators in order to subvert the idea of the inert victim's passivity as tantamount to assent to sexual intercourse (McGregor).[7]

With the representation of rape in the novel, the author herself broke the taboo of silence around sexual violence that has accompanied women throughout history (D'Cruze), but she let her protagonist, Dolores, stay in silence throughout the novel. The secret exacerbates the split between Dolores and her husband after the rape and it also deviates from the honesty that characterizes the love relationships of the villagers in Burgos' novel.

After the rape, Dolores finds herself pregnant and the landlord releases Víctor but keeps his grip over the family by relocating them to his estate La Unión in Rodalquilar (named after the Burgos family estate in the same village). There, Víctor continues working to sustain the family, including the landlord's son. The blond and delicate features of the child that is born are presented as a premonition of its impending death, differing from the dark skin and robustness of the couple's first-born:

> Her second child was to her like a constant rebuke. His degenerate blood made him blond, pale, and with dark circles stretching over his face like

6 "Un velo frío le subió del corazón a la cabeza, ya no sintió nada … quedó desvanecida, inerte, entre los brazos que la oprimían."

7 For instance, in the rape case that provoked the #cuéntalo uprising in Spain, the lack of physical resistance on the part of the victim made the court find the five perpetrators not guilty of rape, since they had not forced the victim with physical violence (Beatley).

> lily petals, instead of showing off his brother's cheeks and his brick-coloured flesh, big, chubby, and rosy. [8]
>
> BURGOS, *Los inadaptados* 151

In the features of the dead child and its unfitness for survival, there is an echo of the eugenic notions of race and biological heritage that were common among intellectuals throughout the political and academic spectrum at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Spain this was particularly the case within the anarchist movements (Cleminson; Molero-Mesa et al.). In the context of the novel, however, the features of the dying child reflect the difference between the rural and the upper-class spaces that are being contrasted in the novel. The delicacy of the blond child underlines its position as a wedge of civilization that has been forged in the village where it cannot survive.

The wedge of civilization that tears Dolores and Víctor apart in the novel is also illustrated by the cold atmosphere of Catholic morality that reigns in their new home on the landlord's estate, in contrast to the vibrant and passionate life of the villagers. In the midst of the cold and incommunicative atmosphere between the spouses, Burgos depicts a longing for love and desire between them, a yearning that also involves the dead child, and that finally builds into a strong desire for vengeance in Víctor. The deadlock between the spouses is not released until Dolores breaks her silence. Then, Víctor confesses to his wife that he is waiting for the right moment to vent his anger and kill the landlord (Burgos, *Los inadaptados* 216–18).

When Victor finally manages to carry out his vengeance plan in what appears to be a hunting accident, where the landlord falls into a well and dies, the whole village gives its silent approval to the deed and implicitly justifies the symbolism of Víctor's name, as 'victory'. Burgos offers her reader a final scene, where Victor is standing close to his wife, as an impressive and frightening image of "the magnificent beauty of the gods of Rebellion and Revenge" (245).[9] In placing the revenge in the hands of Víctor in her first full-length novel, Burgos lets the husband act out the cathartic vengeance on behalf of the violated woman. As we will see, she would choose differently later in her career, letting the violated woman herself get even with her perpetrator.

8 "Su segundo hijo era para ella como una constante reconvención. Su sangre degenerada le hacía rubio, pálido, de ojeras que se tendían sobre su rostro como pétalos de lirio; en vez de ostentar los mofletes y la carne color de barro cocido de su hermano, cachigordete y coloradote."

9 "La belleza magnífica del dios de la Rebeldía y la Venganza."

2 *La malcasada* (1923)

By the time of the publication of *La malcasada*, Carmen de Burgos' sixth full-length novel, the author was at the height of her career: a well-known writer, activist and much coveted contributor to magazines and journals in Spain. In 1923, Primo de Rivera initiated his era of dictatorship in Spain but, despite that, intellectual life flourished in the country's metropolis and the women's movement, with Burgos at centre stage, pushed forward with demands for suffrage, gender equality and legalized divorce.

In her 1923 novel Carmen de Burgos returns to the intimate spaces of her native Almería, but this time to the city of Almería itself and not to the countryside of the province. *La malcasada* has been interpreted as Burgos' most autobiographical work in its representation of a young, unhappily married woman in Almería (Sales Dasí). The novel lacks the romantic, naturalist beauty that characterized her first full-length novel, *Los inadaptados*. In *La malcasada* she focuses instead on Almería city, revelling in the kitschy details that highlight the pettiness of the provincial bourgeoisie. She seems to have used the whole toolbox of her melodramatic style of writing, developed during many years as a best-selling author, to denigrate the rich and wealthy in the city where she spent her early years. It seems as if the novel's entire gallery of characters was created to reflect "ugly feelings" as Ngai calls them, of revenge and anger. As we will see, Burgos also let her political message about the necessity of divorce shine through quite clearly in *La malcasada*, and especially in its ironic and bloody ending.

In *La malcasada*, the protagonist's name is also Dolores, but in this case, she is the opposite of a village woman. This time, Dolores is depicted as a young woman of a wealthy Madrid family who falls in love with a rich young man from Almería, whom she marries, believing his charming behaviour to be the harbinger of a blissful future. Soon after the marriage he turns out to be quite the opposite: a gambler, a drunkard, and the local womanizer, who spends his nights in bed with other women. Antonio abuses Dolores, but Burgos does not let his sexual criminality be limited to his wife. Towards the end of the novel, Antonio even starts abusing his mistress' fourteen-year-old daughter with the mother's silent permission (Burgos, *La malcasada* 244).

Intimacy between the spouses in *La malcasada* is described in a way reminiscent of the freezing behaviour of the victim in *Los inadaptados*, in the sense that Dolores shuts down her feelings and passively endures Antonio having sex with her:

> She remained silent, frozen, suffering those kisses, which hammered painfully in her brain; but she had no energy to reject it. Her will fell asleep even to the extent of accepting this abjection. She was like a thing that belonged to that man. (53)[10]

Once again, Carmen de Burgos offers a realistic description of the psychological response to trauma due to sexual violence in the way that Dolores, in the passage above, detaches herself from what is happening to her, letting her will fall asleep and becoming a thing belonging to that man. Trauma research has made evident that dissociative mechanisms like those described by Burgos – in Dolores when she distances herself from what is happening, or in the protagonist of *Los inadaptados* when she is raped by the landlord – are common in victims of repeated sexual violence and are likely to result in severe psychological trauma (Levine, 136–39; Mason and Lodrick).

No one in Antonio's family shows any compassion for Dolores' situation in her loveless marriage. The only exception is the rich and beautiful Aunt Pepita, the foremost matriarch of Antonio's family, a widow elegantly dressed in black. When Dolores decides to leave her husband, Pepita is the only family member who shows her some tenderness, even though the separation of the spouses goes against the aunt's Catholic faith (Burgos, *La malcasada*, 178). The widowed matriarch appears as a sort of portent of the novel's deadly ending, but Aunt Pepita may also be interpreted as an ironic wink on the part of the author. Through Aunt Pepita's list of merits – five dead husbands – Burgos managed to pinpoint widowhood as the only possible career path for a woman in Spain at the time that would grant her a life of independence. In the novel, Dolores even shares with Pepita the thought that she would sooner be divorced than wish her husband dead. Pepita does not object to this, but only responds, first with silence and then with tender resignation: "Oh, my dear! It is useless to seek the ideal in marriage. Dreams are always superior to reality" (178).[11]

As mentioned earlier, the legalization of divorce was one of Burgos' principal struggles and in the 1923 novel she informs her readers of their limited legal rights through Dolores' lawyer Pepe, a young man who also becomes the target of the protagonist's fantasies of true love and intimacy. Pepe explains to Dolores that there is no way of getting a legal divorce in Spain, only separation,

10 "Permanecía muda, helada, sufriendo aquellos besos, que martilleaban dolorosamente en su cerebro; pero no tenía energía para rechazarlo. Su voluntad se dormía hasta para aceptar aquella abyección. Ella era como una cosa que le pertenecía a aquel hombre."

11 "¡Ay, hija mía! Es inútil buscar el ideal en el matrimonio. Siempre es superior el sueño a la realidad."

and when Dolores succeeds in separating from her husband, she ends up in a state of limbo.

The rootless state where Burgos puts the separated Dolores in the novel leads to a situation of constant fear, which is maintained by the men in her proximity. This is almost an illustration of the patriarchal rape culture that Susan Brownmiller, in *Against Our Will* from 1975, would describe as a "process of intimidation by which *all* men keep *all* women in a state of fear" (15, original italics). Instead of being set free to create her own life, Dolores is set aside, first in the household of her husband's brother, Luis, where she becomes a family pariah. Dolores is seen as the prey of any woman-hunting man in Almería, where even a trusted member of her husband's family, Uncle Eduardo, takes advantage of her situation and tries to abuse her sexually. He is then followed by Luis, who tries to seduce Dolores and threatens her when she rejects him (Burgos, *La malcasada* 202–09). After separating from Antonio, Dolores is left with no space for a life of her own in a society where a woman's life depends on the protection of a man. Here, Burgos transmits the experience of the so-called fallen women of her time, the ones who end up outside of the protected space of belonging to one man. Such a woman must see a perpetrator in any man she encounters, since she instead of belonging to one man belongs to them all. When Dolores leaves Luis' house, finding refuge in the home of an old widow, Doña Anita, the sexual abuse continues in the form of indecent letters from a great number of men who find in her "the woman of whom no marriage ambush was to be feared" (228).[12]

Dolores finally surrenders to the impossibility of getting a legal divorce and decides to reunite with her husband, with the single demand that he will leave her alone, to which he agrees. In this way Dolores ends up in what is described as the tiny space of alleged freedom that is offered to an unhappily married woman: the liberty of not having to endure the unwanted intimacy of an unendurable husband (245). In the final scene of the novel, however, even this tiny space is infringed, when Antonio comes home drunk one night wanting his wife's intimacy, to which she responds that she prefers death to his caresses (249). The narrator then describes the one sentiment that, before he tries to take Dolores by force, dominates the rapist's mind: the necessity for him "to impose his marital authority, his male dominance" (250).[13] By this remark, the author pinpoints that power and dominance are the motivating forces behind sexual violence, rather than love or desire. Burgos here shows an insight into

12 "la mujer de quien no había que temer la asechanza matrimonial."
13 "de imponer su autoridad de marido, su dominio de macho."

the perpetrator's motive, his will to dominate, that Susan Brownmiller half a century later would identify as the moving force behind men's sexual violence (11–15).

Similarly to *Los inadaptados*, Burgos ended *La malcasada* with the death of the perpetrator, although in the latter she let the victim herself perform the action by killing her husband with a pair of scissors in an act of self-defence at the end of the passage where Antonio comes home drunk and tries to force himself on her. The final death of the abusive husband echoes the motif of the widow personified in Pepita earlier in the novel, as a morbid and blood-soaked representation of the contemporary woman's only way to individual freedom, through the cathartic killing of her husband.

3 Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there is no way of proving that the experiences of sexual violence portrayed in *Los inadaptados* and *La malcasada* correspond to the author's own, even though they might well have done so. Nevertheless, considering the political ardour that characterizes Burgos' lifelong struggle against the legal and social injustice experienced by women, to limit the analysis of violence in the novels to the author's own biography would surely be reductive. The context of Burgos' role as a public figure is just as important here as her life in Almería, since it put her in a position to give voice to a shared experience of sexual violence, whether her own or belonging to the vast collective of Spanish women she addressed in her writings.

The Dolores characters in the novels are both young women though of different social class and origin. Despite their differences, both appear as the author's doubles, as young women who break spatial and social boundaries in their search for love and happiness in life. Dolores in *Los inadaptados* has a different social background to the author but shares the life in the village of Rodalquilar. Dolores in *La malcasada*, on the other hand, has a different local origin from Burgos herself, but shares her social background. Through this mixture of autobiographical doubling and fictionalization, the author achieves a fragmenting effect similar to the collective storytelling of the #metoo and #cuéntalo movements. There the intimate spaces of the individual past are manifested in public space though a mixture of voices that break the taboo of silence regarding sexual violence.

In her novels, Carmen de Burgos gives proof of a deep knowledge about the experience of being a victim of sexual violence in her realistic portrayals of it. However, this experience is not tied to her own person through any

autobiographical truth claim, but rather universalized through the fictionalization of the intimate spaces of the author's childhood. The political aspects of the novels, where the author includes elements connected to her activism as a feminist in Madrid, also lift these novels out of the author's personal, intimate spaces and into the public debates of both her time and ours. Considering this, the final vengeance in both novels might be inserted into a larger feminist project of articulating the anger of the victims, where Carmen de Burgos' stories in Ngai's terms become part of a cathartic, collective, and ongoing roar.

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PART 3

Intimate Authorship in Space and Time

CHAPTER 9

A Collective Sense of Intimacy

Carmen Sylva's Postures

Roxana Patraș and Lucreţia Pascariu

Abstract

Taking into account Carmen Sylva's multiple personae—princess, queen, writer, musician, philanthropist, etc.—we have explored *postures* as intimacy devices. Defined as a way of occupying a position in the social field, the notion of *posture* seemed the most appropriate for investigating the spatial and temporal coordinates of intimacy. In this specific case, the plurality of *postures* led to a discussion of spatiality and temporality under the larger concept of memory. We started by bringing biographical information about the queen's protean personality and about the functionality of pseudonyms and nicknames. Then, by scanning Sylva's wardrobe, we gathered evidence as far as the relationship body-intimacy is concerned. In the last part, we tried to demonstrate that the abstraction of Sylva's intimacy is caused by her attempt at behaving like a professional writer rather than by the limitations of her royal status.

Keywords

posture – realms of memory – wardrobe – royal brand – collective intimacy

1 Intimacy and Posturality

Elisabeth, Queen of Romania, Carmen Sylva's names through history are, like her works, legion. Bestowed by all the Muses, her protean, perhaps genial personality overlaps with a complex, carefully-composed identity that is reflected not only in her own literature (memoirs, poetry, novels, short stories, theatre), but also in the way nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographers retrieved it. This chapter explores Sylva's real and fictional personae, and hypothesizes a plurality of *postures,* each one with various degrees of self-disclosure and authenticity (Giddens, 184–205). Even though extremely relevant in showing a writer's versatility, genre considerations have been put aside in the remarks

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that follow: we have simply treated writings by or about Carmen Sylva, pictures and other testimonies featuring her alter-egos and representations as a system of communicating vessels, thus as documents having the same level of referentiality. Our understanding of *persona* (the mask) is a phenomenological one: it is "*a precondition* of the public presentation of self … *a prerequisite* of every scenic activity [*our emphasis*]", rather than an object as such (Meizoz and Martens 203). As "preconditions" of public presentation, as person emanations formed *ante res* in the vestibule of public life, Sylva's personae function, in our view, as intimacy devices.

Defined by theorists such as Alain Viala and Jerôme Meizoz, the notion of *posture* implies, from a spatial point of view, "a way of placing oneself in social space" and "a way of taking a position" (Meizoz 18; Viala, "Eléments de sociopoétique" 216). Viewed from a temporal perspective, it is connected with ephemeral dispositions, with moments, thus with short spans of time. Also, it seems the most appropriate for our case study because, endowed with a certain plasticity, it can open the essentialist concept of identity, thus it can support various aggregations of gestures, behaviours, and discursive expressions (Meizoz 40–41; Viala, "Eléments de sociopoétique" 216). Photographs and writings of or about Sylva are thus collated in order to prove that the plurality of *postures* leads, in her case, to a collective sense of intimate space and time. While the concept of intimacy usually evokes "something that is hidden away from a larger world" (see this volume's *Introduction*), it is worthwhile testing its complexity by trying its limits and by putting it in a paradoxical equation: intimacy and the collective. "In contradiction to what is suggested by our popular conception of intimacy (up close and personal)" – B.C. Parry argues – "*spaces of intimacy* may be stretched out such that they extend their encompassing arc across not only great geographical distances but also, curiously, across social parameters that may seem to be non-negotiable as conditions for the construction of intimacy" (Parry 35).

In line with the concept's "private turn" (Valentine 297), our idea of *collective intimacy* emerged from several questions shedding light on Carmen Sylva's specific case: Does intimacy have the same meaning for a queen and woman writer as for everyone else? Are the habits of privacy, familiarity, and informality altered by status? What emotions are predominant in a queen and women writer's intimacy? Is the body the only mediator, the only locus for intimate acts? The answers refer to Carmen Sylva's specific case as woman writer and queen, but may be taken as a starting point in a more general debate on public intimacy in general, and on writing intimacy in particular: "Keeping in mind the exposed nature of intimate writing [of all kinds of writing, *our comment*],

it is important to consider what happens to intimate acts when they are made public and visible" (Donovan and Moss 17).

Collective intimacy is also grounded on a "collective" definition of memory, supported by D. Caracostea's remark on Sylva's creativity as "dynastic" rather than as "individual", on her personal destiny as an episode of Romanian national history rather than as a story about disclosing the authenticity of self (483–504). It follows that our study works on the concepts of spatiality and temporality by subsuming them to the larger concept of memory: for the queen-poetess, intimate spaces function as "realms of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) (Nora 1–21), whereas postures, closely connected to her wardrobe pieces, render a temporal sense of identity.

From a civil viewpoint, she was born Princess Elisabeth Pauline Ottilie Luise of Wied, whereas from a political perspective she was Queen of Romania, the founding mother of the Romanian dynasty and, as biographers contend, the king's trustworthy advisor. In fact, "Carmen Sylva" is only one, albeit, the longest-running, of the queen's literary pseudonyms: while she signs her youthful verse as "E. Wedi", for more mature and experimental fiction she uses, beside "Carmen Sylva", mysterious anagrams of Dido and Carol such as "Dito & Idem" or "F. de Laroc" (Tartler 12; Marinescu 120). Various metonyms used by her contemporaries also point at her royal person and are indicative of the queen's exceptional versatility: the widely-circulated "poet-queen" and "mother of the wounded"[1] can be rounded off with a rich list of attributes such as "the Rhine princess", "the queen of the Carpathians", "the globetrotter queen", "the lonely queen", "a star of the Belle Epoque", "the exile", "an intellectual ogre", "the Danube muse", "the little fairy", "the storm", "the forest rose", "the (little) wild rose of Wied",[2] and so forth (Manolache 45–46; Bengescu 25; Sylva and Loti 43–44; Badea-Păun 7; Nixon 36; Zimmerman 26; Roșca 11; Badea-Păun 7–18, 175–185; Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* I 103; Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* II, 29; Deichmann 54).

In spite of the queen's natural pudeur, of her growing love for solitude, and of her attempt at hiding under a mask, the pseudonym Carmen Sylva did not favour "the development of an alternative identity" as in other famous cases – for instance, George Sand – because the literary signature was constantly coupled with the Queen's political and civil postures (Nixon 95). With a

1 "muma răniților". All translations of quotations in this chapter are ours.

2 The Queen's nicknames travel around biographies, monographs and articles published in four languages: German, Romanian, French and English. The English translations of these nicknames have been established by Sylva's English biographers and translators (e.g. Baroness Deichmann, Edith Hopkirk, Laura Nixon and others).

pseudonym put in inverted commas, the typical signature on her time's books and journals was usually "Carmen Sylva", H.M., the Queen of Romania (Nixon 93). Apparently, the overlap name-pseudonym had the result that she "could not develop a reputation based solely on the literary merit of her writing", as she was constantly suspected of "cultural propaganda" and "literary marketing" or, even more harshly, of gaining unmerited fame and literary prizes (Nixon 93; Marinescu 118; Zimmerman). For instance, Barbu Delavrancea was the only one, among the few Romanian writers, that dared baffle Sylva's literary groupies and voice doubt about the value of "the august poetess" (Delavrancea 350–408).[3] With less bitterness than Delavrancea but still very critical, Queen Mary, next in line on the Romanian throne, also nipped "Aunty" for her eccentric manner of dress,[4] for her eclectic artistic style and faulty sense of proportions, and for her melodramatic behaviour associated, paradoxically, with authoritarianism in family life (Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele* I 292–300).

Recent analysis has shown that Elisabeth of Wied was always caught between her literary and civil facets, which would explain, as in Marie Corelli's and Margaret Oliphant's cases, her belonging to a grey area of nineteenth-century hot issues: the emancipation of women, the Jewish question, etc. (Nixon 22). Always aware of her public posture, she did not dare attack taboos and conveyed a conservative perspective on the world, which – scholars assume – might have been politically justified, biographically and psychologically determined, or, given her preference for medieval art, even aesthetically formatted (Manolache 47; Sylva *Colțul penaților mei I* 37; Zimmermann 102). As in the story of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the same effigy also reflected Elisabeth's innate shyness and longing for dissolution as well as a double-dip craving for popularity (Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei I* 55, 165–166; Sylva *Colțul penaților mei II*, 15). The queen-consort internalized Charles I's dictum "Everything for the country, and nothing for me"; the female writer tried to force her way through to the centre of the nineteenth-century literary canon, which she assumed was the same as exposing her true self as much as possible.

Designating traits of simultaneous active personae, the name Carmen Sylva is an effigy, so its uses are closer to market brands than to literary pseudonyms. Standing for a sheaf of names and postures, the Carmen Sylva (royal) brand suggests versatility. Such an idea might be also supported by the fact that Sylva – like Queen Victoria and many other kings and queens who consented to participate in "the royal culture industry" of the nineteenth century

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3 "augusta poetă".

4 As her memoirs attest, this nickname was used by Queen Mary.

(Nixon 155–156) – seized the advantage of photography by presenting a *recherché* image of herself, her environment and her entourage to the wider public. Knowing her love for tableaux vivants (Badea-Păun 176) and the fastidious way in which she set the stage when she met a person for the first time (Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele* I 298), we can easily infer that the queen's photo sets portrayed her preferred ideas of personal scenery rather than any of those of the photographers. Therefore, for such a protean personality it is important to determine, first and foremost, whose intimacy we are actually talking about and what narrative of self it entails.

2 The Taming of Intimacy

Sylva's love for mise en scène affected her sense of intimacy and its spatial-temporal expressions. There are enough testimonies evidencing that both her solitude and her public appearances had a studied scenic effect. Indeed, she loved to play the part of an august statue, draped in a marble-white gown. Grounded on "dynastic creativity" (Caracostea 483–504) rather than on individual creativity, the queen's authorial posture thus belongs to a space in time where collective memories are internalized as personal memories and, viewed the other way round, where personal recollections become moments of Romanian national history. Likewise, personal objects such as clothes, furniture and other artefacts participate in "the act of creating intensely intimate relations without personal interaction" (Parry 35).

Sylva's romantic taste for reclusiveness – nurtured by childhood reminiscences of wild landscapes – is confirmed by her choice of residences: from the Swiss hunting pavilion near the Peleș Castle in Sinaia to the house in Constanța from whose terrace she used to bless, via a megaphone, all the boats leaving the port (Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele* II 314–315). Commenting on Queen Mary's memories (Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele* I 298), the biographer Gabriel Badea-Păun notices that Sylva had a preference for dark little corners such as the one called "The Paradise of Laces":[5]

> Everywhere, trinkets, family memories, photos and portraits of Princess Mary [*Sylva's daughter*] … priceless laces were hanging all around, clinging to the attic and the walls, covering the tables, the pillows, the sofa … In the attic, there was Sylva's studio, a big square room, with beams

5 "Paradisul Dantelelor".

> richly sculpted with fantastic animals. Beautiful curtains were covering the easels where prayer books were waiting for her miniature drawings. In a niche, a stocky couch looked as if it was inviting intimate discussion or rest.[6]
>
> BADEA-PĂUN 135–137

Perhaps unconsciously echoing Dickens' famous portrait of Miss Havisham, the biographer describes in the fragment provided above a space where time seems to have stopped. Like a cocoon or like an industrious female-spider, the queen is surrounded by real and abstract networks: laces, needlework and, of course, memories.

But what memories? Despite their darkness and shown-off cosiness, Sylva's rooms do not function as intimate spaces, but as a sort of collective intimacy, in the line of Nora's definition of "realms of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) (Nora 1–21). Here, in her private rooms, royal emotions can turn into a subject of collective interest and communal bonding; here, in her private rooms, people are encouraged to revere and remember a mother's pain at the loss of her child, a dynasty's failure to produce an heir, an artist's tormenting toils, a woman's hardships in finding her own voice. Turned itself into a museum piece, this queen's life could thus figure – despite the fact that she has always been perceived as a foreigner – as a piece of national history (Mironescu 22–26) or as a local legend, very much in the fashion of those gathered by Sylva in the collections published between 1880 and 1910: *Robia Peleșului*, *Poveștile Peleșului* [*Legends from river and mountain, Tales from the Carpathian mountains*], *Insula Șerpilor, Puiu, În luncă* (*o idilă*)*, Poveștile unei regine* [*The serpent-isle, In the meadow. A love affair, Stories of a queen*] and so forth. In actual fact, the museification of emotions (sorrow, pain) is already a traceable stylistic device in *Pilgrim Sorrow: A Cycle of Tales* (1884).

Published in 1908 and translated partially as *From the Memory's Shrine* (1911),[7] *Mein Penatenwirkel* hybridizes several biographical genres because the author

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6 "Peste tot, bibelouri, amintiri de familie, fotografii sau portrete ale principesei Maria. Carmen Sylva avea predilecție pentru micile colțuri întunecate, asemeni alcovului aflat în continuarea budoarului ei și pe care îl numea Paradisul Dantelelor, unde dantele neprețuite erau agățate peste tot, prinse de tavan, pe pereți, pe mese, pe pernițe și pe canapea. (…) La mansardă, sub acoperiș, se afla atelierul lui Carmen Sylva, o încăpere mare, pătrată, cu bârne bogat sculptate reprezentând animale fantastice. Niște draperii frumoase erau aruncate pe șevalete, pe care se aflau pagini din cărțile de rugăciuni pe care le orna cu miniaturi. Într-o nișă, un divan scund invita, parcă, la discuții intime sau chiar la odihnă …".

7 1908 is the publication year of the first German edition. It was translated in Romanian as *Colțul penaților mei* in 2002.

aims both to remember her own life and to instruct and enlighten the public: it is, first and foremost, Sylva's *memoirs*, but also a great-men-and-women anthology and a collection of exemplary portraits in the line of eighteenth-century moralist prose. The textualization of Sylva's authorial posture in the lineage of eighteenth-century culture is obvious in her choice of literary forms. Titled *Astra* and written in co-authorship with Mite Kremnitz – which is a scarce practice in the landscape of Nineteenth-century Romanian literature – one of her novels is a fictional epistolary in the fashion of Richardson's novels or, better still, in the fashion of Madame de Staël's, Mme Cottin's or Mme de Genlis's. The queen's moralist tastes and literary influences lead us to the hypothesis that her fierce rhythm of letter-writing (Bengescu 2019, 225–237) should perhaps not be regarded as "a modern means of communication" (Badea-Păun 7) but as a leftover from an eighteenth-century intellectual habit that enabled her to transgress the boundaries between private and public domains (Clery 138; Spencer 217).

While nineteenth-century fiction contains plenty of letters, *billets doux*, diaries, and albums (Duțu 88–91), Sylva's fondness for letter-writing does not belong to a model of seduction, but to a rationalist and aulic model of chancery. This is also supported by the fact that while she kept writing literature as an amateur in her youth, it was only around 1880 that she decided to act as the secretary of her own life and behave as a self-conscious professional writer. Chancery letter-writing and the corresponding posture of the (woman) letter writer fulfil the same function as Sylva's private rooms: to interbreed the time of storytelling and the time of living, to tame privacy, to propose an open intimacy. For example, one of Sylva's short stories *Uă scrisóre* [A Letter] shows how letter-writing serves for the main character Agata as an incentive for recalling, understanding, and discoursing her entire life (Sylva, *Nuvele* 5–61). Once publicly exposed, this character's intimacy undergoes a process of abstraction.

3 The Wild Rose of Wied and Her Wardrobe

As mentioned above, many of the princess's nicknames contain the noun rose. Presumably, Sylva herself and her biographers might have undertaken usage of an iconic code: the English rose stood for all accomplished beauties. While *sub rosa* always lies mysterium, it is also possible that Sylva's youth nickname indicates a deeper psychological mechanism stirred by a problematic relationship with the body (Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* I 61): on the one hand, there is the acknowledgement of fleshly ephemerality, on the other, there is the rejection of bodily-related matters such as marriage and motherhood. Widely used as a

literary figure, the idea that the female is (like) a flower can be correlated with "a ritualized body erasure, with a de-corporealization of the feminine image" (Duțu 99), thus leading to the abstraction of intimacy.

Explained by biographers as a sort of *saeculum*, the queen's excessive pudeur is reflected in her unremitting rejection of décolleté clothing and, after her daughter's premature death, by her refusal to be consulted by a gynaecologist (Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* I 27; Badea-Păun 110). These biographical details might fit in the same frame with the queen's restatements of her fear of marriage, with her stylizing motherhood to the point that it becomes a marked psychological complex. The prevailing chronotope of the primordial in the fictional works, her interest in the magnetization of bodies and, later, in theosophy and spiritualism indicate a certain unease so far as the body is concerned (Sylva *Colțul penaților mei* I 27–30, 53; Caracostea 487; Manolache 50; Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* I 160; Badea-Păun 41–42). "The body", Sylva remarks in her memoirs, "does not matter and it is only meant to be conquered" (Sylva *Colțul penaților mei* II 61).

The de-corporealization and abstraction of intimacy become immediately apparent if one takes a glance inside the queen's wardrobe. Closely connected to her multiple personae and to the way they are aggregated under the same brand, the wardrobe is not only a place where royal clothing is stored; it is also a place where royal clothing gets exposed as if having a life of its own; it is also a place where the gesture of returning to the past acquires a stylistic significance. As a matter of fact, Sylva's short story *Năluca* [The ghost] includes a very interesting scene in which, completely unassisted by bodies, silk gowns, damask tunics, priests' vestments, and other ceremony apparel start moving and revolving around a "snow-white bridal dress".[8] Only a barely perceptible motion of laces and garments testifies to an invisible presence therein. This phantasmic gathering – in a richly lit hall, at midnight – represents a preview of the aristocratic marriage between the German princess Meta, heiress of Kommbach castle, and a young knight. Herself a wild rose' like Elisabeth of Wied, Meta is the daughter of a Bluebeard father and of a religious mother, whose eccentric lifestyle drags her among the spirits that haunt her parents' castle. As the ending of the story suggests, Meta turns into a ghost herself and is never to be wed (Sylva, *Nuvele* 354–358). If Meta is Sylva's alter ego, then the scene of the animated wardrobe pieces is meant to convey a sort of uneasiness as far as marriage (thus bodily intercourse) is concerned.

8 "uă rochiă de mirésă albă ca zăpada".

As Meta's story suggests, there is always a temporal dimension in all wardrobe pieces because they sheathe the memories of spent experiences and the phantasmal trace of premonitions; every instance it is worn, a dress can draw past into the present, and present into an anguished future. For instance, in *Colțul penaților mei* [*Mein Penatenwirkel*] recollections of important moments trigger representations of dresses worn then and there, implicit memories of previous body states: the Princess of Wied registered poor Clara Schuman's red velvet dress, but also her own blue-and-white dress when she was engaged to Charles I of Romania, the black wool dress she wore at her grandmother's funeral, her portrait in a décolleté dress, the black dress and the black-and-white stripped dress she chose for her uncle Moritz's funeral (Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* I 20, 27–28, 49, Sylva, *Colțul penaților mei* II 27, 40). Sylva also adds that her mother Maria of Nassau kept all her childhood dresses; the museification of a childhood wardrobe seems to have a negative effect on the now-mature queen ("disgust and fear", she confesses) because, like Princess Meta from *Năluca*, she associates them with severe physical punishment (Sylva *Colțul penaților mei* II, 26). The same happens with Astra, Sylva's voice in the eponymous novel written in collaboration with Mite Kremnitz, as the character associates the day of her unhappy engagement with a long black dress she wore as a bride (Tartler 23; Dito and Idem 114).

In point of fact, Gabriel Badea-Păun remarks that the queen designed a clothing line all for herself: the white silk dresses with a tunic cut, matched with costume jewellery and lace of her own making, huge capes garnished with expensive furs and ridiculous hats resembling night bonnets (Badea-Păun 149). In her memoirs, Queen Mary of Romania also depicts Elizabeth, dressed in long white dresses (Maria, Regina României, *Povestea vieții mele* II 314–316). Reportedly, a white dress was also part of the dramatic *entrée* the queen set up when Pierre Loti visited her for the first time: friends remember her as she left the great organ, where she had just finished playing Bach, descending from the bandstand in a blindingly white dress (Badea-Păun 169). Robert Scheffer's controversial novel *Misère Royale* begins with the stormy entrance of Queen Magda (Sylva's fictional projection), who wears a white woollen gown (Scheffer 1, 18). In Mite Kremnitz's novel *Radu*, Princess Fermanu – "tall", "stout", "blue shining eyes", "blonde, wavy hair", and "eagle nose, which gave her the aspect of a queen" – is dressed in "a sparkling white gown", simple and richly garnished with pearls (Kremnitz 32–33).

Richly-draped dresses as well as nostalgia evoking female gloves – the latter, a must in her grandmother's wardrobe, epitomize a modesty style of clothing, on the cusp between premodernity and modernity:

> The female body is articulated as a vessel for an (absent) unworldly object of desire, and her clothing as a vessel for the (absent) female body. The relation between body and clothes has been transformed; whereas premodern period clothes and underclothes were placed in relative, stark opposition to the body … by the end of the Victorian era, the female body and its clothes had become, not exactly exchangeable objects, but metaphors of sorts for one another.
>
> FINCH 338

Such metonymic expression of bodily matters might explain the more pronounced Gothic features of Sylva's fiction, announcing Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Nixon 18, 34, 173, 265) but also inheriting the features of the eighteenth-century "feminized (popular) Gothic" (Davison 85), which challenged old ideals of sociability, chiefly the segregation between public and private domains: "Due to its commercialized character, low cultural status and structural openness, the novel in general, and the Gothic novel more specifically, offered women writers a unique venue in which to engage in a variety of important cultural debates" (Davison 85).

Perhaps a bit too extravagant for local tastes, Sylva's Gothic was criticized as sensationalist and artificial because the queen was alleged to have come up with rehashed versions of the Romanian people, mores, and folklore (Delavrancea 350–408; Ardeleanu). In actual fact, her legends about Romanian sites make little reference to the inhabitants' private lives, the lack of ethnographic insight being compensated through universal psychological situations. The result is a romantic geography about mountains and rivers (Omu, Caraiman, Ceahlău, Furnica, Jipii, Peleș, Vârful cu Dor, Piatra arsă, and so forth) that could have been inspired more by her native Rhineland than by Romania. Indeed, in spite of her close collaboration with the best stylists among all Romanian writers (Alecsandri, Coșbuc, Eminescu, and so forth), the queen did not, in reality, manage to understand and communicate the subtleties of Romanian culture, so as to secure full access to what has commonly been called *le génie de la langue* (Fumaroli 216).

There was, whatsoever, another way for her to access the genius of the Romanian language and culture: by supplementing her white royal wardrobe with plenty of Romanian traditional white blouses and by spreading photographs of herself and of her ladies-in-waiting dressed as peasants, in an idyllic, rural and sometimes working posture. For example, Franz Mandy's 1883 photo set presents Sylva as a Romanian country woman in front of an easel or in front of a writing case, which are bizarre matches if one considers that at that time, 90% of the Romanian population was illiterate. The recently proclaimed

queen (this happened back in 1881) wears a richly embroidered traditional blouse; on the easel lies a miniature with Gothic letters. Around her, other miniature pages suggest Sylva's arachnean industriousness. Another picture from 1910 presents the queen in front of a loom, surrounded by the books of the library she created in the Bucharest Royal Palace.

Wearing a Romanian traditional costume in an intimate setting – be it an idyllic pose in the fields or a cosy pose in a library – sends out a message of familiarity with the queen's adoptive culture. By the same token, we may infer here an intimacy *sub specie communitatis*.

4 Intimacy Unchained

Besides an obvious effort to become acquainted with Romanian culture (by redefining local legends and by wearing traditional costume), many of Sylva's portraits also project images suggesting that, in her mind, the intimacy of literature is held in predominance above all else (Duțu 73–85) and thus, the only one acceptable to be portrayed as a royal pose. Most of the time, the queen is surrounded by books, in a pensive or working posture: at the table in her boudoir at the Peleș Castle (1888); on the terrace of Domburg Castle (1895); in bed while self-exiled in Italy (1892); in front of a writing case (1883); with her royal husband and caressing a book (1883), on a couch in Neuwied (1900), weaving in the library of the Bucharest Palace (1910), etc. Sylva's pictures, while reading a book or in front of the typewriter, indicate an unmistakable one-on-one relationship with literature, in fact a type of "instructive intimacy", which involves the dissipation of self into a text that is being read or written (Schlanger 9–23, 127–150). For that reason, the maximum degree of royal intimacy, "the pure relationship" (Giddens 49–65) seems to be reached only in the presence of books, only through medialization. If that be Carmen Sylva's case, not only physical (related to fear of marriage), but also emotional intimacy turns out to be problematic.

The royal couple exchanged many letters, for instance, while Elisabeth was seeking treatment for infertility or while Charles was on the field of battle in the Russo-Turkish War. However, there is an utter imbalance in the number of letters written to each other. Between 1869 and 1888, Elisabeth wrote six times more letters than her husband. The editors of the most recent volume of royal correspondence noticed that Charles I – renowned for his laconism and discreteness – only kept letters that he himself considered relevant for historians (Zimmerman and Constantinescu 8). However, according to the nineteenth-century code of romantic behaviour, it was not uncommon for couples to take

back or to give back letters when experiencing difficulties in relationships or after a final break up. Thus between 1892 and 1894, during the so-called marriage crisis, when the queen went into a kind of exile, we can imagine the royal partners rereading and probably purging their past (love) correspondence. Still, the imbalance between the partners' surviving letters might lead one to hypothesize that the king's sense of historical mission represents only the outer shell of a deep psychological crisis whose source is the queen's need to be confirmed as a writer. Indeed, the inflation of Sylva's love letters might also be explained by her obstinacy to preserve each and every written piece that she had ever written as drafts for future literary endeavours. The rereading and re-evaluation of past postures means a gradual distancing from self, in fact unfolding the very mechanism of professional writing: lives broken into pieces and remade as texts, "intimations that destroy intimacy" (Pârvulescu 254).

Taking into consideration King Charles' taciturn temper and the fact that many of his letters to his wife have not survived to our day, the one he sent Elisabeth in 29 September 1893 sounds intriguing. In fact, the main issue between the two partners was the violation of intimacy:

> While you unreservedly trusted strangers, allowing them into the intimacy of your inner life, I was excluded, and when I drew your attention to the fact that you did not tell me this or that, you would always serve me the stereotypical answer "I am always silent". This claim was a self-deception, because you could never be silent about the others … Before, you had no reason to entrust the most sacred secrets to third parties. Now there is a devastating proof of your boundless indiscretion … It's about the infamous novel by R. Scheffer … You sacrificed what should have been most precious in your life … No longer was this world enough for your literary pride and they [the queen's entourage], through visions and ghosts, made you believe you are in contact with immortality.[9]
>
> SYLVA, Colțul penaților mei II 181–183

9 "În timp ce unor străini le acordai încredere fără reserve, îngăduindu-le să aibă acces la intimitatea vieţii Tale sufleteşti, eu eram exclus, iar când îţi atrăgeam atenţia că mie nu-mi spuneai cutare sau cutare lucru, mă alegeam cu stereotipicul răspuns *eu tac mereu*. Această pretenţie constituia o autoînşelare, căci faţă de ceilalţi n-ai putut niciodată să taci (…) Înainte nu aveai, însă, niciun motiv să încredinţezi unor terţe persoane cele mai sfinte secrete. Acum există o probă nimicitoare a indiscreţiei tale fără margini (…) Este vorba despre imfamul roman al lui R. Scheffer (…) Ai sacrificat ce-ar fi trebuit să-ţi fie mai scump în viaţă celor care, prin neruşinate linguşiri, voiau să te aibă la discreţia lor. Lumea asta nu-ţi mai ajungea pentru orgoliul tău de scriitor şi ei, prin vedenii şi fantome, te-au făcut să te crezi în contact cu nemurirea".

To a certain extent, King Charles's letter stresses the fact that there is nothing more contrasting than literature and pure relationships; actually, there is nothing more contrasting than the process of writing and intimacy. What the king does not understand, altogether thoroughly, is that the true cause of their marriage crisis was not the queen's bohemian entourage (Hélène Vacaresco; Robert Scheffer and others), but the growing professionalization of Sylva's writing. More likely, this crisis escalated a decade earlier and 'the exile' represents only the highest point of their crisis.[10] So, if Sylva's works retrieve an abstract sense of intimacy on both physical and emotional levels, then the cause should not be sought in the protocolar restrictions of the royal posture, but instead, in a profound, almost fanatic, engagement with literature.

5 Conclusions

Taking into account Carmen Sylva's multiple personae – princess, queen, writer, musician, philanthropist, etc. – we have explored *postures* as intimacy devices. Understood as "a way of occupying a position and of adjusting to it" (Viala, "Posture" 216–218), the notion of *posture* seemed the most appropriate for investigating the spatial and temporal coordinates of royal intimacy as well as its "partial nature" (Parry 36). In the first part, we provided biographical information about the queen's protean personality and about the way she made use of pseudonyms and nicknames. In her case, the plurality of postures led to a collective sense of intimacy: considering the queen's rooms, wardrobe, and literary style as the geometrical loci where personal recollections and collective memories crisscross, we showed evidence for Parry's theory that "material artefacts … effectively operate as an interface between different knowledge communities. The objects maintain a common 'public' or normative identity while still being capable of local interpretations that are the product of very private and individualized engagements. While suffused with different meaning and values for each of these constituencies they nevertheless, or indeed precisely because of their multiple valences, effectively operate as points of mediation and negotiation between each" (Parry 2008, 36). In the second part, we commented on a few of Sylva's fictional works, letters, and memoirs in order to prove that the queen's obsolete postures (in terms of both clothing and writing), many of them bearing a phantasmal, Gothic air, testify to a problematic relationship with bodily matters. In the last part, we commented on

10 "l'exilée".

royal correspondence and analysed the relationship of private space-reading-writing as being indicative of an instructive, more abstract, intimacy that implies a ritual de-corporealization, the dissipation of self into the text that is being read or written. Paying a heavy price in terms of family life, the female writer discovers that the purest of all relationships is to be found within the realm of literature.

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2019-0127, within PNCDI III.

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CHAPTER 10

Discovering Intimacy in Impressionist Poetry

The Voice of Slovene Vida Jeraj

Alenka Jensterle Doležal

Abstract

In the study we research intimacy in the poetry of Slovene Vida Jeraj (1875–1932). In the period of the Fin- de-Siècle Slovene women writers were no longer silent. Jeraj as the most distinguished poet from the Slovene female women writers' circle of the newspaper *Slovenka* [Slovene women; 1897–1902], connected to the ascending Slovene feminist movement and became the first Slovene lyrical female poet. Jeraj was a nomadic person, part of the Habsburg myth with a bilingual, hybrid identity: Slovene and Austrian. With a passionate, delicate, and sometimes subversive voice Jeraj expresses intimacy in an impressionist, decadent and symbolist style, engaging in a dialogue with the contemporary European literature. Light, etheric poetry full of tender feelings proclaimed the new credo and also the philosophy of the ascending modernism in Slovene poetry. Jeraj wrote about the moments in nature, the blessing of the meetings of lovers and about parting and death. In connection to these motifs the temporality and the historical dimensions of her lyrical confessions will be explored. Furthermore, the expressions of intimacy will be connected to social and religious conditions in Central Europe of the period.

Keywords

intimacy in poetry – time and space in poetry – Vida Jeraj – Slovene *Moderna* – Central European women writers – Fin-de-Siècle literature

In this study I explore the poetry of Vida Jeraj (Franica Vovk, 1875–1932). The story of the talented poet is the tragic story of a female writer of the small Slovene patriarchal society making her way through life, balancing writing, love, and living at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century in the shadow of great historical and political changes in Central Europe: the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the First World War,

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and the beginning of the new Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia was a part after the end of the war. In her lyrical discourse I will focus on intimacy in connection with time and space.

My reflections on the topic of intimacy in Jeraj's poetry will begin with the speculations of the philosopher Henry Bergson, the poet's contemporary, who, with his theory of nature and his subjective perception of time and its relation to space, had a profound influence on the generation of Slovene novelists and poets at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Already in his early work, he focused on a special perception of time and space:

> We involuntarily fix at a point in space each of the moments which we count, and it is only on this condition that the abstract units come to form a sum. No doubt it is possible, as we shall show later, to conceive the successive moments of time independently of space, but when we add the present moment to those which have preceded it, we are not dealing with these moments themselves, since, they have vanished forever, but with the lasting traces which they seem to have left in space on their passage through it.
>
> BERGSON 79

In the impressionistic poetry by Vida Jeraj we find a very similar perception of special moments and a new understanding of time and space connected to intimacy. In her modern perception, Jeraj believed and wrote about the qualitative, special moments related to space. Her close connection between time and space can be expressed as a chronotope – the interconnectedness of temporal and spatial literary relationships (literary 'time space') as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin.[1] Her experience of the close connection of time and space in poetry was gained through intense sense perception, including her emotions. In searching for a new poetical language and choosing the right expressions, style, forms, and words, she was also searching for her inner self: the poetical language of emotions.

Intimacy is a category with a lot of meanings and aspects: psychological, philosophical, sociological – and literary ones. I will study this phenomenon in the literature of Vida Jeraj according to the concept of intimacy as defined by Donovan and Moss: intimacy as a long-term emotional connection with, a familiar awareness of, or a deep attachment to someone or something (4).

1 Bakhtin analysed the inseparability of space and time in the novel; nevertheless, it is possible to use his terminology for poetry as well.

In this article, I will point out the historical dimensions of intimacy as part of the European culture of the *fin-de-siècle* period. In Jeraj's autobiographical poetical discourse, intimacy connecting to the 'poetical chronotope' will be analysed. In her lyrical confessions, I will examine her awareness of herself, her relations to the other and to the world generally. The problem of gender and intimacy will also be underscored. Her themes were love, nature, and reflections on existence and death. We know that the perceptions of love and the erotica were at that time traumatic for both sexes.

Her understanding of intimacy and close relations with contemporaries can be traced in her correspondence with friends, colleagues, love partners – here we must emphasize the relations with her best friend Zorana Trojanšek Tominšek (1867–1935) and Josip Murn-Aleksandrov (1879–1901). Nevertheless, in the study I will focus mainly on the expression of intimacy in the poetry of the female poet, who showed in her texts an impassioned relation to the world. Generally, I will also follow her turn – through her poetical discourse and through the themes of intimacy – into modernity.

1 The Beginning of Jeraj's Poetry: The Period of the "Slovene Woman"

The history of Slovene female poetry is not very long. Fanny Hausmann (1818–1853), in 1848, was the first woman to publish a poem in Slovene, followed by Pavlina Pajk (1854–1901) and Luiza Pesjak (1828–1898). Jeraj's foremothers connected their writing with the Slovene national movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Luiza Pesjak was one of the first Slovene female writers to include emotional descriptions of nature and changing periods of time in her art, as well as typical female motifs, such as the love of a mother for a small child. Her poetical expressions were often interwoven with patriotic feelings.[2]

In the *fin-de-siècle* period, Slovene women writers were no longer silent and hidden. Women authors were full of life and energy. They were part of the Central European movement and the beginning of modernism in Europe. Vida Jeraj, the first Slovene female poet who voiced intimacy in her work, was the most distinguished poet from the female circle of *Slovenka* [Slovene woman,

2 In Slovene literature there also existed a strong tradition of 'male' intimate poetry from the Romantic era until the period of realism and the end of the nineteenth century: the greatest Slovene romantic poet, France Prešeren (1800–1849), wrote love poems with the motifs of tragic love interwoven with patriotic feelings. In Slovene literary society at the end of the nineteenth century, the national idea and also panslavism were no longer as important as they had been at the beginning of the national revival movement.

published in Trieste, 1897–1902], the circle of young female writers of prose and poetry, which was founded even before the organized Slovene feminist movement in 1901 (Žerjal-Pavlin 53–65). Jeraj – in contrast to her Slovene foremothers – searched for language and authenticity in expressing the feelings of her autobiographical lyrical subject. In her expressions of intimacy in poetry, we can follow the identity construction and also the construction of the authorship of the young writer. Vida Jeraj was a nomadic Central European person, part of the 'Habsburg myth' with a bilingual, hybrid identity: Slovene and German, as with all other Slovene modernists.[3] Jeraj received a German education and wrote some German texts in the beginning, but thereafter – as with other Slovene modernists – she decided to write in Slovene and to identify with Slovene culture.

Jeraj had problems getting her literary work recognized: she published just one collection of poetry, *Pesmi* [Poems; 908] during her lifetime and she was never really accepted into Slovene literary history. The Slovene literary historian Marja Boršnik, in 1935, wrote the first positive review of her poetry: "She is the first woman who dared to go public with relatively courageous erotic lyrics" (Boršnik 65).

Jeraj was also connected to the leading figures of the Slovene *Moderna* circle in Ljubljana. This generation appeared on the Slovene scene in 1899 with two anthologies of poetry (O. Župančič, *Čaša opojnosti* [The goblet of inebriation]; Ivan Cankar, *Erotika* [Erotics]). The first wave of Slovenian modernism consisted mainly of intimate, erotic poetry, which was also the topic of the texts of the first female Slovenian poets during the *fin-de-siècle* period, breaking away from the nineteenth-century habits of thought and writing.

In her work, we can recognize the traces of traditional Slovene poetry from the nineteenth century and also the influence of her Slovene and European contemporaries. The main influence on her writing was Heinrich Heine (1797–1856). Jeraj read Heine and translated his poetry throughout her life. Since Jeraj mostly translated Heine's love poems, the great German author was able to teach the young Jeraj how to express her loving feelings and how to be in a

3 She was educated in Vienna (1887–1891). At the end of the nineteenth century for some years she succeeded in financing herself as a teacher and independent writer. She was part of Slovene public life in the strict conditions of the narrow-minded Catholic Slovene society. After her marriage to the musician Karel Jeraj (1874–1951) in 1901, she moved to Vienna, where, with her husband, she established a literary salon for Slovene artists (see Jeraj-Hribar). After 1918 she returned with the family to Ljubljana. In 1932 she committed suicide. Her most creative period lasted for little more than ten years: from 1896 to 1908.

dialogue with the Other: how to express the spectrum of different, often also conflicting and discordant feelings in lyrics.

2 Poems by Vida Jeraj – "Passions of the Heart"

From the beginning of her writing Jeraj's relation to the world generally was erotic and full of desire (in her case, we could speak about *Eros* as a philosophical phenomenon in a wider sense, a kind of equivalent to 'life power'). In her literary confessions, she always tried to go beyond herself and form a communion with the Other. She sharpened her lyrical voice in the classical form of confessions in a time of ascending modernism, when in Central Europe the new poets – and also female poets with delicate poetics – appeared with completely different, more modern poetics. Modernist poetry did not want to express feelings anymore. In the words of Hugo Friedrich, modern poetry showed dehumanization: poetry without emotions, a "rational escape" from feelings, poems knowing "neither joy nor sorrow" (Friedrich 196) and also poetry without human dimensions, without a lyrical subject in his/her form being present. On the European cultural scene, some avant-garde women writers were already present and active with that kind of poetry and they deconstruct lyrical confessions in their texts, but experimental poetics was nothing for Jeraj. She preferred traditional confessions. Nevertheless, for Slovene circumstances, her poetry was also innovative: the expressions of her feelings were very modern, and she was brave enough to find her lyrical voice, the first female poet to express her personal feelings – with sometimes traditional poetics. She tried to find original images of the outside world to describe the reality of her inner world, and she looked upon the world through a lens of intimacy. These intimate spaces of her language in short poems written in a classical form, constitute her originality. Her typical intimate form was also a dialogue with the Other: with her lover. In her later poems she was also in intimate dialogue with the great negater – death. (Jensterle-Doležal, "Med impresijo in in dekadentnimi občutki", 31–107; Jensterle-Doležal, "Aporie slovinské moderny" 47–58; Jensterle-Doležal "Imagining the Not Imaginable", 21–33; Jensterle-Doležal "Pri mojih durih čaka smrt", 5–17)

Jeraj prefers short verses, clear, short expressions and a simple but very melodic way of communicating with the reader. Her impressionistic, sometimes decadent poetry is highly autobiographical: her poems represent a diary of her turbulent life. Writing was for her a kind of self-discovery of her rich emotional life. She was looking for a new discourse for all the nuances of her

colourful 'spiritual and emotional landscape'. In her poems she inhabited nature with her feelings.

The lyrical subject is presented mostly in the first person. Her perception of the world is full of uneasiness and restlessness. With a modern sensibility she describes a spectrum of modern feelings in lyrical impressions: from ecstatic fragments of happiness and contentment with life to expressions of a 'sick soul', and feelings of nausea and tiredness, melancholy and sadness.

Light, ethereal poetry full of tender feelings proclaimed the new credo and the philosophy of ascending modernism in Slovenian poetry. In her first poem in 1896, she identified her voice with the collective and the construction of the national idea ("Rojakinjam" [To my compatriots]), but she quickly discovered that her strength and lyrical expression lay somewhere else: in her subjective perception of the world and emotions. Already in the second issue of *Slovenka* in 1897, she published the love poem "Slutnje" [Premonitions]. She revealed her intimate world as a special entity and category. She used the term in the modern sense: this is the expression of the spiritual and emotional inner life – of the soul, which was the term used also by the other members of the Slovene *Moderna* group.

Her sensibility was typical of the *fin-de-siècle* period. We can also recognize in her writing at the turn of the century the 'identity crisis', a personal crisis and, by all means, the crisis of her gender and cultural roles (see also Lorenz). For Jeraj, as for other artists, the holistic concept of the world was gone, and she was only able to perceive fragments of reality. She often expressed contrasting feelings, depending on moments and her perception of time. Sometimes she felt estranged from reality: the subject-object relation was disconnected. In her most well-known poems she wrote about moments in nature and the blessing of the meetings of lovers, but also about parting and death. Jeraj expressed the moments when she is intimate with herself in the night landscape and also the moments when she feels close to man, in a dialogue with him. At the end she tended to be in a dialogue with the death. As mentioned earlier, very characteristic for Jeraj's poetry are her impressionist poems about nature, when the speaker describes the world of nature and the variety of different landscapes with the patterns of her feelings. Nature in Jeraj's case becomes the place of her feelings: she tries to express 'the landscape of the soul' with authentic poetics. Often she paints ecstatic moments in time – in connection with space (nature landscape). With all her senses, she absorbs small details and various motifs. In texts, she notes special movements and as a careful 'painter' depicts the variation of light found in the landscape, often in dramatic contrasts. The elements are combined to reveal new colours, shapes, movements, and fragrances. The worship of the moments is followed by a great appreciation for nature, where

her neo-romantic subject escapes to find harmony and solitude. For Slovenian poets of the *Moderna* – as for Jeraj – nature played an important role in the literary imagination: the standard metaphors they used applied to nature. For the first time in the Slovene literary imagination, nature becomes a valuable category and a typical space for the lyrical subject. Moments in nature were special for Jeraj: in nature she was truly conscious of the human existence and the metaphysical aspects of being. Sometimes, the poet also interweaves motifs from nature with religious reflections, and she expresses her belief in God, as in the poem "Blešči se v solnci vsa poljana" [All the landscape is sparkling in the sun]:

All the landscape is sparkling in the sun
and the villages all around,
the power of my will is strengthened.
God rises from my soul.

Thus the chalice of the flower opens,
so the seed sprouts from the earth,
so the falcon rises into the blue morning
solemnly rises from dewy soils.[4]

JERAJ, *Pesmi* 4

Precious moments of peace and concentration in nature provide an intimate experience of place and also of God. The lyrical subject is closer to God and is also in harmony with herself.[5] Even in her turbulent life in Vienna, she tried to turn her memories into homeland and nature, *Doma* [Home].

Essential to her intimate poetry are her love poems. In her poetry we may trace an autobiographical story of love and separation from the lover, all presented in myriads of different moments: for example, in the playful, light simple poem "Jaz nimam dijamantov" [I don't have diamonds]:

I don't have diamonds –
who's sorry about that? I have a red flower,
he gave it to me!

4 "Blešči se v soncu vsa poljana / blešči vasi so naokrog, / kipi mi volja okrepčana / iz moje duše vstaja Bog. // Tako odpre se kelih roži, / tako iz zemlje vzklije kal, / tako se sokol v sinje jutro / slovesno dvigne iz rosnih tal". All translations are mine.

5 Her education was Catholic and she was religious like some of Slovene authors of that period – for the example female poet Ljudmila Poljanec (1874–1948), the first Slovene lesbian poet, ended up writing religious poems.

He is not a prince nor the king of
the land of blue,
but he has a sweet mouth
and black curls.[6]

JERAJ, *Pesmi* 18

For the lyrical subject love means the highest level of intimacy, which she achieves only in the beginning of the relationship, and it means also erotic closeness. Love is only a matter of certain exceptional moments, a temporary, instantaneous phenomenon.

These emotions may prove quite violent: anger, certain varieties of joy, sorrow, passion and desire. Time here is presented as a great negater: great moments of time are very quickly gone, feelings of separation, estrangement, and loss prevail in her late 'dark poems'. The most interesting and innovative language-wise are the poems dealing with the parting of lovers and expressions of sorrow and pain, for example in the poems "Spomin" [Memory], "Ne misli, da ločena sva sedaj" [Don't think that we are really separated], "Pojdi v sever med samotne bore …" [Let's go to the north among the lonely pines …]. In those poems, her voice sharpens, becomes more minimalistic and abstract, and the verses end with three points as in the poem "Tam zunaj, tam daleč je moja mladost" [There outside, far in distance my youth stays], where the abstract feelings of happiness on the one hand, and bitterness and loneliness without hope on the other, are presented in the distance of time (present, past) and space (here, there):

There outside, there far in distance
my youth stays,
here inside, here near all my bitterness.
– There the sacred sun shined once,
here night is without mornings, without evenings is night;
there the flowers looked up at the sky
and the thirsty chalices opened
here the last lights fade,
the desert – the mists above it are risen.
There only blissful moments, here last beats of the heart![7]

JERAJ, *Pesmi* 56

6 "Jaz nimam dijamantov,- / komu to žal je? / Jaz imam rdečo rožo, / to on mi dal je! // On ni princ in kralj ni/ dežele modre, / pa ima sladka usta / in črne kodre!".

7 "Tam zunaj, tam daleč / je moja mladost, / tu notri, tu blizu vsa moja bridkost. / – Tam sonce je božje hodilo nekoč, / tu noč je brez juter, brez večerov je noč; / tam rože v nebo se ozrle so

Happy moments of intimacy with the Other are lost and they belong to the past. The lyrical subject distances herself from the world, and her existence loses a sense of meaning. In these very suggestive poems we do not find a direct confession any more. Her emotions escape into metaphors, sentences shorten, noun phrases with few words dominate. Through the new perception she depicts the uncertain position of the subject in the world, filled with unfulfilled metaphysical longing on the one hand and a philosophy of disappointment on the other.

The crucial problem in the writer's modern existence, presented also in her poetry, is her attitude to erotic and carnal love, expressed in the unresolved relation to her own body and the body of the Other. As was the case with her Slovene contemporaries, she was very uncertain about expressing erotic themes. From her writing we presume that she understood erotica traumatically. She was apprehensive of formulating erotic desire openly in the austere Catholic atmosphere and in a time of the double standards of patriarchal society. Her passionate meetings with her lover always stop with a kiss: the erotic belongs to a forbidden sphere. This suppressed space is hidden between words. Erotic love in her poetry is also expressed in allegorical situations or with metaphors (very often with the motif of a flower associated with the sky, sun, or moon).

> Don't ask me what I sense now.
> Just love, just love.
> Drink tears from my face,
> comfort my heart with kisses.
>
> With the flame of your happy eyes
> penetrate into the bottom of my eternal soul
> and write in it forever
> happy moments of these two lives.[8]
>
> JERAJ, *Pesmi* 26

In her late poems, the most intimate partner for her is death. Melancholy and depression are interwoven into the atmosphere of her dark poetical landscape.

/ in kelihe žejne odprle so / tu lučice zadnje pojemajo, / pustinja, – megle nad njo dremajo. / Tam sami preblaženi hipi so, / tu srca najzadnji utripi so!".

8 "Ne vprašuje me, kaj zdaj slutim. / Samo ljubi, samo ljubi, / solze mi izpij raz lice, / teši mi srce s poljubi // S plamenom oči veselih / v dno prodri mi duše večne / in za veke vanjo vpiši / dveh življenj teh hipe srečne!".

In some poems, eluding death is present, and the lyrical subject is conscious of the existence of "demons from the unconscious and from the past". The motifs of death announced decadent tendencies in her writing (Jensterle-Doležal, "Pri mojih" 5–17). At the end, the real and the imaginary united in her world: in 1932, she committed suicide. Very suggestive is the poem "Pri mojih durih čaka smrt" [At my door death is waiting], where the lyrical subject is in intimate dialogue with death. Jeraj uses repetition and the symbolic number three from folklore as a stylistic device. All the poems are simple, but very musical.

> At my door death is awaiting
> and saying: I plod the garden,
> where I comfort the souls,
> where white stones guard.
>
> – There three iron locks are
> open them, three latches, death, for me!
> She waited at the door all day, she knocked at it all night.[9]
>
> JERAJ, *Pesmi* 51

3 Escape from Intimacy to Quasi Folk Poetry and Poems for Children

From the very beginning until the end of her life, Jeraj identified herself and her poetry with the figure of Lepa Vida [Beautiful Vida] from a well-known and often-cited Slovene folk poem from the nineteenth century. This mystification also expresses the poet's philosophical stance and explains her modern and complicated attitude towards the world, broadly characterized by existential uncertainty and nostalgic thoughts and desire. Typically for Slovene writers in the *fin-de-siècle* period and also for Slovene modernism, and as in the folk story of Lepa Vida, in her philosophical approach Jeraj expresses longing and dissatisfaction with existence.

All through her creative period, Jeraj changed her lyrical voice: in the beginning her main lyrical strategy consisted of expressions of intimacy. Later on, she changed her ways: in some poems we find only a description of light, idyllic moments in nature written in simple verses – without much personal involvement. In her only book *Pesmi* (1908), one third of her poems are also quasi folk

9 "Pri mojih durih čaka smrt / in govori: jaz orjem vrt, / kjer duše se vtolažijo, / kjer beli kamni stražijo. // – Ključavnice železne tri, / zapahe tri mi smrt odpri! / Ves dan tako čakala je, vso noč potrkávala je".

poems, written mostly for children, representing idyllic country life. Here she often uses folklore motifs, being inspired by folk poems.[10]

There is a different sort of intimacy in her children's poems: there, the perspective of the innocent child presents the intimate relation to the world 'in the time of innocence', where everything is possible in the realms of fantasy, intensified by feelings of absolute freedom. The imaginary is on her side also in these poems: she uses suggestive images, sometimes animal stories and myths. The author in those poems also likes to repeat verses and parts and exaggerates certain phrases. Typical stories in the world of fantasy are idealized tales of the lives of anthropomorphized animals and fantastic creatures. She also works with anthropomorphized motifs of flowers. All of those poems are very melodic and they sometimes look like lullabies and children's songs.

It can be established that at the turn of the century Slovene artists escape into the folklore tradition was the philosophical, post-romantic answer to complicated, isolated modern life and the disillusions of modern man, to the unsolved "I" (Mach's "unrettbare Ich", Lorenz 111–117).

In that period, Slovene writers sought Slovene identity in a tradition of folk songs and motifs. For male poets, the influence of folk poems and the folklore tradition was just a phase of their writing and a great influence on their motifs, language, and style; for Jeraj, it was a crucial decision in her life. Her female authorship was very fragile and the construction of her writer's identity was very unstable. Her voice was losing its lyrical power, authenticity, and legitimacy.

In her last poem, "Sappho", published in 1922 in the main Slovene newspaper, *Ljubljanski zvon*, Jeraj describes the tragic situation of the female poet in the Slovene society of the time. The poem, written in free verse, is a homage to Sappho, one of the first female poets, and generally to the female poetic tradition that extends back to Sappho. At the end of the poem Jeraj concludes that she, as a poetess, did not receive any appreciation in Slovene society.[11] Using metaphorical style, she expresses the idea that exclusion had ruined not

10 The influence of folklore and folk songs – also for children – was generally great in Slovene literature at that time. Normally in the poetry of different poets we can follow the escape from personal poems to the description of traditional village life and collective images (e.g., her great influence, Josip Murn-Aleksandrov).

11 As mentioned above, she only published one collection of poems, *Pesmi* [Poems; 1908]. Her second book, *Izbrane pesmi* [Collected works], was published after her death in 1935. The book was not very well accepted in Slovene literary society: her work was treated differently than that of her male contemporaries, and her poetry was defined by male paradigms. Her response to the misogynist critics of her first book was silence. She also started writing just for children.

only her career but also her life: "All the poems have already been pronounced. The poetess sacrificed herself to the merciless gods in the middle of an empty sanctuary" (Jeraj, "Sappho", 220).[12]

4 Conclusion

According to Henri Bergson the poet develops feelings into images, and the images themselves into words which translate them while obeying the laws of rhythm. In seeing these images pass before our eyes we in our turn experience the feelings which were, so to speak, their emotional equivalents: but we shall never realize these images so strongly without the regular movements of the rhythm by which our soul is lulled into self-forgetfulness, and, as a dream, thinks and sees as the poet (Bergson, 15). We can transpose this very description of poetry to Jeraj's poetic expression. In her intimate poems, she abolished established conventions and shaped her lyrics according to the rhythms of her emotions. Light, ethereal poetry full of tender feelings proclaimed the new credo and the philosophy of the ascending modernism in Slovene poetry. Jeraj's poems are transportive, intimate, and powerfully imaginative. The poems contain short lines and traditional rhyme and structure. Nevertheless, her poems were not just innovative in their content: in very short verses and in a concentrated form with rhythm, she looked for new strategies in poetry. She made a great effort to discover a new style and in some poems she succeeded in that. She was searching for special moments, which she thought were important for her existence. She sought intimacy in nature, in dialogue with the male counterpart, and at the end in death.

The category of time and space were very important for her impressionist poetical discourse. Jeraj presents the moments of time and emotions with spatial dimensions. We can also recognize the historical dimensions of her emotions: in her poetical discourse on intimacy it is possible to recognize typical *fin-de-siècle* feelings. She expressed herself as an often dissonant, nervous person, with 'a malady of the soul'. That was her response to the spiritual uncertainties of the time. Her perception of the world was breaking apart, but she was always authentic, full of passion, searching for her true self, eager to ′embrace the world'.

12 "Pesmi so bile izgovorjene. Ona sama se je žrtvovala neusmiljenim bogovom sredi praznega svetišča".

Jeraj's poems uncompromisingly depicted female experience, ambivalence, and also grief: she discovered intimacy through her original lyrical voice. Even though her intimate poetry promised to offer one of the most original, courageous lyrical poetics in Slovenian culture, after her death Jeraj was almost forgotten in Slovene literary history until recently. Unfortunately, also in this case "poetics is politics" (Benstock). She did not get the place she deserved in the Slovene patriarchal culture during her lifetime, so her voice ended in silence. In expressing her intimacy and feelings full of paradoxes in her very original poetry Jeraj represented herself as part of the European culture of the *fin-de-siècle* period. Her poetical imagination and especially her love poetry suggest a very special poetical voice in the Central Europe of the time.

The author acknowledges financial support by the Slovenian-Czech research project Transformations of Intimacy in the Literary Discourse of Slovene "Moderna" (GAČR project 21-47320L).

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CHAPTER 11

Intimacy and Influence between Women Authors

The Case of Isabelle de Charrière

Suzan van Dijk, collaborating with Josephine Rombouts

Abstract

This contribution is about the intimacy, in the sense of closeness and solidarity, which can exist between women authors, writing and publishing within the context of male-dominated society and literary field. We claim and illustrate the possibility of such closeness to be experienced between those authors not just across frontiers but also across generations. The case of the Dutch-Swiss Isabelle de Charrière/Belle de Zuylen (1740–1805) provides an interesting illustration – especially thanks to the extensive correspondence she kept and which currently is being worked on in view of digitizing and presenting it online. In these letters Charrière is not just keeping contact, from Switzerland, with her Dutch family, but also discussing international developments related to the French Revolution and the emigration of members of the French nobility. She also comments upon her readings and writings, and her attitudes toward female colleagues and predecessors. Having a strong tendency to mentoring her younger brothers and sisters, as well as friends, she is clearly positioning herself as a role model for young women around her, who accept her as such. Interestingly she continued playing this role, and even continues now for women authors who are still inspired by her ways of thinking – as is clearly shown by Josephine Rombouts.

Keywords

18th century – 'foremothers' – influence – correspondence – novel – Isabelle de Charrière – Belle de Zuylen

Our contribution is indeed typically, and visibly, the product of collaboration – intimate collaboration, we might say. Not just between the two of us: it

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was prepared within an international project in women's literary history,[1] the members of which share a tool containing their research data.[2] Consequently they also share each other's data,[3] and find out sometimes that "their" writers were read and appreciated by the authors that colleagues from abroad are working on – and vice versa. In this way researchers also become familiar with foreign women writers, whose works they are unable to read in the original version: colleagues as *de facto* intermediaries for each other …

The data that are stocked in this VRE refer to "early" women authors (active until the beginning of the twentieth century) being read, received, and reacted to, both by women and men: the information is about connections and (positive or negative) appreciations, which existed and were formulated between and about these women authors. As for instance between the nineteenth-century Dutch translator and critic Marie-Henriette Koorders-Boeke and the American novelist for young girls Louisa Alcott. In an 1877 review article Koorders-Boeke presented the author of *Little Women* as "one of us" – addressing the female part of the audience of *De Gids* ([The Guide], an important cultural magazine). One of the very few female reviewers of the magazine, she not only wrote this article about Alcott, but also formulated the happiness about the book as it was felt by herself *and* by her Dutch women readers – feelings also expressed in a personal letter sent earlier to the novelist, who had personally answered it, and whose letter was likewise published in the same journal.[4]

These two women, from different countries and writing in different languages, were each other's contemporaries. Therefore, and thanks to the development of intercontinental postal services, they could reach each other and be, on both sides, satisfied about the personal connection which was brought about thanks to the publishing and translating industry: they could confirm to each other the closeness between author and readers, all of them women who had recognized themselves (their younger selves …) in *Little Women*.

Reaching each other had been much more complicated for the – less numerous, indeed – women authors of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. They might have "heard about" each other, but feelings of intimacy

1 Now known as the DARIAH-EU Working Group *Women Writers in History* (https://www.dariah.eu/activities/working-groups/women-writers-in-history/).

2 Entitled NEWW (New approaches to European Women's Writing), it contains the names of over 6000 women authors, from Sappho to Anne Frank (see http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/womenwriters/) and enables documenting their literary production and reception, for purposes of comparative research.

3 This means that we can also check each other's data, supplement them, comment on them, etc.

4 Koorders-Boeke 424.

were more rarely formulated – as we discussed in a volume entitled: *"I have heard about you"*. "I" and "you" represent respectively: "the famous Anna Maria van Schurman" and "Lady Dorothy Moore, a learned Anglo-Irishwoman", the former taking contact with the other by letter around 1640.[5]

More problematic still is intimacy as an experience between women authors across generations; yet it can be felt. An inspiring example was recently provided by the volume *Women's Literary Tradition and Twentieth-Century Hungarian Writers*,[6] in which the Hungarian writer Anna Menyhért comes quite near to five of her Hungarian 'foremothers'. In her book she describes not only her own reading of the women's writings, but also her visits to houses where they had lived. And she thus illustrates the kind of intimacy which is possible between women who – although in different periods – express(ed) themselves in writing. This intimacy is different from the 'current' one, in the sense that it is experienced only on *one* side:[7] the reader's …

Nevertheless, even if only virtual, the experience of closeness to an admired model can be important and very helpful for young women who wish to become writers – the more so, of course, in those ages where the numbers of women who wrote and published were considerably smaller. For which reason the need for historical role models, other than the proverbial Sappho,[8] can be argued to have been larger.

1 The Case of Isabelle de Charrière

Here, as a researcher and a writer collaborating together, we want to discuss and illustrate the Dutch-Swiss novelist Isabelle de Charrière (1740–1805) and her position not only in relation to her contemporary colleagues,[9] but also in between (a small number of) predecessors and (a growing series of) successors. This example illustrates not only the need – as experienced by female

5 See van Dijk et al., "*I have heard about you*" 9.

6 Published 2019 in the series *Women Writers in History*, by Brill Leiden.

7 An exception might be the *Journal* written by Magdalena van Schinne: at the end of the eighteenth century (8 June 1788) she imagined (predicted?) that this document, which she did not plan to be published, would be found 200 years later – which actually happened! However, she did not plan it especially to be found by *female* readers … cf. Dekker and Dik 64.

8 Whose presence – for instance – in Dutch private and public libraries of the eighteenth century was impressive, most often in the French translation (1681) by Anne Dacier.

9 In the Netherlands she is known under her Dutch unmarried name: Belle van Zuylen. Before her marriage in 1771, she lived in the Netherlands, near Utrecht, where she also started publishing – in French, which was the language of the (European) elite; cf. Frijhoff 237–260.

authors – for earlier role models, but also the possibilities for a woman to function as a mentor, example, or role model for younger generations of (potential) women authors – be it intentionally and by her own choice, or because of the needs felt and the questions asked by these younger women. Well aware of the difficulties women encountered when wanting to become an author,[10] Isabelle de Charrière was clearly reassured and inspired by some female predecessors to whom she felt close. And she herself encouraged younger contemporaries, who felt close to her; even nowadays she is inspiring women authors – creating a current of closeness and intimacy over time, as it were.

Some of these connections towards both the past and the future are well documented: Isabelle de Charrière herself left an important correspondence in which she also comments on writers who were admired ancestors, and addresses younger colleagues whom she is encouraging.[11] Quite recently several modern novelists (Dutch in particular) explicitly declared having been influenced or felt supported by Charrière's writings.[12] Rather than referring to her published fiction or essays, they tend to admire first her private letters, which were not written in order to be published.

One might think that (private) letter-writing is *not* what makes someone into an author, especially when knowing that this author clearly felt (and expressed in these very letters …) that she had a message which needed to be transmitted to the readers of her publications. However, not only Charrière's written output contains much more private correspondence than published works (six out of the ten volumes of her *Oeuvres complètes*), the quality of these letters is also generally praised: let us therefore consider Isabelle de Charrière's authorial connections, to *past* and to *future* writers, as they can be found both in her own published fiction and in her private writings, and also in comments formulated here by one of her female 'followers': Josephine Rombouts.

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10 "But a writing career, is it a happy one? This is *unsure, especially for a woman*". "Mais est-ce une *heureuse carrière* que celle des lettres? Cela est *douteux, pour une femme surtout*" (italics Suzan van Dijk). Letter 2182 to Isabelle de Gélieu, 20 August 1800; OC VI 126. Translations of quotations Charrière: Hilde Hoogenboom and Mark Cruse; others Suzan van Dijk, unless mentioned otherwise.

11 This correspondence was published in Charrière's *Oeuvres completes*, Candaux et al. vols. 1–6, and is currently being digitized at Huygens Institute (KNAW Amsterdam): the total of some 2600 letters is planned to be available online in 2023. Those 199 letters of which the manuscripts are kept in Dutch archives were launched in October 2019. A second portion, containing c.700 letters considered especially relevant for Dutch readers and researchers, was presented in November 2021. The complete correspondence will be available from May 2023. The letters can be consulted at https://charriere.huygens.knaw.nl/.

12 The role of Dutch translators, biographers, and other intermediaries is obviously of considerable importance.

1.1 *In Charrière's Novels*

As a writer Isabelle de Charrière was often herself inspired by what she had just been reading. In that sense she was a very active reader. Often, of course, what she read had been written by a man, who might have created a male narrator, considering his fictional world through his inevitably male gaze – someone like M. Bompré, the unhappy husband complaining about his wife's bad character in Samuel de Constant's *Mari sentimental* (1783).

Charrière had read this novel and must have felt an immediate and urgent need to react and oppose a female perspective to Constant's male gaze: her own *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* were printed and distributed early in April 1784! This Mrs Henley starts the very first letter she writes to a friend who lives in France, by distancing herself from Bompré:

> What a nice and cruel little book came to us from your country some weeks ago. Why did you not tell me about it, my dear friend, in your recent letter? It must have been a sensation over there: it was just translated, and I am sure the *Sentimental Husband* will be in everyone's hands. … My dear friend, this book, seemingly so full of useful information, will be the cause of much injustice.[13]

This shows clearly that Isabelle de Charrière was concerned about gender issues, and not afraid of making these explicit in her fiction. Indeed, she has her Mrs Henley disagree with Samuel de Constant's Bompré about the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives in unhappy marriages. She sets out in this brief "exchange of novels" between the two of them,[14] to adopt the female perspective on the situation: "Me too, I am unhappy, just as unhappy as the Sentimental Husband".[15]

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13 "Quel aimable et cruel petit livre que celui qui nous est arrivé de votre pays il y a quelques semaines! Pourquoi ne m'en avez-vous rien dit, ma chère amie, dans votre dernière lettre? Il est impossible qu'il n'ait pas fait sensation chez vous: on vient de le traduire, et je suis sûre que le *Sentimental Husband* va être entre les mains de tout le monde. …Ma chère amie, ce livre, si instructif en apparence, fera faire bien des injustices." All translations of quotations in this chapter are ours, unless otherwise indicated. Charrière 1784, OC vol. VIII 101.

14 *Lettres de Mistriss Henley* is, itself, *not* an exchange of letters: we only read the six letters written by Mrs Henley to a (female) friend. The last one suggests that her death (either by unhappiness or by suicide) is near.

15 "Moi aussi, je ne suis point heureuse, aussi peu heureuse que le Mari sentimental", OC vol. VIII, 101.

The "dialogue" between Isabelle de Charrière and this male predecessor is a simple one, but it had some impact. In a second edition of his novel (1785) Samuel de Constant adapted the ending: M. Bompré having died, his widow becomes perfectly unhappy because of her second husband's bad character.[16] But there was also at least one – male? – reaction taking the side of M. Henley *against* his wife: an anonymous *Justification de M. Henley*,[17] which immediately generated the anger of Charrière's friend Julie de Chaillet-de Mézerac.[18]

It is important to keep in mind this general context of authorship as predominantly male,[19] in order to understand Charrière's writing: she takes a position *against* a novel by a man, *in favour of* the insulted heroine of his book. However fictional, she expresses solidarity with Mrs Henley – and through her with Mme Bompré. This is not to say that she would have felt close to *any* woman: she was certainly not positive about *all* female authors and strongly disliked, for instance, such international celebrities as Germaine de Staël and Stéphanie de Genlis. This is sometimes visible in her novels, as in *Lettres écrites de Lausanne* (1785), where a widowed mother of a young daughter, Cécile, is involved in a correspondence with a cousin of hers. Both are facing the same question: how to make sure that the daughter will become happy once married? Cécile's mother obviously knows Genlis' works, and distances herself from *Adèle et Théodore* (1782) in a quite subtle way: "keep in mind that my daughter and I are not a novel, as Adèle and her mother are, nor a lesson, nor an example to cite."[20]

The very subtlety of such an observation requires – for us now – the explicitness of the novelist's private correspondence: a letter to Caroline de Sandoz, for instance, where Charrière writes about a recent book: "It is by Mme de Genlis, and it is so moral, so indoctrinating, in such a dry style! *This woman is never anything but a school teacher.*"[21]

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16 See also Van Dijk, "Le troisième Constant d'Isabelle de Charrière" 12.

17 *Justification de M. Henley, adressée à l'amie de sa femme* (the friend supposed to be responsible for the publication of the six letters after Mrs Henley's death). Yverdon, 1784.

18 Letter 515 from Julie de Chaillet-de Mézerac, 22 or 29 April 1784; OC II 405–406.

19 Though the number of women authors was growing during this period, the literary scene was still dominated by men.

20 "Songez que ma fille et moi *ne sommes pas un roman* comme Adèle et sa mère, ni une leçon, ni un exemple à citer"; *Lettres écrites de Lausanne* (1785), OC VIII 149, sixth letter (italics Suzan van Dijk).

21 "Il est de Mme de Genlis, et si moral, si endoctrinant, d'un style si sec! *Cette femme n'est jamais qu'une maîtresse d'école*"; Letter 1996 to Caroline de Sandoz-Rollin, February 8 1799; OC V 535 (italics Suzan van Dijk).

1.2 *In Her Letters*

Indeed, the most important (quantitatively) and also much more explicit source for our understanding of Charrière's feelings about female colleagues is certainly her correspondence. There are not many letters *addressing* other women authors, but different kinds of *comments* confirm her negative attitude not only towards Genlis, but also to Germaine de Staël.[22] Reflecting on an answer she had sent to her German translator L.F. Huber, for instance, she once apologized: "I am ashamed of my answer. It is as inarticulate as my conversation and as the writings of *Mme de Staël.*"[23]

But in these letters we become also aware of more positive impressions made by other women's writings. According to a letter from a (male) friend, Charrière read, as early as 1784, and in Dutch, the Dutch *History of Miss Sara Burgerhart* by Elisabeth Wolff and Agatha Deken (1782).[24] In 1804 she still remembers the influence of this novel on her own *Lettres Neuchâteloises* (1785).[25] In this letter,[26] however, she does not mention the ties of solidarity between women belonging to different classes, which – comparable to those found in the Dutch novel – appear in Charrière's: while the bourgeois Sara from Amsterdam – in an early #MeToo situation – was saved by the young daughter of a gardener, in Neuchâtel Mlle de La Prise, from the local upper class, solved similarly delicate problems for her seamstress. Here negative reactions by readers, as referred to in the periodical press, reveal that the statement her fictional character had made was felt inappropriate.[27]

2 Foremothers

In her correspondence, Isabelle de Charrière is in particular explicit about the closeness she feels towards some women authors of the past, because of the

22 Note that the other way round it was different: see Letter 1262 from Germaine de Staël, 17 February 1794; OC IV 340.

23 "Je suis honteuse de ma réponse. Elle est *aussi décousue* que ma conversation *et que les écrits de Mme de Staël*". Letter 2212 to Ludwig Ferdinand Huber, 27 October 1800, OC VI 166 (italics Suzan van Dijk).

24 Letter 538 from Claude de Narbonne-Pelet de Salgas, October 22 1784, OC II 439. Charrière lent him her copy of the novel.

25 Letter 2500 to Gérard Godart Taets van Amerongen, January 1804, OC VI 558.

26 This does not mean that she would not have referred to them elsewhere: a substantial number of letters obviously were lost, and also burned or otherwise destroyed, especially by herself – according to her own correspondence. Cf. Van Dijk and Schouten.

27 Cf. Van Dijk, *"Amitié, solidarité"*.

very fact of their having, also, written *as women*. She is quite clear about the German eighteenth-century Markgrave de Bayreuth (who wrote in French) and, the more so, the seventeenth-century Marie de Sévigné, whom she extensively quotes and refers to. Both were, exclusively, authors of private letters, which they had not intended for publication, but were published by others.[28]

The correspondence of Wilhelmine of Prussia Markgrave de Bayreuth, who died in 1758 and was the sister of Frederick II King of Prussia, was really a discovery Charrière had made: seventeen of her letters were published in the famous Kehl edition (1784–1789) of Voltaire's *Oeuvres complètes* (vol. LXVI). These are letters Charrière is proud of as a woman:

> I am so proud, for the female sex, of the letters of the Markgrave of Bayreuth that I read them to everybody. *I have never seen a woman prove so completely that we are as capable as men.* It is said that Sappho demonstrated this for poetry, the Markgrave does the same for great and good intelligence, case closed.[29]

In the 'contest' between men and women, the Markgrave's letters provide evidence which can be checked and appreciated by any sensible person. Yet it had remained hidden, and Charrière feels like unhiding it!

2.1 *Mme de Sévigné*

The case of Mme de Sévigné is completely different. Her letters, published in 1725 well after her death in 1696, were not still to be discovered, as they were known everywhere, in particular by female readers:

> Thanks to French teachers, …; for forty years *Mme de Sévigné's letters have been in the hands of all German, Dutch, and Swiss women who are more or less well educated* ….[30]

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28 The Markgrave wrote also her *Mémoires*, which were published in 1810 (translated into English 1828).

29 "Je suis si vaine pour mon sexe des lettres de la Markgrave de Bayreuth que je les lis à tout le monde. *Je n'ai jamais rien vu d'une femme qui prouve aussi complètement que nous pouvons être tout ce que sont les hommes.* On dit que Sappho l'avait prouvé quant à la poésie, la Markgrave le prouve quant au grand et bon esprit, c'est donc un procès jugé." Letter 636 to Jean-Pierre de Chambrier d'Oleyres, 6 December 1788 ; OC III 115 (italics Suzan van Dijk).

30 "Grâce aux instituteurs français, …; depuis quarante ans, *les lettres de Mme de Sévigné sont entre les mains de toutes les Allemandes, de toutes les Hollandaises, de toutes les femmes de Suisse, un peu bien élevées* …": in her essay entitled *Lettre sur l'Edit concernant les Protestants*, she insists on the important role played by the Huguenot refugees, who

Charrière is certainly right. However, for herself, Sévigné's letters are not just "in her hands"! They seem to have integrated her whole personality, as – again – we can see in the correspondence. Between 1762 and 1803 Sévigné's name appears 30 times – not in order to quote any statement or justify admiration, it just illustrates the closeness between both women.

This closeness between Sévigné and Charrière was already observed during her own lifetime: a friend of hers, the German singer Luise von Madeweiss, provided her with the honorary title "la Sévigné de notre siècle", in a letter where she especially also expressed her own gratitude about being in correspondence with her:

> Adieu Madam, these words are especially hard to say, when one says them to you. I gratefully accept the permission you gave me to write to you. The Sévigné of our century does not grant the merest favour that is not glorious for the receiver. Both my self-regard and my heart are equally flattered by this distinction.[31]

Bernard Bray, specialist of seventeenth-century epistolarity and Sévigné studies, recognized the appropriateness of Madeweiss' designation, using it in the title of his article analysing Charrière's correspondence, which he compared to this important model represented by the Marquise de Sévigné. Bray admits Charrière's complete originality and her willingness to communicate her opinions: "a certain didacticism shows her intention of transmitting acquired experience, under the seal of her moral and intellectual authority, which was generally recognized."[32]

But he considers surprising Charrière's familiarity with Sévigné's texts, her way of quoting literally and providing appropriate comparisons to what her foremother had described. He concludes that, in fact, here we find complete intimacy between the two:

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contributed importantly to the influence France exerted in most of the European nations. *Observations et conjectures politiques* 1788, OC X 79.

31 "Adieu Madame, ce mot est doublement dur à prononcer quand c'est à vous qu'on le dit. J'accepte avec reconnaissance la permission que vous me donnez de vous écrire. La Sévigné de notre siècle n'accorde pas la plus légère préférence dont on n'ait droit de tirer gloire. Mon amour-propre et mon coeur seront également flattés de cette distinction". Letter 1059 from Luise von Madeweiss, 22 June 1793, OC IV 104.

32 "Un certain didacticisme montre la volonté de transmettre l'expérience acquise, sous le couvert d'une autorité morale et intellectuelle largement reconnue". Bray 490.

> the feeling of community concerning gender, intelligence, culture and a taste for letter-writing … like an empathy that brings Isabelle closer to her predecessor of the seventeenth century, making her reflect upon their profound similarities and differences.[33]

Charrière's reflexions had led her to an interesting comparison between Sévigné and herself – in a letter to her young Dutch nephew Willem-René, who was not always happy about his aunt's mentoring tendencies towards him (and to younger people more generally). In this letter she commented upon her own behaviour and lack of patience with others:

> Did not you notice that it is one of my shortcomings not to have any affability or softening manners in my writing or speaking? This is totally absent in me. I know only how to go clearly and bluntly towards my goal.[34]

She clearly recognized the problem, and admitted Sévigné's superiority to her in this respect. But, in the very same sentence, she stated her own superiority, which – according to herself – was to be found in her critical judgement in literary matters:

> Mme de Sévigné is as much my superior in this regard, as I am hers in a certain power of reason. When she has some complaint to make about her daughter …, what sweetness and grace! And yet she says exactly what she has to say! But it seems to me that I would have been a better judge of Racine and Corneille …[35]

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33 "[le] sentiment d'une communauté de sexe, d'intelligence, de culture et de goût pour l'activité épistolaire … comme une empathie qui rapproche Isabelle de sa devancière du siècle précédent, de sorte qu'elle se sent portée à réfléchir sur leurs ressemblances et leurs différences profondes". Ibid. 495.

34 "N'avez-vous pas remarqué que c'est mon défaut de n'avoir point d'aménité, point de formes adoucissantes dans le style ni dans le discours? Elles me manquent totalement. Je ne sais qu'aller nettement et rudement à mon but". Letter 2259 to her nephew Willem-René de Tuyll, 21 February 1801, OC VI 219.

35 "Mme de Sévigné m'est aussi supérieure à cet égard, que je l'emporte sur elle pour une certaine force de raison. Quand elle a quelque plainte à faire de sa fille …, quelle douceur et quelle grâce! Et elle dit pourtant tout ce qu'elle doit dire. Mais il me semble que *j'aurais mieux jugé qu'elle* Racine et Corneille …". Ibid. Letter 2259, OC VI 220 (italics Suzan van Dijk).

In this way she concludes for an *equilibrium* between the two of them. This can have been one of the outcomes of Isabelle de Charrière's self-confidence as an epistolary letter-writer, to which had contributed enthusiastic comments by her correspondents, but also her "didactisme" mentioned as an important factor by Bernard Bray.

3 Mentees and Followers

For Charrière's "intimate" connections to the generations after her, we need to distinguish between those she engaged in herself with some of her mentees in Switzerland, and those coming up later and even recently: thanks to new editions and translations, which provided our author with new audiences.

3.1 *Her Young Swiss Friends*

In Colombier, near Neuchâtel, Isabelle de Charrière was surrounded by several friends, among them young women for whom she clearly was an invaluable mentor, advising them about all kinds of decisions to be taken, and from time to time also trying to push them into writing and authorship.

One of them was Henriette L'Hardy: Charrière had contributed to her stay at the court of Potsdam as a lady-in-waiting to the Countess of Dönhoff, the morganatic wife of the King of Prussia. Early 1793 the Countess and Henriette came to live in Switzerland, and the exchanges between Charrière and Henriette became more frequent again. Answering one of Henriette's letters, Charrière suggests that she write her memoirs:

> You said you prefer [writing about] the living rather than the dead. I understand this very well. Writing rather than reading, I understand it still. Well, just follow the example provided by Mme de Staal[-Delaunay]: write your memoirs.

And she goes on to provide a list of potential chapter titles, making things concrete immediately, and adding:

> Here are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 chapters, each of which should be interesting. Send them to me as you finish them. If I find something to say about diction, I will make notes.[36]

36 : "Vous aimez mieux, dites-vous, les vivants que les morts. Je comprends cela très bien, écrire que lire, je le comprends encore. Eh bien, faites comme Mme de Staal[-Delaunay],

Several times she proposes opening sentences,[37] but nothing comes back from Henriette. It is just another proof of intimacy, which *could* have led to a young writer being born, but did not. Some years later, Charrière engaged another young Swiss friend, Isabelle de Gélieu, in a different project. Together they translated, in 1797, a novel by Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art* (1796). Charrière was happy both about working on the novel of this Englishwoman ("Her plan was beautiful, the conception was quite strong and there were so many useful things to be said and to be shared"), and about sharing the task with her "écolière", who was indeed of important help:

> Mlle Gélieu, who knows English very well, had saved me the annoyance of looking up the French equivalents of English words and phrases with her nearly literal translation.[38]

The 'intimacy' with Isabelle de Gélieu remained on the private level, with the exchange of letters, and once married, Isabelle Morel-de Gélieu having a daughter named *Isabelle* after Charrière.

Finally Henriette L'Hardy was the one to whom Isabelle de Charrière left all her papers.[39] Through her son, these arrived on the desk of Philippe Godet, who would be – thanks to these letters – Charrière's first biographer, and laid in fact the basis for her "revival" at the end of the twentieth century.

écrivez des mémoires. … Voilà 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 chapitres qui tous seraient intéressants. Vous me les enverrez à mesure que vous en aurez écrit un. Si je trouve quelque chose à dire à la diction, je ferai des notes." Letter 0961 to Henriette L'Hardy, 9–11 March 1793, OC III 544–545 .

37 "Tout de bon, commencez vos mémoires: 'Je suis née à Auvernier, village sur le bord du lac de Neuchâtel …'" Lettre 0964 to Henriette L'Hardy, 13 March 1793, OC III, 551; "si vous ne voulez pas commencer comme Mme de Staal[-Delaunay] à votre naissance …: 'J'avais 22 ans et née avec quelques talents que je ne pouvais cultiver, avec des goûts que je ne pouvais satisfaire, avec une sensibilité qui manquait d'aliments et d'objet …'". Letter 1005 to Henriette L'Hardy, 1–9 April 1793, OC IV 26.

38 "Son plan était beau, la conception en était forte et on y trouvait tant de choses utiles à dire, à répandre …. Mlle Gélieu qui entend fort bien l'anglais, m'avait sauvé par sa traduction presque littérale, tout l'ennui de chercher aux mots anglais, aux phrases anglaises, des équivalents en français". Letter 1793 to Jean-Pierre de Chambrier d'Oleyres, 26–27 May 1797, OC V 311.

39 I.e. those she had not destroyed …

4 Present-Day Women Readers

Isabelle de Charrière appears to be inspirational to women even now, some 250 years after her own writing and publishing activities. This seems to concern in particular *Dutch* women authors: in her home country, thanks to biographers and translators she is quite present now. Several women are experiencing this same feeling of intimacy towards Charrière, or Belle van Zuylen, as she is still named here.

Josephine Rombouts is one of them.[40] She is the author of three successful novels, and here she speaks herself about the intimacy and influence she has been and still is experiencing.

5 Intimacy and Charrière's Influence on Me as a Writer Josephine Rombouts

5.1 *Surprise*

Reading the first line of the first letter of Belle van Zuylen to d'Hermenches was an experience completely different from all earlier readings. It hit me between the eyes.

The Dutch translation of this correspondence[41] was recommended to me by a female bookshop owner. Looking at the cover and publisher I concluded that the author must be someone well known, but I didn't dare to ask who she was. The woman giving me the book recommended it to me, saying it was her favourite. In the shop, above the bookcases, was a row of portraits of well-known Dutch authors, official portraits. Eleven men and one woman. Next to them and very obviously not part of the series was a copied portrait of the author of the book I had just bought. So, she was published, recommended, but not part of the established canon.

My first impression when I read – at age nineteen – the correspondence of Isabelle de Charrière with Constant d'Hermenches was that of instant intimacy between me and her. It surprised me. There were so many dissimilarities between our worlds: she was born in the eighteenth century, belonged to the nobility, was a published author, a celebrity. But she was also nineteen years of age when she wrote it, and also a woman.

40 Next to Nelleke Noordervliet and Joke Hermsen, for instance.
41 Van den Bergh; for the English translation, see Whatley and Whatley.

When I had read it, I came back to the shop and talked with the bookshop owner about the book and the author. This living testimony was important to me. I was not the only one feeling the intimacy, the significance of this voice, it was a shared experience. The lady turned out to be a member of the Dutch Belle van Zuylen Association. So, there were other people who were interested in this author, more people who had felt the intimacy. I went with the lady to a lecture by Suzan van Dijk. A professor and a whole room full of people who wanted to discuss the life and work of this author.

The first sentence that had struck me so forcibly was written by Belle van Zuylen in 1760 and in it she addresses a man, Constant d'Hermenches:

> I will not dissemble, Monsieur; ever rash and imprudent, I will let myself be guided by the trust that some people immediately inspire, and of which you spoke to me one day.[42]

This resonated with me. It is hard to define why things resonate. Was it the defiance in it, the feistiness of the statement "I will not dissemble"?

It was a private letter, the words weren't meant for me. But I could hear them, more than two hundred years later. The whisper of someone, reaching out for someone else. She didn't know this man well, they had met at a ball three weeks before, in The Hague,[43] and talked, that was all. Now she reached out in writing. Can I trust you?

She had defiantly said she would not dissemble, now she asked if she could trust him. This suggests that she had felt people wanted her to renounce herself and that it was not a given that she could feel trust.

5.2 *Gendered Perspectives*

Some months after I had ended reading Belle de Zuylen's letters, I read the letters to Sophie Volland by Denis Diderot. The format is the same: private letters between a man and a woman who are not married. This is how Diderot (at the time a widower) finishes one of his letters to his mistress:

> Greetings, my beloved. I kiss you, oh! My kisses aren't bad, are they? And I always experience the same amount of enjoyment out of them … always.

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42 "Je ne me démentirai point, Monsieur; toujours étourdie et imprudente je me laisserai conduire à cette confiance que l'on prend si vite avec quelques personnes et dont vous me parliez un jour". Letter 59 to baron Constant d'Hermenches, 22 March 1760, OC I 118). Translation by Whatley and Whatley.

43 Cf. Courtney 60.

> They don't believe that; but it is true, despite all the proverbs, even those of Solomon. He had too many women to understand the experience of a virtuous man who honours and loves just one woman.[44]

His letters didn't evoke the same response in me. I read them, I was interested, I learned about his time and circumstances, but it didn't feel intimate. It was a different situation, Diderot and Sophie had known each other for quite some time, I wasn't witnessing a first encounter, and their letters did not keep pace with the intimacy they experienced outside the written world. But it was more: It was a male perspective on intimacy.

I think there is not one word in the bit that I quote which at the time a woman could have written: perhaps since the last twenty years, or ten, or five, a woman can boast of her expertise in kissing. Or can she? It does seem that women are still judged for giving themselves away too freely. After boasting of his expertise in kissing, he assures his mistress that he always enjoys it. It does sound as if he has to prove something. The letters of Diderot were an interesting read, but they did not evoke in me a feeling of nearness, sameness, intimacy.

5.3 *Proximity over Time*

Reading Belle van Zuylen writing that she feels she can give in to her gut feeling that she can trust him, I felt it resonate with me. I was living in the twenty-first century, in a country with legal equality for men and women. But I had been warned by my mother, aunts, friends, not to trust boys, never leaving a party with a man, not to accept drinks or presents from a man as "he would expect something back". Topping it off was becoming acquainted with students and hearing the way male students discussed their triumphs among

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44 Denis Diderot à Sophie Volland, 15-7-1759: "Bonjour, ma tendre amie. Je vous baise. Oh! Je vous baise bien, n'est-il pas vrai? et c'est toujours le même plaisir pour moi … toujours. Ils n'en croiront rien; mais cela sera en dépit de tous les proverbes; fussent-ils de Salomon! Cet homme-là avait trop de femmes pour entendre quelque chose à l'âme de l'homme de bien, qui n'en estime et n'en aime qu'une". Denis Diderot, *Lettres à Sophie Volland. Texte en grande partie inédit, publié pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits originaux* … par André Babelon (1930). Gallimard, 1978, t. I 48. English translation JR, after this 1930 edition. It is interesting to note that for this letter the earlier editors had felt obliged to adapt: "… Bonjour, ma tendre amie; je vous embrasse; je vous aime toujours; ils n'en croiront rien ; mais cela sera en dépit de tous les proverbes, fussent-ils de Salomon ! Cet homme-là avait trop de femmes pour entendre quelque chose à l'âme de l'homme de bien, qui n'en estime et n'en aime qu'une". *Œuvres complètes de Diderot* by J. Assézat et M. Tourneux. Paris, Garnier, 1875–1877, t. XVIII, 362.

female students. It wasn't threatening, it wasn't malign, but it was very clear that it was better not to trust men too easily. Hearing another nineteen-year-old wonder aloud if she could give in to an impulse of trust, sounded familiar.

The style in which she does this is a treat. She is aware of her dilemma; she verbalizes her concerns and she has the skill to make it into elegant prose: "perhaps this is not a very safe guide but it is so convincing that it is at least pardonable to follow it." A sentence later she states: "If you would make me regret my gullibility, I would have every reason to hate you whole-heartedly and I promise you that I will." A lady to be careful with. This martial language is followed up by the laconic: "The music you want to send me is very welcome, I will be delighted to practise it."

She was honest but not naïve. She made the conscious decision to go against the rules of her time and write to this man, but she showed that she wasn't just giving in, she was defining the terms of their intimacy. Her correspondent answers using flowery commonplaces about her being the object of his adoration.[45] He sounds very much like Diderot, but she fillets his phrases like a mackerel:

> I can't see your words as simple phrases of politeness. I have the impression that you are more, or want to pose as more, than a friend, and I would neither want to give food for a folly nor be the victim of deceit.[46]

5.4 *Heroinism*

There were a lot of female heroines I had heard speaking at nineteen: Ophelia, Gretchen, Carmen, Anna Karenina, Tess of the d'Urbervilles. But they were never this deliciously rational. All of them had been given their lines by their male creators. In my perception they were overwhelmed victims of their feelings and their inability to cope with them. In Belle van Zuylen I heard someone who could deal with a man on a different level and met a man who could handle it. She wasn't like any heroine I had encountered before. She was real. The author of her own story.

The fact that this author came from my own country, my own culture, made the relation more intimate. She talked about certain national characteristics

45 Letter 63 from Baron Constant d'Hermenches, 7 August 1762; OC I 124–127.

46 "Je ne saurais prendre non plus tout ce que vous dites pour un simple langage de politesse. Il me semble, Monsieur, que vous êtes ou que vous feignez d'être plus qu'un ami, et je ne voudrais ni entretenir une folie, ni être la dupe d'une fausseté". Letter 64 to Baron Constant d'Hermenches, 9 September 1762; OC I 127.

that were recognizable to me. She walked in streets where I walked. Stayed in houses that I could visit. This was a nearness in place as well as in spirit.

I went to the Dutch Royal Library to see a letter from her hand in real life.[47] The librarian put the sheet of paper before me on a table, the paper that she had touched, the letters that she had written. It made the feeling of connectedness very vibrant.

5.5 *Inspiration*

For years I read and reread her correspondence and novels. I had found tales of loyalty and intimacy between female heroines that felt new. I had found a voice that resonated and a style that I admired. Personal observations from someone I could relate to. She phrased her opinions about politics, science, art, literature, affairs of the heart, in her letters as well as her books. As her literary work was convincing me that a woman could be an author, her personal letters gave me an insight into the person behind the author.

Reading her inspired me to study the authors she alludes to in her work. Madame de Genlis, Diderot, Voltaire. I went to look for other female authors and found Austen, the Brontë sisters, Mary Wollstonecraft, Selma Lagerlöf, Lou Andreas-Salomé, George Sand, to name a few. With them, in and through their stories I felt that I shared the same space, the same experiences, I felt intimate.

After reading their books, I was again drawn to read their letters. It supplemented my view of history and society to read these accounts by women, a view of events that I couldn't find in the mainstream (male stream) literature.

5.6 *Authorship*

It took me a long time to realize that I wanted to write. I had to deal with an internalized feeling of inferiority. To picture a copy of my photo between the publishers' portraits of male authors. It was a surprise to me to find that I could feel so insecure. I studied at university, was expected to earn my own money, my professors dealt with female students and male students in the same way. Still there was this other side: while half of the students were female, less than three per cent of the professors – at the time – were female. In my four years studying Dutch literature at university Belle van Zuylen was not mentioned in any literary course.[48] Female authors seemed as rare as female professors.

I had unconsciously blocked myself for want of role models. Then I *consciously* looked at my bookshelf where my 'foremothers' stood in a row, and

47 Letter 837 to Jean-Baptiste Suard, 22 July 1792; OC III 390–394.

48 See the suggestion formulated in Van Dijk 2020.

started writing. I do not copy Belle van Zuylen, but am well aware that her style as well as her personality have deeply influenced me. In reading her letters and novels I feel her near me, read thoughts and experiences that are akin to mine. I feel that it is worthwhile to write, as it builds a bridge to other people, making a connection. Even over two hundred years.

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Biographical Notes on the Authors

Agrell, Alfhild (1849–1923) was born in Härnösand, a small town in the north of Sweden. She married a merchant in 1868. The couple moved to Stockholm in 1876. In 1879 she had four stories published in the daily paper *Dagens Nyheter* [The daily news] under the pen name Thyra. Her breakthrough as an author and a playwright was the play *Räddad* [Saved, 1883], which opened at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in 1882. In histories of literature the play is considered one of the first expressions of the Swedish modern breakthrough. After that, Agrell wrote a succession of plays which became very popular at Nordic theatres. *Räddad* was also translated into English and performed at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1891. By the second half of the 1880s her new plays were no longer being staged; instead she found success as a writer of stories about the life and manners of the common people.

Benedictsson, Victoria (1850–1888) used the male pen name Ernst Ahlgren. She grew up in a small village in the very south of Sweden as the daughter of a farmer. At twenty-one she married a postmaster twice her age. A period of illness gave her an opportunity to develop her literary writing. She had her first collection of short stories, *Från Skåne* [From Scania], published in 1884. The following year, her novel *Pengar* [Money, 1885] saw her breakthrough as an author. Benedictsson is most commonly known as a writer of naturalistic prose fiction, but she also wrote plays. In the 1880s her one-act comedy *I telefon* [On the phone 1887] was the most popular of her plays at the theatres. *Den Bergtagna* [Enchanted, 1890] is her best-known play today. It was published posthumously by her colleague and friend Axel Lundegård, to whom Benedictsson had donated all her manuscripts.

Bibesco, Martha (1889–1973). Princess Bibesco was the descendant of one of the oldest and illustrious Romanian aristocratic families. She was one of the most distinguished European personalities of the twentieth century and a celebrated writer, politician, and socialite at her Mogosoaia Palace. Her outstanding personality charmed Marcel Proust, Saint-Exupery, Winston Churchill, Ramsay MacDonald, Charles de Gaulle, Alfonso XIII of Spain, and many others. In 1954, the French Academy awarded her the Great Prize for Literature for her entire lifelong literary oeuvre. A year later, she was elected member of the Belgian Royal Academy of Language and Literature. In 1962 she received the Legion of Honour. She was forced into exile by the dire circumstances of the Bolshevik regime in Romania. On her tombstone the epitaph writes sententiously: *Marthe Bibesco – French writer*. Romanian culture has yet to do her justice.

Burgos Seguí, Carmen de (1867–1932) was born in Almería in southern Spain but moved to Madrid with her daughter in 1901 after she had obtained her degree as a teacher and separated from her husband. Simultaneously with her work as a teacher in Madrid, she had a successful career as a journalist and writer of popular novels and short stories under the pseudonym Colombine. She was also active as a feminist, fighting for the legalization of divorce and for women's suffrage. Apart from her teaching and extensive writing, Burgos made several journeys through Europe and America, which she wrote about both in travelogues and in press chronicles. In 1909 she became Spain's first female war correspondent, reporting from Morocco. In 1931, a year before her death, Spanish women obtained suffrage, and in 1932 the legal right to divorce.

Charrière, Isabelle de (1740–1805). This novelist and essay writer is known in the Netherlands as Belle de Zuylen, member of a Dutch noble family living near Utrecht. In 1771 she became Mme de Charrière by her marriage with the Swiss Charles-Emmanuel de Charrière, and lived the second half of her life near Neuchâtel. She was educated in French, and (almost) always wrote in that language – both her published works and her extensive correspondence. Her first publication, the 'conte moral' *Le Noble* [The noble man] (1763), was published in a French-language periodical edited in the Netherlands, but most of her publications (short novels, theatre pieces, essays) were written after 1784 in Switzerland.

Ghica, Elena (pen name Dora d'Istria) (1828–1888) was the first woman to be placed in the wake of the great French intellectual tradition in Romania, born in one of the most prominent and cosmopolitan families of the time. In 1842 her entire family was forced into exile for political reasons. At the age of twenty-two she married the Russian prince Alexander Koltov Massalski. She soon separated from her husband and decided to live her life as a keen traveller (she became the first woman to have climbed the top of Mönch in the Alps) and a keen translator and writer. She collaborated with numerous magazines throughout Europe and travelled from Western and Eastern Europe to the two American continents. She was elected member of several Academies and associations from Greece to Argentina. A true cosmopolitan spirit, she is claimed today by many cultures: French, Italian, Albanian, Greek, and of course (but paradoxically, the least keen) Romanian.

Jeraj, Vida (1875–1932) was the first Slovene female lyric poet, whose real name was Franica Vovk. She was educated in Vienna and in Ljubljana (Slovenia). From 1895 to 1901 she worked as a teacher, mostly in the village of Zasip near Bled (Slovenia). There she became a part of the group of Slovene writers of the "Moderna". In 1901 she married the musician Karel Jeraj and they moved to Vienna. There they organized a salon for Slovene artists. She had three daughters and a son (who died very young). In 1919 the family moved to

Ljubljana. In 1932 she committed suicide. She published just one collection of poetry, *Pesmi* [Poems] in 1908, which was negatively received by critics. She also published one collection of poems for children *Iz Ljubljane čez poljane* [From Ljubljana across the Fields] in 1921. Her collected work was published after her death in 1935 (ed. Marja Boršnik).

Key, Ellen (1849–1926) was a Swedish teacher and essayist who campaigned actively on issues relating to education, childrearing, and women's emancipation. She took a stand against the church's influence on morals and often invoked science when calling for a "new morality". Her reading included Darwin, Spencer, and Nietzsche. Another important source of inspiration was the European tradition of male and female writers. In the late 1880s/early 1890s, Key wrote biographies of authors such as Victoria Benedictsson, Anne Charlotte Leffler, and the mathematician Sonja Kovalevsky. She also wrote about Goethe and Carl Jonas Love Almqvist. A leading radical voice in Swedish cultural life, Key had an international reputation, especially in Germany, where she undertook lecture tours in the early 1900s. She was one of the founders of *Mödraskyddsförbundet*, the Swedish section of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sex Reform.

Kveder, Zofka (1878–1926) was a Slovenian-born, multicultural, very prolific author and ardent feminist. She wrote prose texts, dramas, and journal articles. After leaving the Slovene ethnic space in 1899, she published various articles in German, Croatian, and Czech languages on artists from the cultural environments in which she lived. Moreover, at the same time she tried to acquaint readers not only with her own literary work but also with translations of other Slovene writers into German, Croatian, and Czech. Translations of short stories from her first prose collection *Misterij žene* [The mystery of the woman, 1900] were published in German, Czech, Croatian, and Polish newspapers and journals. She was also the editor of the magazines *Domači prijatelj* [Home friend, 1904–1914], of the *Frauen-Zeitung* [Women's newspaper, 1911–1917], which was the supplement of the Zagreb newspaper *Agramer Tagblatt* [Agram daily] and *Ženski svijet* [Women's world], later renamed *Jugoslavenska žena* [Yugoslav woman] published between the years 1917–1920.

Leffler, Anne Charlotte (married Edgren) (1849–1892) was the youngest child in an intellectual bourgeois family. In 1872 she married a chief district judge whom she later divorced. In 1890 she became the Duchess of Cajanello, after having married an Italian duke and moved to Naples. Leffler used the male pen names Carlot, Alrun Leifsson, and Valfrid Ek in the beginning of her career. She had her first collection of short stories published in 1869, at the age of twenty. Her breakthrough came with the first series of the short stories of *Ur lifvet* [From life] in 1882. With this collection Leffler was placed at the front of a group of writers known as "Young Sweden" who wished to engender

a renewal of Swedish literature. Leffler wrote twelve plays, most of them successful at Nordic theatres. Some were translated into English, French, German, and Italian and also staged in Germany.

Linder, Marie (1840–1870), née Musin-Pushkin, was a Russian aristocrat by birth. Her mother, Emilie Stjernvall, was born in Finland and her aunt was the well-known Finnish charity patroness Aurora Karamzin. When she married the Swedish-speaking Count Constantin Linder she moved to Finland. According to her biographer, Katri Lehto (1986), Marie was a figure both admired and disapproved of by Helsinki society. She was disapproved of due to her unconventional behaviour as a well-known nobleman's wife and the mother of three children. She was keen on acting, debating, dancing, drinking champagne – and writing. Linder started to write stories for newspapers in 1866. One year later, she published her only novel, *En qvinna af vår tid* [A Woman of our time]. She wrote under the pseudonym Stella, even though it was widely known that she was the actual author. The novel sold well and was translated into Danish in 1868; a Finnish translation was published in 2009.

Luanto, Regina di (1862–1914) was the author of eleven novels and two collections of short stories. Guendalina Lipparini, her real name, was born in Terni into a wealthy middle-class family and after her first marriage in 1881 she lived in Florence. She published articles in the journal *Rivista italiana di scienze, di lettere, arti e teatri* [The Italian review of sciences, literature, art and theratre] and later in the magazine *La donna* [The woman]. Through her literary production Regina di Luanto soon became known as a daring writer without false modesty. After the death of her husband, the writer moved first to Pisa and then to Milan with her second husband. When she died suddenly in 1914 in the early days of the First World War, Regina di Luanto was characterized as "the boldest, most advanced, most daring writer that literary Italy has had in the last twenty years" (*Il Nuovo Giornale*, [The new journal]13 September 1914).

Meisel-Hess, Grete (1879–1922) was an Austrian-Jewish feminist and writer. She began to publish novels, short stories, and essays in 1900. She dealt with social and sexual reforms, the emancipation of women, and individualism. She clearly opposed Otto Weininger's bestseller, published in 1903, *Gender and Character* in the book *Weiberhass und Weiberverachtung* [Hatred and contempt for women, 1904]. She criticized the prevailing sexual morality as a double standard and described prostitution as an effect of social lack of freedom. In the novels *Fanny Roth: Eine Jung-Frauengeschichte* [Fanny Roth: A young woman's story] and *Die Stimme* [The voice, 1909] Meisel-Hess depicts the lives of young women who have to give up their artistic activities after marriage. In the study *Die sexuelle Krise* [The sexual crisis, 1904] she calls for a change in the economic and social form as a necessary prerequisite for the sexual liberation of women.

Milčinović, Adela (1878–1968) was a Croatian feminist, novelist, critic, and journalist. She qualified as a teacher. Adela Milčinović's entry into public life dates back to 1900. She published her most resounding article in the magazine *Domaće ognjište* [Domestic hearth, 1901–1914] in the form of a letter in which she wrote about the absence of women in public life and revealed her views of art. Milčinović' writings are psychological portraits of women, their longings and broken illusions. In *Ivka* (1905) she published eight short stories in which she articulated the fates of teachers and educators, seamstresses and embroiderers. The most artistically mature work by Adela Milčinović is a novella *Sjena* [Shadow, 1919] where the writer portrayed the contrast between a man's and a woman's experience of the First World War. In addition to the topic related to women, Adela Milčinović's writings also show the economic and spiritual decline of Slavonian villages.

Noailles, Anna de (1876–1933), countess Anna-Elisabeth Brancoveanu, was a Romanian-Greek aristocrat. Her family of Byzantine descent moved to Paris in her early childhood, where she was brought up in the spirit of Romanian and French nationalism. She became a princess by marriage and soon developed an illustrious career as a prolific writer and intellectual. She was the first woman commander of the Legion of Honour (1931) and the first woman to become a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium (1921). Her feminine lyrical work reached its peak before the First World War, and was awarded the French Academy Grand Prix for Literature in 1910. She is markedly a phenomenon of Francophonie, a celebrated writer who greatly influenced iconic French writers of the moment, among whom Marcel Proust and Jean Cocteau stand out. She has remained insufficiently explored by Romanian culture and French alike.

Svobodová, Růžena (1868–1920) was a role model for many modern (Czech) women writers of her time. She attended the Higher Girls' School and became a home teacher. She participated in the anti-realist movement and sought a new style. Her writings are mainly influenced by impressionism. In her short stories and psychological novels about women she created a special type of subjectivized and lyrical prose. She primarily deals with the emancipation of women and criticizes social grievances. She founded the women's magazine, *Zvěstování* [Annunciation] in 1919, and edited another magazine, *Lípa* [Linden, 1918–1919]. She also hosted a literary salon, which was visited by many renowned Czech artists of her time. In her early works she includes feminist ideas. Her most successful work is a novel *Černí myslivci* [Black Foresters, 1908]. She also published many collections of short stories, for example *Na písčité půdě* [On the Sandy Soil, 1895], *Ztroskotáno* [Wrecked, 1896], and *Přetížený klas* [Overloaded ear, 1896].

Sylva, Carmen or Queen Elisabeth or Princess Elisabeth Pauline Ottilie Luise of Wied (1843–1916) was Romania's first female sovereign and the wife of Charles I Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, King of Romania since 1866. After the Romanian War of Independence or the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), Queen Elisabeth devoted herself to charity and philanthropy, and she was therefore widely known among Romanians as the "mother of the wounded". With a vivid poetic imagination, she devoted herself to literature, but she also was exceptionally endowed with talent in music, painting, and handwork. The queen wrote in German, French, English, and Romanian. She published several volumes of poems, plays, novels, short stories, essays, memoirs, and aphorisms. A few of them – novels, short stories and poems – were signed "Dito and Idem" and were devised in collaboration with Mite Kremnitz. Taking stylistic advice from the most acclaimed of the Romanian writers (V. Alecsandri, Mihai Eminescu, G. Coșbuc), she also refashioned Romanian legends into literary form.

Wägner, Elin (1882–1949) was a Swedish author and journalist who wrote short stories and novels as well as essays on subjects such as sexual difference and women's emancipation, pacifism, and ecology. A leading intellectual of the time, she was elected to the Swedish Academy in 1944. Wägner is now recognized as one of Sweden's most influential feminists. She was a prominent member of the suffragette movement and later joined the international women's peace movement. Wägner's early novels, *Norrtullsligan* [Men and other misfortunes, 1908] and *Pennskaftet* [The penwoman, 1910], are sharply critical of the social conditions for women in different classes. Whereas these works are ironic in tone and exhibit a degree of lightness and humour, her later fiction is characterized by more complex narrative structures and greater psychological depth. This development arguably paralleled Wägner's growing interest in mysticism. She also eventually joined the Quakers.

Öhrlund, Saimi (1889–1959) is in many ways a minor figure in the Finnish literary field. Between 1913–1946 she published five novels all together, four collections of poems and three plays. Apart from her last novel, *Hamppiniemeläiset* [People living in Hamppiniemi;1930], all her work was self-published, or had her husband's name written on the cover as the publisher. In 1912–1914 Öhrlund worked as the editor-in-chief for the literary magazine *Kyllikk*i, in all likelihood producing most texts published in the magazine by herself. Moreover, during the 1910s she contributed to at least one other literary magazine, *Viikko* [Week]. The Helsinki address calendar from 1911 lists Saimi Öhrlund as a barber: The Finnish digital newspaper archive suggests that at least in late 1920s, she run her own touring theatre company. Neither Öhrlund's life nor works are discussed in any written history, literary or otherwise. Her published biography consists of a couple of lines on Wikipedia.

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