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The Political Woman in German Women's writing 1845-1919

D.Phil.

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Short Abstract

This thesis analyses the depiction and its function of politically active women in novels by six female authors from the margins of the democratic revolution of 1848 and the first German women's movement. The thesis asks (i) what their political stance was in relation to democratic developments and women's rights, (ii) how they rendered their political convictions into literary form, (iii) which literary images they used, criticised, or invented in order to depict politically active women in their novels in a positive light, and (iv) which narrative strategies they employed to 'smuggle' politically and socially radical ideas into what were sometimes only ostensibly conventional plots. The thesis combines intertextual analysis with poetic analyses of individual texts in order to highlight deviant elements in narrative strategy, imagery, or text-internal appraisals by the narrator or author. In order to contextualise the chosen texts as well as my analyses, it draws on the historical environment (social and legal developments, revolutions, technological progress) for the definition of what can be considered radical and political in the period 1845-1919. Additionally, the thesis is firmly grounded in feminist theory, which provides the instruments for highlighting the concepts and circumstances in which the six authors' works are situated. The essays and novels analysed were written before feminist theory was established; however, their proto-feminist observations, demands, and discursive tactics contributed much to the formation and institutionalisation of feminist thought and, ultimately, theory. In their efforts to construct a positive role model for the political woman, the six authors chosen are united in their notion that such a role model should evolve from bourgeois values of family and work ethics, but the examples manifested in their novels show a great variety of degrees of radicalism.

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Long abstract

This thesis analyses the depiction and its function of politically active women in novels by six female authors from the margins of the democratic revolution of 1848 and the first German Women's Movement. The thesis asks (i) what their political stance was in relation to democratic developments and women's rights, (ii) how they rendered their political convictions into literary form, (iii) which literary images they used, criticised, or invented, in order to depict politically active women in their novels in a positive light, and (iv) which narrative strategies they employed to 'smuggle' politically and socially radical ideas into what were sometimes only ostensibly conventional plots. The authors chosen for this study are Louise Aston (1814-1871), Malwida von Meysenbug (1816-1903), Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884), Fanny Lewald (1811-1889), Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895), and Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919). They all wrote political essays or pamphlets as well as novels, and were chosen for this reason as well as for being leading voices in the events of the democratic revolution of 1848, with some of them going on to become leading figures in the first German women's movement. As such, they were bound to have not only explicit political ideas and demands, but also a great interest in depicting and establishing a positive literary image of the political woman in contrast to the negative and mocking image of the Bluestocking. Other studies on these authors so far have tried to map their political programmes onto the contents of their novels and have noted some congruencies, but they also assume a greater conventionalism in the authors' literary texts in comparison to their political essays. However, it has not yet been considered whether the six authors attempted to create a new literary image, in the vein of the *femme fatale* or *femme fragile*, for the political woman, and which narrative as well as poetic strategies and concepts they employed in order to challenge, subvert, or claim already established forms and norms of literature, in particular with regard to women's writing, and not least to attempt to educate and convince their readership of the necessity of women's involvement in politics. In order to analyse these strategies, this thesis combines intertextual analysis with poetic analyses of individual texts in order to highlight deviant elements in narrative strategy, imagery, or text-internal appraisals by the narrator or author. In order to contextualise the chosen texts as well as my analyses, it draws on the historical situation such as social and legal developments, revolutions, technological progress, and the influence of philosophy for the definition of what can be considered radical and political in the period 1845-1919. Additionally, the thesis is firmly grounded in modern feminist theory, which provides the instruments for highlighting the concepts and circumstances in which the six authors' works are situated.

The six authors used surprisingly different narrative techniques to transport their political messages: one is the stylisation of their own life as a role model, alternately highly charged with pathos and linked to the literary images of the genius, martyr, or visionary, or deliberately presented in a practicable way, in order to demonstrate that any woman could follow this role model. Other strategies include 'hiding' subversive messages in marginality: minor characters live in alternative, non-sanctioned ways and achieve much by it, or voice deviant social or political opinions; even structurally, some novels link to established genres

such as the epistolary or educational novel, but flout the rules of the genres in order to draw attention to the problem field of female authorship, or to mirror conflicts at the level of the plot. In their efforts to construct a positive image for the political woman, the six authors chosen are united in their notion that such a role model should evolve from bourgeois values of family and work ethics, but the examples manifested in their novels show a great variety of degrees of radicalism. This is in turn bound to their different personal experiences in their upbringing, family background, marriage, and in the opportunities for education or independent work that they had, that is, whether they had the possibility of doing something apart from making a good match and having their own families. The characteristic features of the political woman in the novels that have been analysed show her as belonging to the bourgeoisie, as a supporter of democracy, as aware of social and legal injustices towards women, and as possessing both the interest in political matters and the willingness (and courage) to live a life different from the common bourgeois notion of a woman's 'natural' role in society. More specifically, the figure of the political woman is as multifaceted as the different wings and sections of the German women's movement itself, from the radicalism of her political demands down to her domestic and work situation. While these variations offer vivid images, different political and social alternative life paths, and several opportunities for self-identification to the nineteenth-century readership, the question remains whether it was this variety that hindered the moulding of a literary female type with an influence and force to equal that of the images of the *femme fatale* and *femme fragile*; or whether it was the long-lasting absence of real female politicians alone, due to the lack of suffrage, which undermined the authors' ambitions to present a positive image of the political woman.

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Introduction

The political woman, as a literary image and as a person, should, strictly speaking, not exist in nineteenth-century Germany. Women were by definition excluded from politics, and, once married, not even recognised as independent persons before the law, all this justified by the emerging ideals of ‘natural’ gender roles and attributes.¹ The first German Women’s Movement existed in its organised and institutionalised form only from 1865, the year Louise Otto-Peters, Minna Cauer, and several other politically minded women founded the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein (ADV) in Leipzig.² However, even this association focused primarily on campaigns for the reform of marriage law, equal access to education, and equality in the workforce, and explicitly not on women’s suffrage, quite in contrast to the British, French, and American Women’s Movements of the same period.³ Nevertheless, since the Vormärz period at the latest, German women writers concerned themselves with politics and women’s exclusion from it and various other fields of public life, in various ways and genres. The democratic revolution of 1848 provided a unique opportunity to reach a large readership with political interests, and a number of female authors published explicitly political pamphlets, novels, and poetry with the goal of securing women’s participation in the construction of the new democratic state. These authors faced one particular problem when turning from essay or pamphlet to literature: they had no literary image of a political woman at their disposal, except for the unpopular, mocking image of the Bluestocking. In order to depict their own political points of view,

¹ See e.g. Barbara Duden, 'Das schöne Eigentum. Zur Herausbildung des bürgerlichen Frauenbildes an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert', *Kursbuch*, 47 (1977), pp. 125-40, and Karin Hausen, 'Die Polarisierung der „Geschlechtscharaktere“ – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben', in W. Conze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977).

² See Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (SAGE Studies in 20th Century History, 6; London, Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1976), p. 24.

³ See Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous greetings: the first international women's movement, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 135-36 and 157-58.

they had to create a literary character suitable to represent their ideas, which had to be distinct from the caricature of the Bluestocking. Since women encountered massive antagonism when trying to engage with matters of state, they had to justify these literary characters, and they had to make them socially acceptable for their – presumably female, less politically aware or interested, and in most cases bourgeois - readership.

The authors chosen for this study – Louise Aston (1814-1871), Malwida von Meysenbug (1816-1903), Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884), Fanny Lewald (1811-1889), Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895), and Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919) – all wrote political essays or pamphlets as well as novels. Apart from the last-named, all authors actively participated in the democratic revolution of 1848 on the side of the revolutionaries. Aston witnessed the fighting on the barricades in Berlin and wrote a historically accurate novel about this so-called March uprising. Anneke followed her husband into the Baden uprising and, during the military actions, undertook messenger duties on the front lines, while Lewald and von Meysenbug witnessed the political proceedings of the provisional National Assembly in Frankfurt. They all supported the formation of a democratic state but were appalled when, once again, their fellow male democrats ignored the female half of the population when formulating the ‘equal’ codes of law for the new republic. Even though the authors chosen did not, at that time, demand women’s suffrage as the basis for a democratic state, they campaigned in their essays and pamphlets for the true legal equality of men and women. The six authors differed quite profoundly in the extent of their radicalism, which is also palpable in their employment of various argumentative strategies. How, then, did they depict politically active women who dared to speak out or to live a life involved in politics in their literary texts? Did they use their novels as ambassadors for their political demands and agendas? And what strategies did they employ in order to keep within the limits of what was thought proper for female authorship, that is, if they bothered to keep within those boundaries at all? Are their

versions of the political woman hidden away in sub-plots, are they minor characters who function as a subversive counterpoint to a conventional story, or do they take centre stage?

In her short article 'Die Nebensächlichen' Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres describes how the most important political, or socially radical, messages can be found not in the centre but on the margins of novels by women writers.⁴ The female authors were writing from a marginalised position themselves, so one strategy for advocating deviant opinions and different blueprints for (women's) lives was to keep them out of the main focus, to present them as an alternative which creeps in slowly via the margins, instead of turning the world upside down in a full-scale revolution. However, not all of the authors discussed in the following employed this strategy. Aston virtually parades her radically different heroine, Otto-Peters presents the hitherto unheard-of phenomenon – a bourgeois woman who earns her own living – several times as her protagonist, and von Meysenbug boldly puts forward her own life story as an alternative model for the course of a woman's life. It appears that the more pronounced their stance in depicting political opinion and demands is, the more it is necessary for other writing strategies to take the edge off this transgression of female boundaries. Dohm depicts a woman actively involved in social politics rather unfavourably: she is a friend of the protagonist who is described as having a small hunch, being slightly cross-eyed, and constantly fretting about poor families to whom she cannot give enough help. Lewald favours female protagonists who lead by example and leave theoretical, political debates to the male characters. The question arises whether this should be attributed to the attempt to deliver 'proper' female writing, with strategies such as ridicule or a divide between political theory and practice as a safeguard against the criticism that a female author should not concern herself with politics; or whether the

⁴ Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 'Die Nebensächlichen: Selbstbehauptung durch Protest in den Schriften deutscher Schriftstellerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert', in Albrecht Schöne (ed.), *Kontroversen, Alte und Neue: Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses, Göttingen 1985* (6; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 68-72.

ambivalence can be read as an expression of the (even more) marginal position of an explicitly political woman, a marginality the authors of those texts undoubtedly felt.

The authors chosen are more or less contemporaries and are bound to have taken notice of each other's political involvement. However, there are few or no extant sources on the interaction or correspondence between them and comments on their respective works are scarce, if they exist at all. For one thing, the literary estates of the authors have not always been kept – in the case of Dohm and Aston there is not even an established archive. Otto-Peters and von Meysenbug were rediscovered by the second Women's Movement in Germany in the 1970s, and a Louise Otto-Peters-Gesellschaft and a Malwida-von-Meynsenbug-Gesellschaft have been founded which have worked towards consolidating archive material in one central archive in each case. Lewald's literary estate is perhaps the most secure and well catalogued of the six authors, whereas Anneke's is kept partly in Germany, partly in the U.S., with some texts available only as copies or in typescript in one location because the originals are stored in the other one, or are simply lost. The Frauenarchiv in Kassel, the FrauenMediaTurm in Cologne, and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach also hold lists and some texts by the six authors; the rest remains distributed across Germany, or, in von Meysenbug's case, even across Europe. Reconstructing the contacts the authors had with each other and with members of the contemporaneous women's movement in Britain or America, at least beyond the obvious, is made difficult by this fragmented archival landscape, and is often down to luck, as other scholars note in their attempts.⁵ Personal contacts between some of the authors can be reconstructed through their direct correspondence, if extant, and through mentions of visits or meetings in letters to other friends. Here especially von Meysenbug's correspondence, recently edited and published, has been informative and instrumental in tracing the

⁵ See e.g. Isabel Rohner, *Spuren ins Jetzt. Hedwig Dohm - Eine Biographie* (Sulzbach/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2010), and Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany: German refugees in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

connections of several well-known authors and political characters.⁶ Von Meysenbug met Lewald several times, first together with Lewald's husband Adolf Stahr in 1866 in Rome, where von Meysenbug lived for the second half of her life; then again in 1878 in Rome, and finally von Meysenbug invited Lewald again for a visit in 1881.⁷ In a letter to Ludwig Geiger, von Meysenbug congratulated him on his preface to Lewald's memoirs and promised to read the whole book.⁸ Dohm also met Lewald by chance on a visit at a friend's place in Berlin, and commented on the occasion in her characteristic sarcastic manner.⁹ Otto-Peters apparently wrote to everyone, and knew everyone, who had voiced support for the women's movement in Germany, and asked them for contributions to her political women's newspaper. In the literary estate of Gottfried and Johanna Kinkel, von Meysenbug's best friends in their political exile in London, there is a letter from the socialist women's activist Kathinka Zitz, describing a brief visit from Otto-Peters, and forwarding her request for contributions to the Kinkels.¹⁰ Johanna Kinkel and von Meysenbug forwarded Otto-Peters's apparently frequent requests to each other with much amusement.¹¹ Strikingly, Dohm and Otto-Peters seem to have avoided each other. Dohm preferred to publish her political essays independently, and when she turned to writing frequent articles for newspapers at the turn of the century, she found a forum in more radical newspapers such as *Die Zukunft*, instead of the central publication of the ADF,

⁶ See Malwida von Meysenbug, *Die Korrespondenzen der Malwida von Meysenbug, Teil 1-3, Briefregesten 1827-1903*, eds Annegret Tegtmeier-Breit, Christa Gehlhaus-Urban, and Karin Hollmann (Veröffentlichungen der staatlichen Archive des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Reihe C, Quellen und Forschungen; Detmold: Nordrhein-Westfälisches Staatsarchiv, 2000).

⁷ See *ibid.*, letters 528, 1014, 197, 202, 203.

⁸ See *ibid.*, letter 2064.

⁹ See Hedwig Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2009), p. 25.

¹⁰ Letter Kathinka Zitz to Gottfried Kinkel, Mainz 27. August 1851, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Abteilung Handschriften und Rara, Nachlaß Gottfried und Johanna Kinkel, S 2663.: „Luise Otto, die begabte Schriftstellerin, war heute bei mir und hat den besten Eindruck auf mich gemacht, denn mit sehr geistiger Begabung verbindet sie die edelste Weiblichkeit, grosse Einfachheit und Bescheidenheit. Sie lässt Frau Johanna herzlich grüssen und sie um irgend einen Beitrag aus ihrer Feder für die von ihr gegründete Frauenzeitung ersuchen.“

¹¹ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Briefe an Johanna und Gottfried Kinkel, 1849-1885*, eds Stefania Rossi and Yoko Kikuchi (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1982).

Neue Bahnen, which had been founded by Otto-Peters. Influences from the British Women's Movement are even harder to trace. Although von Meysenbug lived in London for almost a decade, and had, together with the Kinkels, a lot of contacts among international political circles, there are few indications that she actually met or corresponded with leading figures of the British movement. Von Meysenbug, Lewald, Otto-Peters, and Dohm commented on John Stuart Mill's texts concerning political philosophy and women's emancipation. It can be assumed that Anneke knew these texts as well, but she did not write anything about them, and Aston more or less vanished from the public stage after her second marriage in 1852. In a letter to von Meysenbug in 1859, Alexander Herzen mentioned that he had given Mill's *On Liberty* to her as something she would want to read, and that he wrote a letter to Mill as well.¹² In 1869, von Meysenbug told Gottfried Kinkel that she had received a letter from Mill regarding her memoirs, and in 1877 von Meysenbug promised Paul Rée to make him a gift of one of Mill's letters to her (it is not clear whether this is the letter referring to her memoirs, or whether they had a more frequent correspondence).¹³ Lewald dedicated one of her collections of political letters to Mill, and in the preface mentions a letter from Mill complimenting her on her earlier political essays.¹⁴ Dohm, the youngest of the six authors, quoted Mill and Josephine Butler in her later essays, and Otto-Peters printed translated excerpts of Mill's texts, as well as translations of English articles in favour of the women's movement, in her newspaper.¹⁵

Considering the contacts five of the six authors had with each other, it is also safe to assume that they took note of each other's literary publications. Von Meysenbug's and Lewald's memoirs certainly got mentioned and discussed; however, only Aston managed to provoke two of the other authors, Otto-Peters and Anneke, into reacting to her literary

¹² Ibid., letter 380.

¹³ Ibid., letter 663 and 950 respectively.

¹⁴ See preface to Fanny Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen* (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1870).

¹⁵ See preface to Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, and Marion Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!" Schriftstellerinnen und die Revolution von 1848/49* (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer, 2004).

endeavours. Aston started to publish political poetry in the Vormärz period, taking the Saint-Simonian's stance of free love as the way to women's emancipation. Already infamous in Berlin and beyond for her scandalous behaviour during the years preceding the revolution, Aston set herself even further apart from her contemporaries by creating a powerful literary woman in a novel who broke the mould for acceptable female behaviour in every way. Most of the other authors in this study made efforts to distance themselves from this particular image of a political woman, and even from Aston herself. Otto-Peters attacked Aston and her texts in her political newspaper, accusing her of damaging the efforts other women made towards legal emancipation by depicting a literary character who seems to forget her 'natural' feminine character, and abusing the upheaval of the democratic revolution for personal benefit.¹⁶ Anneke, on the other hand, came to Aston's defence, at least up to a point. Anneke unmasked the loudest personal accusations against Aston as based on society's moral double standard, but did criticise her poetry and first novel with regard to their political content. For Anneke, Aston remained too ensnared in her personal experiences, and did not take the next mental step from demanding individual to demanding legal freedom. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the other authors in this study searched for a literary representation of political women which very carefully avoided both the categorisation of the Bluestocking and Aston's almost fantastical early attempt.

¹⁶ See Anderson, *Joyous greetings*, p. 151.

Chapter 1

The Politics of Women's Writing

Beginning with the Enlightenment, women had started to make written demands for equal rights as citizens – Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) are generally considered the pioneering writers on women's circumstances, who demanded change in society and equality between the sexes. Their use of polemical language and their appeal to universal justice was carried on by the women of the nineteenth century, especially in the 1840s and later in the organised women's movement in Germany, starting in 1865. Some female authors, like Hedwig Dohm, refer in their political writings to both de Gouges¹⁷ and Wollstonecraft¹⁸ as early campaigners for emancipation in their essays and articles. Literary texts, however, are usually less overt in their demands and do not usually depict the alternative, successful life stories that the essays present; the notable exception is the novel *Revolution und Contrerevolution* (1849) by Louise Aston, in which she depicts an almost fabulous, alternative image of a woman who fights on the barricades of the 1848 revolution. But the history of women's writing in Germany is paradoxical in almost every aspect, as Helen Fronius points out with regard to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁹ We find treatises and scientific essays, written mostly by men, which rigidly promote the separate private sphere as women's domain, and at the same time, there are numerous publications in various genres by women, obviously flouting this supposed boundary. The case studies undertaken by Fronius show that even those female authors who were not connected to publishers through male relatives or husbands, and who were not 'protected' by a famous family name, were

¹⁷ Olympe de Gouges, 'Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne', (1791).

¹⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and the Wrongs of Woman, or Maria', in Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao (eds.), *A Longman Cultural Edition* (Los Angeles: Pearson - Longman, 2007).

¹⁹ Helen Fronius, *Women and Literature in the Goethe Era 1770-1820 'Determined Dilettantes'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

able to publish, and sometimes even to make a living from, their writings. Her thesis is that most of the essays about separate spheres and the natural destinies of men and women came as a reaction to the growing number of female authors entering the public sphere, and are therefore to be read not as descriptive of the status quo, but as an attempt to hold the tide back, and to insist on what society should ideally look like.²⁰ Even after women had more or less established themselves as writers (within a certain framework of acceptable contributions and genres), and publishers had an increasing demand for material, men still used the practice of reviewing and criticism to at least ensure a last measure of control over *what* women wrote.²¹ Fronius comes to the conclusion that women ‘were clearly aware of the discursive conditions in which they published their texts, but not silenced by them’.²² This argument is convincing for the eighteenth as well as for the nineteenth century. It accounts for the inconsistency between the supposedly separate spheres (which seem very rigid from today's scholarly perspective) and the *de facto* existence of various published female authors, not least the first German novel recognised as having been written by a woman, the *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*.²³ This is not to deny that women had to overcome many obstacles on all levels in order to get published, and that many female authors employed strategies in their writing which accorded with the expected gender roles. With regard to novels, Fronius notices a writing strategy that appears to be specific to that genre, namely the calculated use of the language of feminine modesty.²⁴ By comparing authors’ prefaces to novels and dramas, this mode of self-presentation can be found mostly in the prefaces of novels, and therefore indicates a strategic employment in women’s writing.

The question of ‘what’ women should write proves to be paradoxical as well.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

²¹ Ibid., p. 74.

²² Ibid., p. 232.

²³ Sophie von La Roche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, ed. Christoph Martin Wieland (Leipzig, 1771).

²⁴ Fronius, *Women and Literature in the Goethe Era 1770-1820*, pp. 233-34.

Renate Möhrmann shows how even contemporary male critics were unsure as to which topics were considered appropriate for female authors (not to mention what exactly constituted 'true' female virtue and femininity):

Ähnlich verschwommene Vorstellungen hatte man bezüglich der Themenbereiche, mit denen sich die Frau befassen sollte. Daß Carl Barthel [1817-1853] ihr nichts anderes als die Sphäre der engeren Häuslichkeit zubilligt und von ihrem schriftstellerischen Talent vor allem die Verklärung von Zucht, Ordnung und Sitte erwartet, versteht sich nach dem Gesagten von selbst. Weniger einleuchtend ist, dass auch Prutz [1816-1872] ihre Stoffe einengt und sie am liebsten nur auf Natur- und Landschaftsbeschreibungen festlegen möchte, wogegen Gottschall [1823-1909] ihr zwar soziale, aber keine politischen Themen empfiehlt.²⁵

If a woman chose to write about domestic issues, she was in danger of being trivialised by critics, and if she included social or even political commentary, her text could be discounted as being *Tendenzliteratur* without greater importance in the sphere of art. Although this looks very much like a no-win situation, women still wrote and published a great variety of texts, literary and otherwise, in order to make their voices heard. Their growing self-confidence and awareness enabled them to write about topics which they deemed important to discuss; at the same time, they were still influenced by the normative circumstances of women's writing, and different strategies to cope with them can be seen in numerous texts. Many women chose to write essays, pamphlets and commentaries on their current situation, especially in the time shortly before and during the democratic revolution of 1848. In the spirit of that time they saw a chance to participate actively in the formation of a new democratic state, and seized the opportunity to step a little away from their supposed silence in political matters. While many men, also in the spirit of change, welcomed their help with regard to democratic ideas, their willingness to give women the

²⁵ Renate Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau. Emanzipationsansätze deutscher Schriftstellerinnen im Vorfeld der Achtundvierziger-Revolution* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), p. 5.

same rights as men and to let them participate in direct political processes fell very short. The provisional parliament which assembled in Frankfurt consisted entirely of men, and women were not even allowed to attend their meetings. The author von Meysenbug tells in her memoirs how she and a few other women, the wives of some of the delegates, managed to sneak into some of the meetings, and listened to the debates well hidden behind the curtains of the pulpit. In the later meetings of the national assembly, a separate balcony was reserved for women, but they were only allowed entrance as spectators. Most women with hopes of political change realised that yet again, they had been denied their own voice in the debates, and as a consequence also the equal rights they saw as the fundamental basis of a democratic state. Though those women were still denied a public opinion on political matters, several of them turned to writing, or continued to write. Women's political writings, in contrast to their novels, were far more direct, often radical, in challenging texts which tried to prescribe a normative form of femininity or argued against women's political participation. In order to fully appreciate the progressive demands women made in their essays, the legal situation of women at the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth centuries, and the reception of the early pioneers has to be assessed. Following this analysis, the question arises how those female authors of political essays treated the issue of participation in political matters in their own novels.

a. Women's legal situation in the nineteenth century

The many small states that constituted Germany in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had many different legal codes. Apart from differences in the laws relating to rural areas (Landgemeindeordnung) and to cities (Stadtrecht), two main legal systems existed side by side for nearly a century.²⁶ The state law with the largest

²⁶ For a summary of the relation of the different juridical institutions towards each other and towards the

jurisdiction was the Prussian Civil Code (Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten), which came into effect in 1794.²⁷ In 1804, Napoléon Bonaparte instituted the French *Code Civil* in the regions of Germany which were under his jurisdiction, namely the Rhineland, Rhine-Hesse, the Rhenish Palatinate, the Grand Duchy of Baden (where it was replaced in 1810 with the Baden State Law, a slightly modified version of the *Code Civil*), and Alsace-Lorraine.²⁸ All state laws were finally replaced with the Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB), which was drafted and widely discussed from 1896 onwards, and which came into effect on 1 January 1900.²⁹ The key element in all of those legal systems was the distinction between the citizen (Bürger) and the subject: only citizens had the political rights of suffrage and eligibility for office, only they could work as civil servants for the state. To acquire citizenship, several restrictive conditions had to be fulfilled; the modified Prussian Städteordnung of 1831, which already simplified the access to citizenship, declared that ‘Nur solche Personen männlichen Geschlechts, welche weder unter väterlicher Gewalt, noch unter Vormundschaft oder Kuratel stehen, im Stadtbezirk ihren Wohnsitz nehmen, und unbescholten sind, können das Bürgerrecht erwerben.’³⁰ This phraseology explicitly excludes women, while former versions, as Ute Frevert explains, do not mention women at all, apparently under the (at that time) common assumption that women were neither able to gain citizenship nor to engage in politics. The need to make their exclusion explicit arose from a general, social opening of the sphere of citizenship to men of different social backgrounds. Restrictions bound to property and income were abolished in the course of the nineteenth century, and while more men were able to gain

Emperor in Imperial Germany see Richard J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*.

²⁷ Ute Frevert, *Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann“: Geschlechter-Differenzen in der Moderne* (Munich: Beck, 1995).

²⁸ Daniel Lochner, *Das uneheliche Kind im rheinischen Recht*, (Rheinische Schriften zur Rechtsgeschichte; Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2006), pp. 22-30.

²⁹ Projekt Frauenrechtsgeschichte der Leibniz Universität Hannover, 'Stellung der Frau im BGB von 1896 und im Recht der Jahrhundertwende im Lichte zeitgenössischer Forderungen', *Internationale Reformforderungen zum Familienrecht und Rechtskämpfe des Frauenweltbundes 1830-1914* [Website], (updated 13 Jun 2009) <<http://www.frauenrechtsgeschichte.uni-hannover.de/quellentexte.html>>, accessed 28 April 2013.

³⁰ Frevert, *Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann*,"p. 80.

citizenship, and with it, political representation, women had to be excluded more explicitly in case they managed to fulfil these lesser criteria. Frevert states: ‘selbst wenn [Frauen] alle Bedingungen, die sich an den Erwerb des Bürgerrechts geknüpft waren, erfüllten, gingen Frauen leer aus, weil sie Frauen waren’.³¹ But even the opening of the status of citizenship to (nearly) all men was not undisputed. With the argument that political rights are not elements of natural justice but privileges to be earned, politically conservative forces tried to exclude, for example, destitute men from this expansion of citizenship. The argument was even that, because political rights were privileges, the accessibility of citizenship for ‘unworthy’ men was as ludicrous as the same accessibility for women, mainly because of the Kantian ideal of the citizen as male and independent, able to serve the state without being influenced by powers contrary to the state’s interests and, not least, able to serve in the military.³² As a result, women played no significant role in constitutional law, and their concerns were mainly dealt with in the sector of civil law.

b. Guardianship, married and unmarried women

The lack of access to political proceedings was only one negative aspect of women’s legal standing in the nineteenth century. Derived from the lack of citizenship, the existing civil laws defined women *per se* as dependent on a male guardian. Ute Gerhard explains that, while women were always considered minors and placed under guardianship by law, they lost quite a lot of the ability to act in their own legal interests during the nineteenth century due to changes in the legislation relating to guardianship. In general, women were placed under so-called ‘Geschlechtsvormundschaft’, which meant that they were not able to act themselves in legal proceedings, but had to have a male guardian acting on their behalf. This guardian was usually the father as long as the woman was not married, but

³¹ Ibid., p. 82.

³² Ibid., pp. 83-87.

could also be the brother, or a male guardian the women chose themselves; in the latter case, a court had to validate the choice before it was actually legal, but this procedure was often a mere formality. This regulation changed in the year 1875,³³ and the ‘Geschlechtsvormundschaft’ was substituted with the ‘Ehevormundschaft’ in the Prussian Civil Code. It meant that, when a woman married, her husband would automatically become her guardian, and the wife had no legal option to appoint a different guardian to act for her. This modified version of guardianship also meant that the husband now had full access to, and power of disposal over, his wife’s property.³⁴ The legal framework of marriage as a legal status does not differ much in the Prussian Civil Code and the *Code Civil*, but the Prussian laws proved to be more influential and formative when laws were modified, and also in the making of the new BGB. The *Code Civil*, also called the Code Napoléon during the period 1807 - 1815 as well as between 1853 and 1871, offered more *de facto* rights at least to unmarried women, and is even today considered a more progressive version of a civil code in nineteenth-century Germany.³⁵ Unmarried women who had come of age were primarily treated as wards of their fathers, but could hold their own property and engage in some business matters, for example buying, selling or renting property, hiring domestic servants, bequeathing property in an independent will, or taking out a mortgage.³⁶ The option of appointing a different legal guardian instead of the father brought a greater freedom of legal interaction, because the women could make sure that their guardian acted in their interests, and not in the guardian’s own. This option did not exist in the Prussian Civil Code, which Richard J. Evans describes as very authoritarian. Under this law, the father had full control over the family and especially the children. Evans states that “[o]ver the daughters of the family his [the father’s] power was most

³³ Ursula Machtemes, *Leben zwischen Trauer und Pathos* (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 2001), p. 9.

³⁴ Ute Gerhard, *Gleichheit ohne Angleichung. Frauen im Recht.* (München: C.H. Beck, 1990), esp. pp. 80-87.

³⁵ Lochner, *Das uneheliche Kind im rheinischen Recht*, p. 19.

³⁶ Projekt Frauenrechtsgeschichte der Leibniz Universität Hannover, 'Stellung der Frau im BGB von 1896 und im Recht der Jahrhundertwende im Lichte zeitgenössischer Forderungen'.

complete. Until they married, he represented them in law and held their property as his.”³⁷ These rights of the father over his daughter would be transmitted to the husband on marriage. Married women had therefore by far the weakest legal standing in both the Prussian Civil Code and the *Code Civil*. Because the husband was legally seen as the agent of his wife before the law, married women were not able to buy, sell, rent, hire, work or even travel (that is, apply for a passport) without their husband’s written consent. Many contemporary critics of this legal system equated the position of wives before the law to that of legal slaves, and demanded reforms of the marriage laws.

c. Divorce and separation

The laws concerning divorce and separation affirmed the legal dominance of the husband, as there were generally fewer obstacles for the husband to sue for a legal divorce than for the wife. The *Code Civil* made divorce quite difficult to obtain, so separation was the more practical option, even though it meant that both parties remained married to each other and thus were not allowed to marry again. Alimony was a crucial problem for separated couples, as Dirk Blasius shows in his study of divorce laws in Germany. Maintenance for the separated wife could only be enforced after a legally binding divorce; thus the wife was dependent on the goodwill of her husband to pay her living expenses after the separation.³⁸ In contrast, the Prussian Civil Code was rather liberal with regard to divorce, as Evans explains: because Frederick II was more interested in a growing population than in family ideology, childless couples were able to divorce comparatively easily by mutual consent, so that they could find new partners and start families. Couples with children could also obtain a divorce on the grounds of infidelity, and of

³⁷ Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*, p.12.

³⁸ Dirk Blasius, 'Bürgerliche Rechtsgleichheit und die Ungleichheit der Geschlechter. Das Scheidungsrecht im historischen Vergleich.', in Ute Frevert (ed.), *Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Geschlechterverhältnisse im 19. Jahrhundert. Zwölf Beiträge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), pp. 67-84.

‘insurmountable dislike’ of only one party (the divorce would then not be by mutual consent). The children would go to the party found innocent of the reasons for the divorce, e.g. the sued party in the case of insurmountable dislike, or the faithful party in the case of infidelity.³⁹ Blasius also points out that court documents show how, in practice under the Prussian Civil Code, judges often tried to balance the systematic injustices women faced under divorce law by recognising the women concerned as independent legal subjects, and by dealing with individual cases on that basis.⁴⁰ The same practice can be observed regarding the question of alimony and the guardianship of illegitimate children, as Daniel Lochner shows in his analysis of the legal situation of illegitimate children under the *Code Civil*.⁴¹ This legal practice, which, for its time, generously expanded the letter of the law by regarding women as legal persons, is especially interesting, as the earliest arguments made for a reform of women’s rights came from the jurist Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel in 1794.⁴² Subsequently, the demands for more or equal rights for women, at least within the family and in marriage, received far more support than hindrance from legal practitioners, and especially from judges, during the nineteenth century, even though there were conservative voices on that side as well which ridiculed or condemned those endeavours.⁴³

d. Widows

The situation for married women was grim in the nineteenth century, but with the death of the husband the new widow regained not only the rights she had as an unmarried woman in private law, but some other advantages that resulted from the social position her

³⁹ Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*. esp. p. 13.

⁴⁰ Blasius, 'Bürgerliche Rechtsgleichheit und die Ungleichheit der Geschlechter. Das Scheidungsrecht im historischen Vergleich'.

⁴¹ Lochner, *Das uneheliche Kind im rheinischen Recht*.

⁴² Ulrike Weckel, 'Gleichheit auf dem Prüfstand. Zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption der Streitschriften von Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel und Mary Wollstonecraft in Deutschland', in Claudia Opitz, Ulrike Weckel, and Elke Kleinan (eds.), *Tugend, Vernunft und Gefühl. Geschlechterdiskurse der Aufklärung und weibliche Lebenswelten* (Münster: Waxmann, 2000).

⁴³ Projekt Frauenrechtsgeschichte der Leibniz Universität Hannover, 'Stellung der Frau im BGB von 1896 und im Recht der Jahrhundertwende im Lichte zeitgenössischer Forderungen'.

husband had occupied. Ursula Machtemes remarks that widows were able to keep any academic or military titles their husband had achieved and had power of disposal over inherited property, unless the husband had established a custodian over her in his will.⁴⁴ Still, a guardian had to be appointed for any under-age children, as even widows were not able to obtain parental guardianship on their own.⁴⁵ Additionally, the deceased husband had control over the actions of his wife through his will. He could appoint tasks for his wife to carry out, for example, the administration of his literary or scholarly estate, which were designed to keep the widow focused on the memory of her late husband, and, on the other hand, often provided her with an extra income through posthumous publications in addition to her widow's pension. Machtemes shows how a whole insurance system evolved around the financial support of widows with the introduction of so-called 'Witwenkassen', and also how social expectations and pressures tried to restrict the scope of action that opened up for widows. Those social expectations of bourgeois society were built on the image of the idealised marriage, in which the widow remains faithful to her husband even after his death and acts not on her own, but according to his will alone. Interestingly enough, a rather paradoxical situation arose from this ideal: while widows were encouraged not to marry again, in order to serve their husbands' memories, this also allowed them greater legal freedom, which they in turn had to be discouraged from actually putting to use, again through social expectations of what was 'proper' behaviour for a widow. Machtemes shows in her case studies that a lot of women preferred to remain unmarried, and therefore to preserve their improved legal standing. Some of them even managed to re-interpret their husbands' will so that they could focus on matters that were important to them, or even disregarded certain tasks set for them in the will.⁴⁶ But in legal terms, the widow played no major role in the civil codes of the nineteenth century, apart

⁴⁴ Machtemes, *Leben zwischen Trauer und Pathos*, pp. 134-35; pp. 46-49.

⁴⁵ Lochner, *Das uneheliche Kind im rheinischen Recht*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Machtemes, *Leben zwischen Trauer und Pathos*, esp. pp. 211-226.

from the regulations of the ‘Witwenkassen’; the laws regulating the shared life of both men and women mentioned only unmarried women (in the father-daughter relationship) or married women (in the husband-wife relationship). This is also reflected in nineteenth-century texts in which women were defined only through their ability to be mothers; and widows, as well as women beyond the age of fifty, were regarded as useless.⁴⁷ While widowhood provided greater legal scope for action, the social circumstances and images attached to it made it downright necessary for women to justify their existence in socially acceptable ways, for example, in the image of the wife who is faithful beyond death. This social stigmatisation and pressure to conform to prescribed images of ‘proper’ widowhood were other factors that many writing women have criticised in their texts, besides the more politically motivated demands for legal reforms.

e. Early demands for women's rights – the reception of Olympe de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft and Theodor von Hippel

Criticism of the contemporary state of the law and demands for reform and equal civil rights for women came before the first German Women’s Movement towards the end of the eighteenth century. The first pamphlet on the topic was Olympe de Gouges’s *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, written in 1791 as a reaction to the androcentric declaration of human rights in the wake of the French Revolution, and brought before the National Assembly. The contemporary reception of the text is difficult to trace. While it did not have any influence on the National Assembly in creating the new Constitution, de Gouges was punished for her declaration and guillotined in 1793; the text itself seems to have been forgotten for several decades, but in some of the writings of nineteenth-century women’s rights campaigners, there are hints that Olympe de Gouges was still remembered. Hedwig Dohm, for example, does not mention the name or the text,

⁴⁷ Ibid.p. 249.

but alludes to her by paraphrasing what is probably her most famous statement: “Die Frau hat das Recht das Schafott zu besteigen; sie muss gleichermassen das Recht haben, die Tribüne zu besteigen”.⁴⁸ Dohm writes in her essay *Der Frauen Natur und Recht*:

Der Anspruch politischer Gleichheit der Geschlechter in der Kammer und auf der Tribüne erscheint den Männern ein sittlicher Frevel und setzt sie der Gefahr eines Lachkrampfes aus. *Eine* politische Gleichheit aber erkennen sie bereitwillig an: *die Gleichheit vor dem Schaffot*. Warum lachten Sie nicht, meine Herren, als Marie Antoinette’s und Madame Roland’s Haupt unter der Guillotine fiel?⁴⁹

It will be shown below that Dohm often only alludes to the early pioneers of women’s rights and their texts in her essays, while she mentions contemporary supporters and fighters such as John Stuart Mill, Josephine Butler and Florence Nightingale explicitly. With regard to Olympe de Gouges’s declaration, Ulrike Weckel explains that the text was only rediscovered by researchers of the Second Wave of the German women’s movement during the 1970s, and it was only then that it was translated into German for the first time.⁵⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft writes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 at nearly the same time as de Gouges’s declaration is discussed in France, and also in reaction to the looming failures of the revolution with regard to truly equal rights. In contrast to de Gouges’s text, Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* was widely published and saw a second edition in the same year.⁵¹ The contemporary reception in England was at first very favourable and, although the most radical political demands were simply ignored by the reviewers, it was regarded as an educational read for women, no doubt because of Wollstonecraft’s

⁴⁸ Olympe de Gouges, *Die Rechte der Frau 1791*. Translated by Karl Heinz Burmeister, Bern: Stämpfli Verlag, 1999, Art. X.

⁴⁹ Hedwig Dohm, *Der Frauen Natur und Recht. Zur Frauenfrage zwei Abhandlungen über Eigenschaften und Stimmrecht der Frauen*. (Berlin, 1876).

⁵⁰ Weckel, 'Gleichheit auf dem Prüfstand. Zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption der Streitschriften von Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel und Mary Wollstonecraft in Deutschland'. The translation is published in Hannelore Schröder (ed.), *Die Frau ist frei geboren. Texte zur Frauenemanzipation*. (1; München: Ein-fach Verlag, 1979).

⁵¹ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and the Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*.

focus on domestic problems.⁵² The first translation into German was published in 1793/94 with the title *Rettung der Rechte des Weibes*, edited by the pedagogue Christian Gotthilf Salzmann.⁵³ As the editor, he wrote a prologue for the German edition, tellingly titled 'Zurechtweisung der Autorin', in which he explained that he had written footnotes into Wollstonecraft's text whenever he found her arguments too strongly worded, or too much in favour of the women's position: "Bey Stellen, wo die Verfasserin zu stark für ihr Geschlecht spricht, wird Hr. Prof. Salzmann in kleinen Anmerkungen die Rechte der Seinigen zu behaupten suchen".⁵⁴ While the text itself made an impression with its clear style, the first reviews concentrated on the well-executed translation and Salzmann's prologue. Most reviewers adopted a rather patronising, yet benevolent tone, except for those passages where Salzmann had found it necessary to "correct" Wollstonecraft's arguments, where the reviewers agree with Salzmann's comments. In particular, her arguments in favour of equal schooling for boys and girls were seen as plainly wrong, and therefore dismissed.⁵⁵ The rather neutral or mildly favourable stance towards Wollstonecraft's text changed in Germany with the publication of her biography by her husband William Godwin in 1798. Because of her turbulent life, which Godwin uncovered in the biography for the first time, Wollstonecraft became a symbol of the scandalous woman, and was used as a warning example of what undoubtedly must become of women who think and write too much.⁵⁶ The biography was also translated into German and edited by Salzmann in the same year, but with some cuts and the blurring of some passages. With the publication of this book, the focus shifted away from Wollstonecraft's texts, among them the *Vindication*, and towards her person. After the scandal the biography had caused

⁵² Regina M. Janes, 'On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's *a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978), pp. 293-302.

⁵³ Weckel, 'Gleichheit auf dem Prüfstand. Zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption der Streitschriften von Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel und Mary Wollstonecraft in Deutschland', p. 255.

⁵⁴ Quoted after *ibid.* p. 244.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 232.

had ebbed again, the texts were either forgotten or considered unsuitable because of her personal history. Only at the very end of the nineteenth century would they be rediscovered by women of the first Women's Movement: Bertha Pappenheim translated the *Vindication* again in 1899, making it well-known and widely discussed; her translation also formed the basis for Bertha Rahm's reprint of the text in 1975/76. In 1912, Therese Schlesinger translated the biography again, this time without cuts and blurrings.⁵⁷

The only German text, and the only one at that time written by a man, in support of equal rights for women was also forgotten. Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741-1796) was a jurist, friend of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and mayor of Königsberg. In his treatise *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (Berlin 1792) he claimed that only equality under the constitution could help women to fulfil their potential as citizens.⁵⁸ His arguments and demands were very progressive, and he focused, in contrast to Wollstonecraft, very much on the role of women in the state, not only on their domestic roles. This at that time outrageous point of view, together with his rather odd style of writing, led the first reviewers to believe that the treatise was in fact intended as satire. Ulrike Weckel shows that early reviewers seemed rather bewildered as to what to make of the text – the demands were so unheard of that they did not dare take them seriously, but the style of the text – alternating between earnest argumentation and amusing anecdotes – was far too quirky to see the essay entirely as satire.⁵⁹ Among the men who took Hippel seriously, and chastised him for his silly ideas, was Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who makes frequent digs at Hippel's text in his own treatise *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (1796), in which he argues in contrast to Hippel against the political involvement of women, based on concepts which would evolve in the course

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, 'Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber', (Berlin, 1792).

⁵⁹ Weckel, 'Gleichheit auf dem Prüfstand. Zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption der Streitschriften von Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel und Mary Wollstonecraft in Deutschland'.

of the nineteenth century into the polarised gender definitions.⁶⁰ Weckel also identifies some early reactions by women to Hippel's text: Amalia Holst, for example, expressed in 1802 her thanks for his support of women's rights, agreed with his points about equal schooling, reform of marriage laws and access to the labour market, but thought that having women in state offices went too far. Mathilde Franziska Anneke stated that, while she had read the book shortly before the revolution of 1848, she did not confess to knowing it until much later in the nineteenth century, when she called it a founding text for the Women's Movement.⁶¹ Hippel's *Bürgerliche Verbesserung* was not quite as inaccessible as de Gouges's or Wollstonecraft's treatises: in 1828 it was published in the complete edition of his works, in 1842 the Vossische Buchhandlung in Berlin published a new edition, and in 1881 it was published together with excerpts of another text, *Nachlaß über weibliche Bildung*, by the Dietz-Verlag in Stuttgart. In 1901, Gertrud Bäumer opens her book *Geschichte der Frauenbewegung* with a chapter about Hippel, but at that time, he was already a rediscovery.⁶² Like Wollstonecraft, Hippel was regarded more as an absurdity in the public discourse about gender roles, the proponent of arguments seem too extreme to be regarded as constructive in forming a bourgeois-oriented state with laws which follow bourgeois ideals and virtues. The 1848 generation of women still seemed to have been too puzzled by his text, or found it too unrealistic, to adopt his demands for themselves during the democratic revolution. Only at the end of the nineteenth century, with formally constituted women's organisations like Otto-Peters's ADF did the rediscovery and process of reclaiming those early, radical pioneers begin.

⁶⁰ See Karin Hausen, 'Die Polarisierung der „Geschlechtscharaktere“ – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben', in W. Conze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas* (Stuttgart, 1977).

⁶¹ Weckel, 'Gleichheit auf dem Prüfstand. Zur zeitgenössischen Rezeption der Streitschriften von Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel und Mary Wollstonecraft in Deutschland'.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

Chapter 2

Louise Aston and the politics of the novel

Louise Aston was born as Louise Hoche in Groeningen, near Halberstadt, in 1814.⁶³ Not much is known about her childhood and youth, though it seems that Aston received a good education through her father and private teachers, as well as through her mother in musical matters.⁶⁴ Marion Freund has also been able, through her access to a private collection of documents, to establish definitively the number of her siblings and the social background of her mother.⁶⁵ She stresses that Aston was not an only child, and that her mother was in fact not of noble heritage, a misunderstanding that arose from a too autobiographical reading of Aston's first novel, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (1847).⁶⁶ In 1835 Aston married the rich industrialist Samuel Aston from Wales, who was much older and already had four illegitimate children by three different women. In 1838 Aston divorced her husband for the first time, even before the birth of her first daughter in the same year, but apparently they stayed in contact, because in 1841 Aston gave birth to their second daughter. The first daughter died in the same year, and Louise and Samuel Aston married a second time. One year later, in 1842, a third daughter was born. In 1843 Aston divorced her husband a second time and moved to Switzerland with her two daughters, where the younger one died in the same year. In 1845 Aston moved to Berlin, where she joined the political society "Die Freien", and soon became the object of society gossip and the yellow press because of her eccentric appearance and behaviour. Aston's idol was George Sand, and like her she dressed occasionally in men's clothes, visited pubs, drank

⁶³ Biographical data are based on Barbara Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschaffstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 1, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993) and Ruth Whittle and Debbie Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion: political writing by Malwida von Meysenbug, Fanny Lewald, Johanna Kinkel, and Louise Aston* (Britische und irische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur; Oxford: P. Lang, 2005).

⁶⁴ Marion Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn! Schriftstellerinnen und die Revolution von 1848/49* (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag 2004).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* She refers to the private collection of Dr. Walther Wehner, Iserlohn.

⁶⁶ E.g. in Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau*.

beer and smoked cigars in public, and participated in the society's unruly debates. Because of her behaviour and her acquaintance with male political activists she was rumoured to have had several affairs, but only those with Rudolf Gottschall and Gustav von Szepansky have been authenticated.⁶⁷ In 1846 Aston's short production phase started with a volume of poetry, *Wilde Rosen*, in which she advocated and celebrated the principle of free love. Even before this volume was published, Aston was forced to leave Berlin because Gottschall dedicated a poem (*Maria und Magdalena*) to her which was considered blasphemous. At the same time Samuel Aston sued for custody of their remaining daughter, Jenny Louise, which was granted him on the basis of Aston's conduct. Aston's answer to her expulsion from Berlin was the pamphlet *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung*, which was published in the same year (1846). In this text she criticises the proceedings of the Prussian state on the one hand, and on the other hand she argues for free love as the basis for her emancipation programme. In 1847 her first novel was published, the partly autobiographical, episodic novel *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, and in 1848 the novel *Lydia* followed. In the same year Aston witnessed the March Revolution in Berlin, and joined a regiment of volunteers as a nurse. With this regiment she took part in the uprising in Schleswig-Holstein against Denmark. Her experiences of this time in Berlin and Schleswig-Holstein feature heavily in her third and last novel, *Revolution and Contrerevolution*, which was published in 1849. After the uprising Aston went back to Berlin at the end of 1848, where she founded her radical, political journal *Der Freischärler*, which saw only seven issues, because Aston was again expelled from Berlin in December 1848. In 1849 she settled in Bremen, where she joined the "Demokratischer Verein", and published her last novel. In Bremen she also met her second husband, the medical doctor Daniel Eduard Meier. They married in 1850, and Aston published her

⁶⁷Germaine Goetzinger, *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston. In Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1983), p.14.

second volume of poetry (*Freischärler Reminiscenzen*) in the same year. This collection of poetry consisted mainly of political poems which had originally prefaced each issue of Aston's journal *Der Freischärler*. Meier lost his job as a doctor at the *Neues Krankenhaus* in Bremen in 1855, because the senate of the city disapproved of his marriage to the notorious Aston. He was offered a position as a military doctor with the Russian army, and served in the Crimean War in Odessa. Aston followed him and again worked as a nurse. After the Crimean War ended in 1857, the couple moved from job to job through Russia and Europe, finally finding a home in Wangen, Austria. Aston died there on 21 December 1871. Two more novellas remain unpublished, and are scarcely available today.⁶⁸

a. Political stance

In her pamphlet *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* Aston spells out her political and religious convictions. The background is her expulsion from Berlin, even before she had the chance to publish her first volume of radical poetry. In a clever rhetorical ploy, she addresses her vindication to the general public, 'das deutsche Volk',⁶⁹ thereby putting the public's belief in a true democratic spirit above the authority of the Prussian government, and at the same time using the democratic concept of free speech as her weapon of choice: "so stehe mir die einzige Schutzwehr der freien Rede zu!"⁷⁰ It is quite clear that Aston cannot possibly expect the public to overrule the actual expulsion order, as there was simply no legal ground on which the public could object to such a police order. Instead, Aston hopes to dispel some of the rumours and accusations Berlin society has launched at her, and at the same time to draw attention to the daily injustices women in particular have to suffer under both Prussian law and public opinion:

Der Mann, der seine Ehre gekränkt glaubt, hat Mittel, sie zu rächen, Mittel, die

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.175.

⁶⁹ Louise Aston, *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* (Brussels: C. G. Vogler, 1846), p. 34.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

zwar das Gesetz ächtet, die Meinung der Menschen aber anerkennt. Die Frau ist rathlos und hülflos, jeder Anfeindung ausgesetzt. [...] Ich weiß es, welcher Entwürdigung eine Frau unter dem heiligen Schutze des Gesetzes und der Sitte ausgesetzt ist; wie sich diese hülfreichen Penaten des Hauses in nutzlose Vogelscheuchen verwandeln, und das Recht zum Adjudanten [sic] brutaler Gewalt wird!⁷¹

Aston describes in detail, backed up by exact dates and the names of the persons involved, the proceedings of the police in her case. She shows how mere anonymous accusations of an ‘immoral way of life’ were sufficient to place her under police surveillance, and how the dedication to her of a work by another writer was reason enough for the police to summon her for questioning. Aston claims that the interrogation was not noticeable as such and that she was tricked into making statements in a seemingly informal conversation about her attitude to religion, and her opinion of marriage. Those statements were then used against her as part of the official record of her interrogation. Aston uses this incident to clarify her personal opinions, connecting them on a political level to the democratic ideal of human rights:

Unser höchstes Recht, uns're höchste Weihe ist das Recht der freien Persönlichkeit, worin all uns're Macht und all unser Glauben ruht, das Recht, unser eigenstes Wesen ungestört zu entwickeln, von keinem äußern Einfluß gehemmt; den innern Mächten frei zu gehorchen, die Harmonie der Seele durchzubilden, mag sie auch ein Mißklang scheinen gegenüber dem herrschenden Glauben der Welt. Wer dies Recht der Persönlichkeit antastet, begeht einen brutalen Akt der Gewalt [...].⁷²

Maybe unsurprisingly, Aston plays down her stance on free love in her pamphlet. Apparently she is aware that, if she wants to elicit indignation with regard to her treatment from her readers, she has to tone down any too radical opinions she might be known for. Therefore, she explains that her view on that matter is a very personal one, a “natural”

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 6 and p. 12.

⁷² Ibid., p. 7.

consequence of her own experiences of marriage, and as long as she is not in violation of any laws, she should not be discriminated against on the basis of her opinions, a right which any Prussian is entitled to.⁷³ This of course implies, without being stated explicitly, that her treatment and the resulting expulsion are unlawful – a very strong argument, and even more so coming from a woman whom the Prussian state apparently thinks it has to fear. Aston explains only in the latter part of her vindication what exactly she means by saying that free love is the first step to women's true emancipation. Because of her dreadful experiences in her first arranged marriage, in which she was more of a business commodity than a person,⁷⁴ she condemns the bourgeois institution of marriage as truly indecent and shameful. Instead, a form of true marriage has to be instituted which gives women more rights to choose after their own heart, and to become aware of their own value as individuals:

Dies ist die einzige Frauen-Emancipation, an der auch meine Sehnsucht hängt, das Recht und die Würde der Frauen in freieren Verhältnissen, in einem edleren Cultus der Liebe wieder herzustellen. Sich selbst wegwerfen ist die höchste Schande, und grade diese Schande wird durch die Ehe vor aller Welt zur Ehre gestempelt.⁷⁵

This is the main point in which Aston differs from other women writing in favour of women's rights and is a source of some conflict. Whereas Aston puts the emancipation of the heart first (not necessarily that of the flesh, as the Saint-Simonians declared) and hopes for social changes through more awareness of their own worth among women, for other early feminists such as Malwida von Meysenbug and Louise Otto she clearly had the wrong end of the stick. From their perspective, the emancipation of the heart could only be a consequence of women's rights, not one of its demands such as equal rights in marriage. Aston also remains rather vague with regard to how her kind of emancipation would be

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁷⁴ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Aston, *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung*, pp. 46-47.

suitable to reform the bourgeois society she is so opposed to. She mentions the necessity of a more thorough education for women in her treatise, but more for the sake of personal development than economic independence:

Bildung erst giebt dem Leben und der Liebe die höhere Weihe und die innere Freiheit, ohne welche jede äußere Freiheit zur Chimäre wird. Nicht die Bildung des Confirmanden-Unterrichts, nicht die Bildung der Pensions-Institute; nein, das höhere Leben des Gedankens, wozu die Frau von der Natur eben so befähigt und berechtigt ist, als der Mann.⁷⁶

This idea remains rudimentary in the pamphlet, as Aston goes on to say that this text would not be the right place to discuss her ideas in detail, and she only included it to show her readers that she has in fact a higher idealistic concept in mind when she is talking about free love, and is very much removed from any immoral thoughts or actions her readers might have heard of.⁷⁷

The pamphlet, against the personal background of Aston's expulsion and the beliefs that caused it, deals primarily with her opinions on middle class gender roles and women's right to individual development, while her democratic convictions remain more implicit. Aston criticises the state for arguing against her on the basis of religious convictions (she calls the police officers involved in her case "Gewissenspolizei"⁷⁸), implying that the state uses religion as an instrument of power, and calls for a state form in which at least private thoughts and beliefs would remain exactly that, private. Another factor is the already mentioned address to the public as the highest level of jurisdiction in her case, implying that the public ranks higher even than the King of Prussia. This idea is picked up again at the end of the pamphlet when Aston calls for the "deutsche[s] Volk"⁷⁹ to judge her. While Aston *de facto* has to yield to the expulsion order and thus to the authority of the state, she

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

constructs in her pamphlet a situation in which she brings her case in front of a jury that, in her democratic understanding, is the actual authority inside the state, the whole German people. Aware of the danger that precisely this imaginary democratic jury still might not see the true worth of her different values and condemn her on the grounds of her argument, she tries to elicit at least a feeling of common ground on which both the public and she can stand together against the arbitrariness of the Prussian state:

Ich rufe das deutsche Volk auf zu meinem Richter. Mag es eine Ueberzeugung verdammen, die es nicht theilen kann: es wird wenigstens meine Entrüstung theilen über eine polizeiliche Willkühr, die kein Recht der Persönlichkeit anerkennt! Dies ist das Damoklesschwert, das über dem Haupte eines Jeden schwebt; und die gleiche Furcht muß vereinigen, was ein ungleicher Glauben trennt.⁸⁰

Aston connects the issues of unequal gender relations, in the form of the bourgeois institution of marriage, with the democratic cause. While this pamphlet is on the surface a personal vindication, Aston manages to show that the proceedings against her are a symptom of the inherently unjust state, and thus of concern to everyone.

b. *Lydia* (1848)⁸¹

Aston's second novel *Lydia* is sometimes considered a prequel to *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, as it features for the first time the same two female protagonists, Alice von Rosen and Lydia von Dornthal, and narrates the events that brought about their friendship. *Lydia* features five main characters who pair up in changing constellations, always in pursuit of personal interest or gain. In the beginning, Baron Richard von Landsfeld is the first to be introduced together with Cornelia von Hohenhausen, an ageing society lady. While walking through the park of a spa town, they meet the second pair,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

⁸¹ Louise Aston, *Lydia* (Magdeburg: Emil Baensch, 1848).

Alice and her lover Arthur Berger. It turns out that Landsfeld was once Alice's lover, and seeing her now with his successor sets him to plotting revenge, supported by Cornelia who has her own scheme in mind. It is she who points out Lydia, who is Berger's fiancée, to Landsfeld. Landsfeld succeeds in bringing Berger's affair to Lydia's attention, and as a consequence she ends the engagement. Berger consequently joins Cornelia in her plans to be revenged on Landsfeld, who in the meantime has married Lydia himself. The reason for the marriage is, at least on his part, not love. Landsfeld is intrigued by Lydia's innocence, if not naivety. As he is a self-proclaimed sceptic when it comes to women's roles and pretences, he is unable to believe in her apparent lack of any insight into sexuality and suspects her of playing a part to keep him interested. Therefore he refuses to consummate the marriage as long as he is not completely convinced of her true innocence. Lydia is at first happy in her marriage, but after her heavily pregnant friend Therese enquires about her own 'good expectations', she begins to suspect that something is missing from their marriage. But because she has been kept truly ignorant about all matters sexual by her mother, she is unable to fathom what exactly is missing. She suspects Landsfeld of having secrets (and he has indeed several affairs with other women), and grows increasingly unhappy without being able to find a reason for her unhappiness. Landsfeld finds himself more and more convinced that Lydia's naivety is genuine, but now he does not know how to end the situation he has brought upon them both without admitting to his deceit.

At this point Cornelia and Berger put their revenge into action: using Therese's name they forge an invitation to her town house in the neighbouring city in order to lure Lydia away from Landsfeld. Guilelessly Lydia boards the train to visit her friend, but at the station she is ushered into a carriage that delivers her into the hands of Cornelia and Berger. In the meantime, Alice has become aware of the plan, and rides to Landsfeld to warn him of the impending harm to Lydia. While Landsfeld hurries to the city by carriage, Alice rides ahead and arrives just in time to prevent Berger raping Lydia. Holding both

Berger and Cornelia at dagger point, she extracts the unconscious Lydia from the situation and reunites her with Landsfeld, who arrives shortly afterwards. The attempted rape leaves Lydia traumatised, and the death of her mother which follows adds to her despair. After a period of mourning she seeks a final conversation with Landsfeld, in which he finally admits his scheme to her, but assures her that he indeed loves her. Lydia is stupefied by the realisation of how and to what extent she has been used by the man she loved and trusted. When Landsfeld attempts to comfort her, the situation quickly develops from emotional to passionate, at least on his part, and misinterpreting Lydia's passiveness as consent, he finally consummates the marriage. For Lydia, this is the last straw: the trauma of the near-rape, the recent revelation of Landsfeld's betrayal of her trust, and now her unprepared introduction to sexuality drive her mad. The last two short chapters of the novel focus once again on Landsfeld and Alice. Lydia is being treated in a mental institution, and the baron, described as a broken man, visits Alice to see his child, apparently the product of the fatally belated wedding night. Alice leads him to a small chamber with a crib in it, but when Landsfeld kisses the baby inside, he realises the child has died. Despairingly asking Alice what he should do now, she only answers: "Sterben."⁸² After a short while contemplating his dead child, Landsfeld shoots himself. Alice then brings Lydia out of the hospital and to the scene, where, on seeing both her dead child and husband, Lydia regains her senses. The abrupt end of the novel sees both Lydia and Alice dressed in mourning and on their way to Italy.

Lydia has not received much scholarly attention in contrast to Aston's poetry, and still less so in contrast to her third novel, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*. Möhrmann and, to some extent, Kontje regard *Lydia* as a weaker version of the later novel,⁸³ and

⁸² Ibid., p. 281.

⁸³ Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau*, pp. 141-44 and Todd Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation. Domestic Fiction in the Fatherland* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 176-79.

Goetzinger even calls it “sicherlich literarisch mißlungen”.⁸⁴ Wimmer, however, provides a thorough, hermeneutic analysis of the novel in the light of typical Vormärz and Jungdeutsch imagery and motifs.⁸⁵ Freund analyses Aston’s critique of nineteenth century imagery of femininity in a short ‘Exkurs’ as part of her longer chapter on *Revolution und Contrerevolution*.⁸⁶ All of them mention the use of plot devices which are commonly found in popular literature, such as salon intrigues, attempted rape, madness and suicide, but attribute this solely to Aston’s need to earn money from her novels. A closer look at the seemingly familiar motifs of popular literature, however, reveals that Aston employs them in a way that supports her overlaying critique of gender roles. As Freund has shown, Lydia is the embodiment of the traditional, bourgeois ideal of femininity: she is beautiful, innocent, virginal, obedient to her mother, and trustingly accepts her husband’s superiority. But in what follows Aston does not idealise this type of femininity herself, but rather shows how destructive these idealised attributes are for Lydia. From the moment Landsfeld sees her with her fiancé, she becomes his tool to humiliate Berger in front of Alice. Once Landsfeld has achieved the end of their engagement, Lydia is only interesting for him as an object of curiosity, in which he wonders if she really is as innocent as she appears to be. Freund concludes:

In Louise Astons Roman „Lydia“ geht es um die Demontage eines durch den männlichen Herrschaftsanspruch konstituierten Weiblichkeitsideals, das als eine identitätszerstörende oder zumindest –hemmende Ideologie entlarvt wird. Die Radikalität der im Text transportierten Botschaften beruht dabei nicht allein auf dem Plädoyer der Autorin für die freie Persönlichkeitsentfaltung der Frau, sondern auch und im besonderen Maße auf der schonungslosen Kritik an ihrer sexuellen Fremdbestimmung durch den Mann.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Goetzinger, *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau*, p. 59.

⁸⁵ Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschaffstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung*.

⁸⁶ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*“, pp. 379-81.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

Berger treats Lydia in a similar way: wanting to avenge himself, he tries to get back at Landsfeld through raping her. Again she becomes a mere tool, this time the battlefield as well as the prize in a conflict between the two men. Aston also explicitly criticises the role of Lydia's mother for the lack of education which has resulted in Lydia's naivety, thereby attacking another bourgeois image: 'Vielleicht war es nicht klug gehandelt von der Forsträthin, daß sie ihre erwachsene Tochter über die Ehe nie aufgeklärt hatte'.⁸⁸ The mother, Aston implies in the following passage, should be less worried about the purity of her daughter's mind, even if that is highly regarded in bourgeois ideology, but rather prepare her for the realities of life in order to develop a sense of herself. Lydia's lack of sexual awareness, of her own sexuality as well as that of others, renders her unable to follow the plots woven around her, and also denies her the ability to question Landsfeld's motives and intentions when he starts courting her. This is connected to Aston's political views on free love, namely, that women have to be in charge of their own sexuality in order to gain emancipation from patriarchal, normative forms of behaviour. Notably, Aston does not connect the criticism of the mother with an explicit claim for sexual self-determination and education for women. Instead, she presents Alice as a contrast, and she lets her speak for herself. Alice's actions are usually described without further comment from the narrator, and her motives or thought processes are rarely explained or remarked upon, in contrast to other characters such as Landsfeld and Cornelia. This opacity in her character, together with her many unpredictable actions or appearances throughout the novel, makes Alice a rather puzzling figure. It also contributes to her apparent remoteness: the dynamics between the pairings of Landsfeld/Cornelia and Berger/Lydia in the beginning, which then shift to Landsfeld/Lydia and Cornelia/Berger, could theoretically run their course without Alice being present. The squabble between Landsfeld and Berger over Alice, the former being jealous of the latter's relationship with her, only reinforces her detachment: because

⁸⁸ Aston, *Lydia*, pp. 200-01.

she is self-determined and able to see through both the characters of the two men and their attempts at intrigue and manipulation, she is able to retain her independence and break off with Berger (as well as Landsfeld in the past). In contrast to Lydia, she cannot be appropriated as a tool by either of the men for their personal ends. Therefore, Alice's function in the novel has to be linked not so much to the plot development, but to topics that Aston wants to criticise. In the scholarly literature, Alice is consequently seen as the counterpoint to Lydia: where Lydia is the embodied ideal of the bourgeois notion of femininity (with all its conflicts and destructive potential), Aston's reply to that ideal is the truly emancipated, self-determined and self-sufficient Alice. While this point remains undisputed, there is evidence that Alice is more than the alternative to, or direct opposite of, the image of the dependent woman. The motifs of popular literature in the novel already mentioned also turn out, under closer reading, to subvert the commonly transported images of socially acceptable behaviour for women.

The first example is the duel scene in chapter five of the novel. While duels play quite a sensationalist part in some popular novels based on the concept of (male) bourgeois honour, Aston twists the situation in her novel slightly. She does not criticise the duel per se, and Wimmer points out that Aston's stance towards the socially questionable practices of the duel is rather uncritical.⁸⁹ By altering the scene to a double duel, the first pair being Alice and Cornelia, the second Berger and Landsfeld, Aston unmasks the traditional plot device of the duel as yet another narrative that affirms the rigid gender roles of her time, with men being the agents and defenders of their own and women's honour, whereas women remain the objects the duel is about. Aston lets both Alice and Cornelia pick up their weapons to defend themselves. While the men's duel advances the plot of the novel, the women's duel remains a curious episode, as the reason for it is not given, nor does the scene have any greater consequence for the plot. It can therefore be assumed that the

⁸⁹ See Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschrijfstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung*, p. 58

function of the women's duel has to be sought on a different level of meaning. Originally, Berger had challenged Landsfeld to this duel to avenge his humiliation in front of Alice; the reader knows, though, that Landsfeld has manipulated Berger into challenging him, so he could bring Berger's affair with Alice to Lydia's attention, and at the same time introduce himself to Lydia as the gallant protector of her honour. Surprisingly, the reader learns that Landsfeld speculates that Berger will ask Alice to be his second; even more surprisingly, she has to decline because she too, has a duel to attend to at the same time, for she, too, has challenged Cornelia. The exact reason for this remains unspoken, but when Alice tells Landsfeld about this, his first reaction is to laugh at the prospect, but does not doubt that Cornelia will accept the challenge, and quickly gets down to business by enquiring about the proposed weapons, and he even agrees to lend Alice a pair of rapiers for the purpose of her duel. Berger's reaction to the women's duel is even more unusual than Landsfeld's amused collaboration. When he learns about Alice's challenge, he is neither amused nor shocked at the prospect, but admires her even more: '»Du bist ein Heldenweib, Alice!« - sagte Berger, mit einer Art von schwärmerischer Andacht zu ihr aufblickend. »So groß, so herrlich, wie nie ein Weib auf Erden war.«'⁹⁰ Alice herself awaits the duel with a kind of calm anticipation, paying tribute to her opponent's skill, thereby implying that it is not the first fight she, or indeed Cornelia, has fought: '»Ich freue mich schon im Voraus auf einen Gang mit ihr. Uebrigens [sic] führt sie eine gute Klinge und ist fürchterlich erbittert auf mich. Ach, wenn wir nur erst auf der Mensur ständen!«'.⁹¹ The picture of the heroine is taken up again at the beginning of the duel: Alice appears in trousers, her fighting outfit, while Cornelia has donned her best dress, and both of them are referred to as amazons: 'Der Baron nahm die Rappiere, trocknete sie ab und überreichte sie

⁹⁰ Aston, *Lydia*, pp. 86-87.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

den modernen Amazonen'.⁹² The topos of the heroic woman cross-dressing as a man in order to leave her prescribed private sphere to fight has a long literary tradition with clearly defined rules of conduct for the heroine, as both Kerstin Wilhelms and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly have shown.⁹³ Whereas in most cases the swapping of the skirt for trousers has to be motivated by either love, patriotic duty or financial gain,⁹⁴ and the usual order is restored at the end of the novel either through marriage or the heroic death of the woman, this is not the case in Aston's novels. In *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, this is of more significance than in *Lydia* and will be elaborated on later.

In the duel scene, it appears, the function of Alice's cross-dressing is due to practical considerations as well as marking Alice's singularity. Aston describes the duel of the two women in a step-by-step account of their motions and agility, which stresses their very active behaviour, giving credibility to the notion that it is an actual fight, and not a salon-born, fanciful acting-out of a ritual. Alice appears here as much a counterpoint to Cornelia as she usually does with regard to Lydia, starting with her mode of dress and facial expression: 'Die Lust des Kampfes brannte jetzt in ihren Augen, auf ihren Wangen. Corneliens Gesicht zeigte seine gewöhnliche Kälte.'⁹⁵ Both women strike each other at the same time, so that Landsfeld, in his role as the attendant, concludes that the duel is a draw. But while Alice bleeds from the superficial wound on her arm where she has been hit, Cornelia's chest wound reveals a layer of wadding.

Durch die gewaltsame Art, mit der Cornelia ihr Rappier aus dem Aermel ihrer Gegnerin herausgerissen, hatte sie denselben von der Schulter an bis zum Knöchel aufgeschlitzt; zugleich aber bemerkte Landsfeld, daß der weiße Arm, welcher jetzt völlig entblößt war, einen langen blutigen Streifen zeigte. [...] In dem Augenblicke,

⁹² Ibid., p. 92.

⁹³ See Kerstin Wilhelms, "'Sie schien ein Mann geworden'", *Phantastische Frauen in Romanen der Revolution 1848/49*, in Peter Stein et al. (ed.), *Jahrbuch 1997, 1848 und der deutsche Vormärz* (Forum Vormärz Forschung; Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1998), 143-60, and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

⁹⁴ Wilhelms, "'Sie schien ein Mann geworden'", p. 146.

⁹⁵ Aston, *Lydia*, p. 93.

als es ihr gelungen war, die Spitze ihres Rapiers frei zu machen, war die Waffe ihrer Gegnerin bereits einige Zoll tief in ihre rechte Brust gedrungen. Als sie daher durch die erwähnte Wendung die Klinge Alicens fortschlug, trennte ein langer Schnitt, der sich von rechts nach links über die ganze Brust der Unglücklichen erstreckte, ihr Kleid auf, aus dem nun zwar kein Strom warmen Blutes - - aber eine Menge Watte hervorquoll. Ein Schrei, als hätte sie Alicens Klinge im Herzen gefühlt, entfuhr ihrem Munde, indem sie zwei Schritte zurücksprang.⁹⁶

Wimmer interprets this undoubtedly funny scene as a sign of Cornelia's inherent cowardice, in which she protects herself against Alice's superior fencing skills.⁹⁷ But it can also be read as a deconstruction of the image of femininity Cornelia stands for in the novel. From the beginning, Cornelia is characterised as a mature woman who hides the signs of her age as well as the non-flattering features of her very thin body behind elaborate make-up and fashionable dresses. She is well versed in the salon games of intrigue and coquetry, and for this purpose controls her facial expressions as well as her body language to an extent that makes her appear distant and lifeless. While her conduct and connections to important people (such as Landsfeld) make her the prototype of the successful society lady, Aston criticises this particular image of femininity through her depictions of, again, the destructive effect this role has on Cornelia. Through her outer layers of clothing and rigid control she remains isolated, her life in vain society (and debauched circles, it is hinted) has taken its toll on her body, and she is so caught up in her intrigues that she is unable to form a lasting relationship with any of the novel's characters. When Alice rips her dress in the duel and exposes the layer of wadding, it can be read as exposing Cornelia's factitiousness on more than one level: firstly, on the level of the narration, Cornelia has to pad out her chest area to retain a feminine image in the vanity-fixated salon culture; secondly, on the level of character oppositions, it becomes clear that Cornelia is a

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁹⁷ Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschriftstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung*, pp. 58.

representative of a certain gendered type and more like a doll than a living woman in comparison to the real, bleeding woman that is Alice; and thirdly, Aston criticises and even ridicules the artifice of the image of femininity Cornelia stands for, and which is perpetuated by common depictions in popular literature.

Another example of Aston's subversive use of popular and sensationalist plot devices is Lydia's abduction and attempted rape. While Lydia remains faithful to her role and uncomprehending as to what Berger has in mind, and faints at the appropriate moments, it is again Alice who is working against the common notions about respectable female behaviour. It is she who alerts Landsfeld to Lydia's abduction, and she is the first of the two to arrive on the scene. After Cornelia has undressed the unconscious Lydia and called for Berger to enter the room, it is Alice instead who makes an entrance, instantly seizing control of the situation:

Schnell warf sie [Cornelia] einen Mantel über Lydia und öffnete die Thüre. Wie erstaunte sie, als anstatt Bergers ihr Alicens hohe Gestalt entgegen trat. Ohne einen Blick auf die erbleichende Cornelia zu werfen, trat Alice zu dem Lager Lydiens, welche eben die Augen aufschlug. [...] »Beruhigen Sie sich« - nahm Alice das Wort. »Sie sind bei Freunden.« [...] Berger trat stürmisch herein. »Jetzt oder nie gilt es zu handeln« - sagte Alice zu sich, indem sie rasch ihren Dolch zog und den Schlüssel der Thüre, durch die Berger eingetreten war, umdrehte und abzog. Ehe es die andern Beiden verhindern konnten, hatte sie eben so schnell ein Fenster geöffnet und ein paar Worte hinausgerufen. Da begriff Berger, warum [sic!] es sich handelte. Wie ein Tiger sprang er auf sie zu, aber ruhig hielt sie ihren Dolch ihm entgegen. Als die beiden Schuldigen [Berger and Cornelia] die Schritte eines Mannes auf dem Korridor hörten, da überzog eine Leichenblässe ihre Gesichter. »Fort« - rief Alice mit gebietender Stimme, als Cornelia instinktiert auf die Thüre zueilte, während Berger, zitternd vor Wuth und Angst, mitten im Zimmer wie angebannt stehen blieb.⁹⁸

Rather than having Landsfeld rushing in to save his wife and taking revenge on Berger,

⁹⁸ Aston, *Lydia*, pp. 245-46.

Aston constructs Alice as the superior, controlling instance in this scene. Her physical presence and quick-witted actions, and the fact that she is again carrying a weapon, render both of her opponents paralysed. Alice remains in control even after Landsfeld arrives: before he is able to enter the room, she forces him to promise that he will not kill Berger. When Landsfeld is reunited with his wife, it is he who breaks down and starts crying with relief, while Alice keeps her eye on Cornelia so she cannot escape. Again, Aston twists a motif of popular literature by depicting the men as overwhelmed by their emotions (Berger by hate and lust, Landsfeld by fear and relief), whereas the women remain calm and act to a plan. It is again Cornelia who stands for the destructive side of the gender stereotype: it is clear that Berger acts out the plan that she has devised, which makes her complicit in degrading Lydia to a tool for her own personal revenge, which she can only achieve by collaborating with Berger's assumed claim to power over Lydia. Aston seems to criticise those women who, in contemporary societal discourse, in an attempt to gain the power necessary to fulfil their ambitions, will rather turn to established power structures and become complicit in perpetuating the exploitative nature of these structures when it is to their advantage. Alice, on the other hand, again provides the counterpoint to both Lydia and Cornelia: she is brave and confident enough to act on her own initiative, regardless of propriety, when it comes to protecting her fellow woman (and man – she prevents Landsfeld from killing Berger) from injustice and brutality. She is able to notice impending threats and react to them accordingly because she is, in contrast to Lydia, in control of her own personality. She does not need to appeal to either a man and his power, or to a rigid image of femininity to define her place in society, she is able to take on and deal with threats, and to interact with the other characters completely independently.

A third example of a slightly twisted, and thereby subverted, motif of popular literature is the plot of the last two chapters of the novel. After Landsfeld's and Lydia's marriage has culminated in her madness, Landsfeld meets Alice again in a villa in Dresden.

It has been two years since Lydia has had to be put into a mental institution, and Landsfeld has just returned from a visit to her when he comes to Alice to see his and Lydia's infant child. After the discovery that the child has died, Landsfeld asks Alice what is left for him to do:

»Was würdest Du an meiner Stelle thun, Alice?«

»Sterben« - sagte diese ruhig.

»Das dachte ich auch - aber darf ich hier sterben?« - Er wies auf die Wiege.

»Ja!«

Alice wandte sich zum Gehen.

»Alice« - rief er noch einmal. Er hatte ihr beide Hände entgegengestreckt. Da vermochte sie sich nicht länger zu halten. Weinend stürzte sie in seine Arme und drückte einen langen - langen Scheidekuß auf seine kalten Lippen. Er wandte sich sanft aus ihren Armen und blickte sie flehentlich an. Sie stürzte hinaus und schloß die Thüre, neben der sie sich auf den Boden niederkauerte. Nach einigen Minuten erfolgte eine Explosion. Sie sprang empor und trat ein. Landsfeld lag über der Wiege ausgestreckt. Die Kugel war ihm mitten durch das Herz gegangen.⁹⁹

Freund analyses the scene convincingly as the symbolic death of the character representing the 'old order', the creator of the destructive image of femininity that led to Lydia's catastrophe.¹⁰⁰ Both he and the child (whose sex remains curiously unmentioned) symbolise the result of the patriarchal system taking advantage of the gender roles the same system ascribes to women. They have to die in order to allow a new beginning (breaking the generation cycle, so to speak), to make the opportunity available for Lydia and women like her to gain control of their life, free from existing, crippling images of femininity. After Landsfeld's death, Alice allows herself to faint while she grieves for him. This is the sole occasion on which this happens in the novel, but exactly thirty minutes later she is in her carriage on her way to collect Lydia from the mental institution. After explaining her plan to the doctor, she takes Lydia back to the villa and confronts her with

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 281.

¹⁰⁰ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 380-81.

both her dead husband and child. The doctor's laconic comment on the situation draws attention to the usual development in popular literature: «Sehen Sie diesen Blick?» - sagte der Arzt zu Alicen. »Noch zwei Minuten und sie ist entweder todt oder bei Bewußtsein.«¹⁰¹ Lydia does indeed regain her senses, but far from remaining the grieving widow, or attempting to kill herself after comprehending her loss, the end of the novel sees her and Alice arriving in Vienna on their way to Italy a month later, beginning a new life. Freund concludes: 'Dabei ist mit dem Tod des Mannes als Urheber zugleich die Zerstörung eines Weiblichkeitsideals phantasiert, die erst den Aufbruch der Frau in ein selbstbestimmtes Leben ermöglicht.'¹⁰² Instead of employing the suicide motif as the final gesture that leaves behind the other characters congealed in a tragic tableau and ending the novel, Aston uses it to hint at the possibility of development. Not only does Lydia regain her senses, she is for the first time in the novel on an equal footing with Alice: she is independent of any other character, and her cruelly learned lesson about sexuality gives her at least the potential to take control, or at least begin to take control, herself.

The reception of the novel is difficult to reconstruct. Goetzinger reprints one contemporary review in *Blätter für die literarische Unterhaltung* which unwittingly reveals how much the reviewer needs literary stereotypes and images of femininity in order to see merit in a novel, and how little he (presumably) has understood the reasons for Aston's deviations from those expected images:

Mit Ekel erfüllte den Ref. die Gesellschaft der emanzipierten Frauen, Zigarren rauchend, in männlicher Kleidung mit männlichen Liebesintrigen; der unweibliche Stolz, „auch durch die Tat emanzipiert zu sein“, verletzt. Die weibliche Liebe bedarf des Geheimnisses, Waldesdunkel, zugezogene Gardinen, Erröten usw., und die Intrige ist willkommen, wenn die der illegitimen Liebe den umhüllenden Schleier bietet. Die ewige Sehnsucht, der tiefe Liebesschmerz, die Leidenschaft in ihrem heiligen Ursprung, der Glaube an eine Ewigkeit in der Liebe, das

¹⁰¹ Aston, *Lydia*, p. 287.

¹⁰² Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*“, p. 381.

Freudejauchzen und zum Tode Betrübtheit, das kann versöhnen mit der weiblichen Sinnlichkeit, die sich verirrt. Aber hier das nackte Laster ohne Illusion, ohne Selbsttäuschung, bei Frauen die Liebesgrundsätze eines depravierten Fähnrichs, eines blasierten jungen Diplomaten, eines übermütigen Künstlers! Gewiss, wir befinden uns in schlechter Gesellschaft.¹⁰³

It also appears that the reviewer does not refer to the novel alone, but attempts to land a blow at Aston herself; for instance, in contrast to her own habits, no woman in *Lydia* smokes cigars, and the quote referring to Aston's 'Emancipation der Tat' is from her earlier treatise *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung*. At the same time, the reviewer spouts so many shallow clichés about feminine love and its depiction in a novel that one cannot help but wonder about the reviewer's qualification and ability to pass aesthetic judgements on other novels. Nevertheless, if the scathing review is an indicator of the wider reception of the novel, it is not surprising that even today it has received little scholarly attention. The employment of features of popular literature in the novel has certainly played a part in its being passed over, thereby missing the inherent critique Aston builds into the mechanisms and motifs of popular literature as a means of perpetuating and affirming common images of femininity (as seen in the reviewer's response).

c. *Revolution und Contrerevolution (1849)*¹⁰⁴

Aston's last novel is commonly considered to be the most radical text written by a woman in the context of the 1848 revolution, and it is indeed a fascinating eye-witness account of the events of the March Revolution in Berlin in that year. Wimmer has demonstrated in her study that the historical events and proceedings Aston takes up as the

¹⁰³ *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*, vol. 18, issue 304, p. 1215, reprinted in: Goetzinger, *Für die Selbstverwirklichung der Frau: Louise Aston. In Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁴ Louise Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution* (Mannheim: J.P. Grohe, 1849).

setting and, for the most part, plot of her novel are described very accurately.¹⁰⁵ Freund complements this factual approach in the first part of her study by giving an inventory of and background information to the historic persons who are mentioned in the novel, and she also traces the accuracy with which Aston recounts their actions, decisions, and even whereabouts on the 18 March which is so crucial to the novel.¹⁰⁶ Apart from Aston's very reliable and generally truthful depiction of events and persons, the novel has attracted the most scholarly attention for the character of Alice. Both Alice and Lydia return as protagonists and in a similar counterpoint constellation already familiar from the previous novel. This time, there is even greater focus on Alice's actions, namely, her involvement in political intrigues and street fights on the side of Berlin's working class. Möhrmann states that, in Alice, Aston has created a new literary type of woman, that of the 'aktive Vormärzlerin'.¹⁰⁷ However, the question remains whether Alice actually has literary successors, or if the term coined by Möhrmann has subsequently been employed to describe the female writers involved in the democratic revolution themselves. In her radicalism, Alice appears to stand out - and stand alone - in comparison to the texts of other female, or indeed male, authors of the same period.

Apart from the valuable historic details and the enigmatic Alice, *Revolution und Contrerevolution* features several plotlines in its three volumes. The first book is set in Vienna, and sees Alice plotting to bring about a victory for democracy. To this end she collaborates with, and simultaneously spies upon, her main counterpart, Prince Lichninsky who is a thinly veiled version of the real Prince Felix Lichnowsky.¹⁰⁸ At the same time she also spies on members of the same aristocratic circle, as well as on Father Vincent as a representative of the Catholic Church, in order to gain information and to anticipate

¹⁰⁵ Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschaffstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung*.

¹⁰⁶ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*“, esp. pp. 84-92 and pp.385-401.

¹⁰⁷ Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. Wimmer, *Die Vormärzschaffstellerin Louise Aston: Selbst- und Zeiterfahrung*.

potential threats or betrayals from those sides. Next to the politically ambivalent, self-interested Lichninsky, Alice's main antagonist in this is the mysterious Chevalier von St. Just, who also appears under the names of Gilbert and Möller. He moves in the same social circles as Alice, and in the second book even appears as a member of the underground *Jakobinerverein* in Berlin over which Alice presides. Alice's political position firmly supports the socialist democratic demands of the proletariat, represented in the novel by this society and by her second in command, the metalworker Ralph. From this position, Alice tries to convince members of the aristocracy to support the formation of a democratic government once the revolution has succeeded. In the second and longest volume events are played out alongside those of the March Revolution in Berlin, with 18 March being the subject of the central chapter, which has the most elaborate account of the street-fighting. Ralph and his sister Anna, a factory worker, are the characters that illustrate the harrowing life of the proletariat in Berlin's Voigtland, and Ralph remains Alice's faithful righthand during the street combat. A subplot, running through all three books, narrates the story of the Spanish woman Ines and her son Salvador. Ines was once Lichninsky's lover and Salvador is his son, but the Prince abandoned her, and now Ines wants to avenge herself for the grief Lichninsky's treatment has caused her. She has instilled her own wishes for revenge in her son, who is tasked with killing the Prince and thus carrying out Ines's revenge. Salvador attaches himself as a servant boy to Father Vincent in order to gain access to the Prince, but later falls in unrequited love with Lydia and she in turn takes him on as a servant. Another subplot, starting in the second book, narrates Lydia's part of the plot around the revolution on the streets of Berlin. This subplot hints at parts of the events that took place between the two novels. It seems that Lydia met the character Duke A. in Venice when she was travelling with Alice, and he fell in love with her. But unwilling, or unable at that time, to respond to his feelings, Lydia departed with Alice, first back to Vienna, then to Berlin. Duke A., himself a supporter of the democratic movement, has now

also come to Berlin in order to try to influence the King of Prussia in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, but to no avail. He meets Lydia again when soldiers break into her and Alice's apartment, and this time their love story develops at least a bit further. However, it is clear that the second volume principally relates the main events of the March Revolution, and Aston gives detailed descriptions of the combat, the situation around the barricades, and the tactics employed by both the military and the revolutionaries. This is also the volume in which Alice's radical, subversive character is the most striking: she arms herself and, dressed in the trousers already familiar from *Lydia*, joins the fighters in the streets and on the barricades. This part of the novel ends with the defeat of the uprising, and the third book sees Alice in Schleswig-Holstein in the uniform of the volunteers' corps she has joined. After her failed endeavour to prevent General Wrangel from carrying out his plans in the conflict with Denmark, which undermined the authority of the newly formed National Assembly, she travels to Frankfurt.¹⁰⁹ There she witnesses the first assembly of the newly elected parliament, but also the ultimate failure of the Democratic Revolution and the murder of Prince Lichninsky at the hands of Salvador. Although Alice fails, together with the revolution, on the level of the plot (which cannot be avoided in a novel based on those historic facts), Whittle and Pinfold point out that Aston's narrator emphasizes not so much failure, but success so very nearly achieved.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Aston herself states in the preface of the novel that she wants to contribute to public awareness of the nature and path of failure, and therefore promises to fill some gaps in the understanding of the reasons for it:

Die folgenden Blätter führen dem Leser Skizzen aus dem Revolutionsdrama des Jahres 1848 vor. Ich übergebe sie der Oeffentlichkeit [sic], weil dadurch vielleicht hie und da eine kleine Lücke in dem Intriguennetz der Contrerevolution ausgefüllt wird, die es selbst manchem Politiker von Profession unmöglich machte, den

¹⁰⁹See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 84-87.

¹¹⁰Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 147-49.

rothen Faden, der sich durch das scheinbare Gewirre der revolutionären und reactionären Bewegungen unsrer Zeit hinzieht, überall zu folgen.¹¹¹

Alice's cross-dressing stands out from all the unique features that mark her as a truly new and radical type of woman, and, aside from the historical information in the book, it is the feature that has received the most scholarly interest. Wilhelms, for example, compares the depiction of Alice with the depiction and narrative function of two fictional women written by men.¹¹² In contrast to those two characters, Alice's cross-dressing is neither motivated by love for a man or the fatherland, nor is it sanctioned by a higher authority for an explicit and limited purpose. On the contrary, Alice puts on trousers as a matter of fact, and no other character in the novel or the narrator challenges her for it. Similarly, Watanabe-O'Kelly has shown with extensive references to the tradition of both cross-dressing and fighting women in German literature that Alice also lacks any display of topical behaviour which might counteract her transgressive act in dressing the female body in male clothing: she does not hide the fact that she is a woman beneath the clothing, she does not relinquish her sexual desires, nor does she marry or die at the end of the novel so that her 'natural' place can be re-established.¹¹³ As Möhrmann and Freund point out, Aston had received a literary education through her mother, so it can be assumed that she was aware of at least some of the justificatory strategies surrounding the figure of the fighting woman, and especially the cross-dressed and fighting woman.¹¹⁴ That she chose to pay no heed to these conventions not only shows Alice's subversive character in the light of the accepted behaviours prescribed to bourgeois gender roles, but can also be read as Aston's attempt to create a new literary image of the woman warrior. She breaks away from the mould of patriarchal justifications and traditions in the depiction not only of the fighting, but also of

¹¹¹ Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, p. 1.

¹¹² Wilhelms, "Sie schien ein Mann geworden".

¹¹³ Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present*, p. 35 and pp.183-211.

¹¹⁴ See Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau* and Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!!*

the politically involved woman.

In comparison to Alice, most of the other female characters in *Revolution und Contrerevolution* have received less attention in the scholarly literature. Lydia is commonly seen as the counter-image to Alice, inasmuch as she embodies the idealized qualities and virtues of the bourgeois 'Geschlechtscharacter'. The factory worker Anna is usually only drawn upon in order to illustrate Aston's social criticism when she depicts the poor and morally deteriorating environment of the Voigtland, the part of Berlin where the proletariat lives. Likewise, Ines hardly features in critical works about the female characters of the novel, unless as a rather stereotypical example for a woman wanting to avenge herself for ill treatment in love. However, Freund offers a convincing analysis of the individual function of each of the women, except Alice, has in the novel. Anna, according to Freund, connects the rhetorical strategies of the bourgeois concept of the 'Bestimmung der Frau' with class conflict, when the narrator in the novel says about her:¹¹⁵

Es war deshalb der guten Anna auch nie in den Sinn gekommen, aus ihrer arbeitsamen und entsagungsreichen Lebensart das erhebende Bewußtsein einer sie ehrenden Handlungsweise zu schöpfen, ein Bewußtsein, das sie vielleicht gestärkt und ermuthigt hätte: Diese Reflexion lag ihr durchaus fern, sie sah darin nichts weiter als ihre »Bestimmung«, der sie nicht entgehen könne.¹¹⁶

By equating the supposedly unchanging fate of women with the notion of a similar, supposedly unchanging fate of the proletariat as a class, Aston deconstructs both notions as rhetorical devices, and makes the important point that, if it is possible to discuss social change for the proletariat, it should also be possible to discuss the same for women.

Lydia, on the other hand, is again more than just the counterpoint to Alice. Freund analyses how Aston criticizes the church, and religion in general, as a surrogate for Lydia's suppressed emotions and desires, when she lets Lydia go to church and pray excessively at

¹¹⁵ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 368-70.

¹¹⁶ Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, p. 125.

the beginning of the novel.¹¹⁷ Instead of her mother or her husband Landsfeld, as in the first novel, it is now religion that keeps Lydia isolated and out of touch with the political events of the day, so that Alice has to act as a mediator between her and the fast pace of events. But there is still some development for Lydia in the novel; when the soldiers attack her apartment in which she hides several armed members of the *Jakobinerverein*, she very nearly acts like Alice, and her actions are described in similar terms:

Die Soldaten gewannen frischen Muth, sie drangen nach - - da plötzlich blieben sie an den Boden gebannt und ihre Waffen entsanken fast ihren Händen - - ein bleiches schönes Weib stand vor ihnen, wie eine überirdische Erscheinung, neben ihr ein schwarzlockiger Knabe, in der Hand einen blinkenden Dolch haltend [Salvador]. Es war Lydia. Ihr Gemach war der Schauplatz des eben beschriebenen Kampfes geworden. [...] In dem Augenblicke, wo der Kampf in ihrer unmittelbaren Nähe entbrannte, erwachte sie aus ihrer Betäubung, und wunderbar, mit ihrem Bewußtsein war ein Muth, eine Geistesgegenwart in sie zurückgekehrt, die sie inmitten der furchtbaren Scene, von der sie Zeugin war, ruhig und besonnen erhielt. [...] Sie sah, daß die Arbeiter unterliegen mußten, und befahl ihnen, sich zurückzuziehen. Sie selbst aber erhob sich und trat den Soldaten muthig entgegen, sie versuchte zu sprechen, aber die Stimme versagte ihr. Den rechten Arm ausgestreckt, den linken auf Salvadors Schulter gestützt, so stand sie regungslos den Erstaunten gegenüber.¹¹⁸

Freund interprets this scene as a symbolic development of female power: among the workers, the supporters of democracy, Lydia has few problems with breaking out of her stereotypical mode of behaviour, indicating the potential for women's empowerment under a democratic system with equal rights for both women and the proletariat. However, once Lydia faces the soldiers, representative of the old patriarchal order, she is thrown back into her role of the powerless, silent woman and it is the male figure who holds the weapon.¹¹⁹

Lastly, Freund analyses the character of Ines as standing between Alice and Lydia

¹¹⁷ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glüht!*, pp. 381-82.

¹¹⁸ Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, pp. 133-34.

¹¹⁹ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glüht!*, p. 384.

in terms of development: she is undoubtedly in control of her own sexuality, has self-confidence, self-awareness, and has her own motives, just like Alice. But on the other hand, she is still fixated on love as the sole purpose of her life, like Lydia, otherwise it would not have been possible for Lichninsky's rejection to hurt her so much and drive her to relentless revenge.¹²⁰ At the same time, Ines receives an additional layer of meaning at the end of the novel when her son Salvador (a revealing name) kills the traitorous Prince Lichninsky:

Ines fungiert dabei [in the killing] als weibliche Figur, anders als es in manchen anderen Revolutionstexten der Fall ist, nicht als Freiheits- sondern als "Rachegöttin"¹²¹ und zwar stellvertretend für »das Volk« und für die Frau. Letzteres zeigt sich nicht allein darin, daß die Autorin ihrer Romangestalt eine federführende bzw. antreibende Rolle bei der Ermordung des Mannes zuweist, der als Verräter in der Liebe und der Politik entlarvt wird. Vielmehr betont sie diese Funktion noch durch die Konfrontation beider Heldinnen, bei der Ines auf dem Schauplatz der Abrechnung Alice darauf aufmerksam macht, daß hier – und das heißt konkret neben dem Fürsten – „kein Platz“¹²² für sie sei, und sie zum Aufstehen auffordert. [...] Und so wird Ines zur mahnenden Instanz für Alice, sich ihre Würde als Frau und ihre Autonomie als Persönlichkeit zu wahren. Geradezu in Umkehrung ihrer Rollen erinnert nun Ines an dieser Stelle die aristokratische Heldin an ihre frühere Äußerung, daß es für eine Frau „keinen Verlust, als den des Glaubens an sich selbst“¹²³ gäbe.¹²⁴

Although the assessments of this novel have mostly focused on the figure of Alice, it can be concluded that Aston not only continued to challenge conservative images of femininity, but also their perpetuation in literature. Again she achieves this not only with the individual character of Alice, but with all female protagonists, by portraying the possibilities of development for the characters (and by implication, all women) under the contemporary

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 402.

¹²¹ Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, p. 164.

¹²² Ibid., p. 274.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 171.

¹²⁴ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, p. 405.

social and political conditions. Alice remains thereby an idealized figure, the truly - in Aston's sense of the word - emancipated woman who acts as if gender equality had already been established and bourgeois images of femininity abolished. Anna, although she vanishes halfway through the novel, represents the state of unawareness in which, as Aston implies, both proletariat and women are being kept, mainly by the patriarchal power discourse. Lydia stands at the start of that development towards a type of woman who is able to act on her own behalf, but she needs, allegedly, the support of a democratically organized framework (the state, in the ideal scenario) to help her break out of the internalized norms of behaviour, and to protect her from further potentially destructive influences during her development. Ines represents the stage between the search for woman's destiny in conjunction with man, as illustrated above and the achievement of true independence (Alice).

There is another important difference between Aston's novels, especially in the depiction of Alice, and the politically active female characters portrayed by other women writers such as Malwida von Meysenbug: there are very few children in Aston's texts. Whittle and Pinfold mention the 'unmotherly Alice'¹²⁵ when they analyse Alice's failure in the revolution with reference to a certain phrasing in the novel:

„*Fast* - dieses »Fast« ist der Fluch unsrer Zeit, das Haar, an dem der Teufel der Reaktion das betrogene Volk festhält, um es bald wieder ganz beim Schopf zu fassen und in das alte Joch der Knechtschaft zu spannen. - Auch in Preußen ist ein solches unseliges »Fast« die Mutter einer eklatanten Contrerevolution geworden.“
(*RuC*, I, 5f)

Significantly, the unmotherly Alice fails to bring the revolution to success; but has she thus become a mother, i.e. the female incarnation of the counterrevolution? The imagery here does not follow clearly defined gender lines.¹²⁶

It is interesting that the two scholars interpret the wording of Aston's text as referring to

¹²⁵ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, p. 148.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Alice, as she is never identified as a mother in *Revolution und Contrerevolution*. However, in the novel *Lydia*, Alice refers to her child in conversation with Landsfeld when she breaks up with him for good: '»Laß uns ohne Groll scheiden. - Du hast mir sehr, sehr wehe gethan, aber ich schwöre es Dir bei Gott - nein, das ist eine Redensart - bei der Seele meines Kindes - das Du so oft auf Deinem Schooße gewiegt, ich werde Dich nie, nie hassen können.'¹²⁷ But as this remains the only mention of Alice's child, the meaning for the literary character Alice cannot be the same as for other depictions of politically active women. Meysenbug, for example, goes to great lengths in her memoirs to construct her literary image as that of the mother of Olga, her adoptive daughter. Her strategy seems clear: as long as the political woman at least fulfils the role of the mother (and her stance that a surrogate mother is just as good and loving as the biological mother was quite radical as it was), her political interests and activities can be accepted. But for Alice, these considerations are not important in her political activities. One possible explanation of the child in Alice's speech is that Aston wants to signal, with the child as a cypher, that Alice lives out her sexuality, with the result of falling pregnant at one unspecified time, and can therefore, in contrast to Lydia, be regarded as experienced. Another possibility is that Aston satirizes break-up scenes in popular literature in this instance, as Alice substitutes one clichéd affirmation with the other, only to reinforce this with an equally clichéd expression that fits into the picture. Apart from this rather hypothetical child, there are only two more children in both novels: Lydia's and Landsfeld's child, who dies in infancy and whose symbolic function has been discussed above; and Salvador who, at fifteen years of age, clearly does not require his mother's constant care in the same way an infant does. Additionally, Salvador is the child who kills his own father to avenge his mother, and then himself. His death could be read in the same symbolic way that Freund proposes for Lydia's child: he, too, is a symbolic representation of the old, patriarchal system taking

¹²⁷ Aston, *Lydia*, p. 62.

advantage of women, even if they are already in the process of developing independence. He has also quite literally become his mother's tool in the battle of the sexes, so after he has fulfilled his role, he has no purpose any more – perhaps also a reference to the idea that a democratic state is necessary for a future (generation?) worth living.

A last reason for at least Alice's childlessness (if the one mention of a child, whether satirical or not, is ignored) could lie in the attempt to write a truly new image of a woman, one who is neither defined in relation to men, nor by biological function, but solely by her own traits of character and actions. In this, Aston would not only have written the image of the 'aktive Vormärzlerin', but that of a woman not just transgressing all bourgeois concepts of gender roles, but also all literary traditions of female protagonists.

Chapter 3

Malwida von Meysenbug: The fight for women's rights on a personal level

Malwida von Meysenbug (1816-1903) undoubtedly had a big impact on the self-conception of the women of her time, and even more so on the women of the following generations. Her exceptional life story, written down in her memoirs and read by generations of women, tells of the difficulties of an independent-minded woman in the restrictive society of Germany in the nineteenth century, but also of the beginnings of the developing women's movement and the fight for democratic ideas across Europe. She was born in 1816 into the Rivalier family in Kassel. Her father, Ludwig Carl Georg Philipp Rivalier, was a counsellor at the court of Wilhelm I of Hessen and of his son, Wilhelm II, and was ennobled for his services in 1825, taking the name of von Meysenbug.¹²⁸ Von Meysenbug's family can therefore be placed in a conservative milieu, as they were loyal supporters of the ruling monarch. Against this background, it is all the more surprising that Malwida von Meysenbug developed into a democrat and an active supporter of women's emancipation, resulting both in estrangement from her family and exile to London in 1852. Her experiences in England and the acquaintances she made in those years shaped the rest of her life.

But seeing von Meysenbug as a radical figure is not undisputed. On the one hand, she did indeed demand better education for women, the right to work, legal emancipation of women in marriage, and the right to individual development. On the other hand, she clearly regarded women's most important role as being in the family and raising and educating their children. While she was perfectly in line with the majority of the German women's movement of the 1840s in this matter,¹²⁹ her more radical thinking in other

¹²⁸ See Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, p.21.

¹²⁹ See for example Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* and Ute Frevert, *Women in German history: from bourgeois emancipation to sexual liberation* (Oxford : Berg, 1989), pp.17-21 and pp. 73-82.

matters creates a puzzling contrast. The question about her political involvement after the critical years of 1848 and 1852 (the year in which the Hamburger Hochschule für das weibliche Geschlecht had to shut down) has led to different factions among scholars, as Martin Reuter explains:

[I]hre öffentliche und historische Bedeutung [bleibt] unklar. Ist sie nun die Fußnote zur Geschichte, als die sie in vielen Publikationen auftaucht? Ist sie eine Politische oder eine Unpolitische? Gehört sie zur Avantgarde der deutschen und europäischen Demokratie, die ihr Leben der guten Sache widmete? Oder war es ihr nur darum zu tun, mit möglichst vielen großen Männern (eventuell auch ihren Frauen) bekannt zu sein und mit ihnen einen Briefwechsel zu führen, der sich wieder für einen Zeitungsartikel verwerten ließ?¹³⁰

These questions arise mostly from a late twentieth-century point of view, and from comparison with other important figures of the German women's movement. While it is true that von Meysenbug did not become a member of any organisation or association within the women's movement, she nevertheless developed political and emancipatory ideas of her own, and shared them with her local circle of friends, and also with colleagues and students in Hamburg, where she attended the Hochschule für das weibliche Geschlecht from 1850 to 1852. That she was indeed seen as a role model and important figure in this early stage of political change is also pointed out by Reuter: '[...] [I]hre Haltung [wird] bis weit in dieses Jahrhundert hinein transportiert, sie hatte eine nicht zu übersehende Fangemeinde. Vor allem von Frauen wurde sie verehrt und auf einen Denkmalsockel gestellt: als „in sich vollendete Menschenerscheinung“!¹³¹

¹³⁰ Martin Reuter, *1848, Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte: die Politik einer aristokratischen Demokratin im 19. Jahrhundert* (Kassel, Winfried Jenior, 1998), p. 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

a. *Reise nach Ostende (1849)*

Malwida von Meysenbug used to elaborate and discuss her political convictions mainly in letters to good friends and like-minded, politically involved men of the bourgeois democratic movement. Apart from those private, or only semi-public letters, she published two essays on the subject of women's participation in politics. The first one is fiercely entitled *Ein Frauenschwur*, and was published in the Sunday edition of the *Mainzer Tagblatt* on 22 September 1850.¹³² The second political article was published in von Meysenbug's collection of articles, essays and observations, *Stimmungsbilder* in 1879,¹³³ and is entitled, less dramatically, *Von dem möglichen Einfluß der Frauen auf die Politik*.¹³⁴ Apart from those two publications, von Meysenbug also developed her political stance in the travelogue *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)*, her earliest political text.¹³⁵

At the beginning of the year 1849, von Meysenbug was able to go on a journey to Ostend in Belgium, accompanying her friends Elisabeth Althaus, the sister of von Meysenbug's first love Theodor Althaus, and Anna Koppe. She mentions this short trip in her memoirs, but the travelogue remained unpublished until 1905, when Gabriel Monod, Olga Herzen's husband, published it posthumously.¹³⁶ In his preface to the text he refers to letters written by von Meysenbug to her mother in which she states that the travelogue was mainly intended for the pupils of the Frauenhochschule in Hamburg, where von Meysenbug studied and taught from 1850 to 1852. Monod stresses in his preface that the text can be regarded as a historical document relating to the revolutionary years of 1848 and '49, but also as an important part of von Meysenbug's 'geistige Biographie'.¹³⁷ The text

¹³² The article is reprinted in *Jahrbuch der Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft 1995* (vol.5; Kassel: Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft e.V., 1996), pp. 163-166.

¹³³ Malwida von Meysenbug, 'Stimmungsbilder', (Leipzig, Köln, 1879).

¹³⁴ Ibid. pp. 61-70. Reprinted in Malwida von Meysenbug, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, eds Sabine Hering and Karl-Heinz Nickel (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2000).

¹³⁵ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)* (Berlin, Leipzig: Schuster & Löffler, 1905).

¹³⁶ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1881).

¹³⁷ Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)*, p. 8.

indeed offers valuable statements about her political points of view and how she reached them. At the same time, it allows a glimpse of the method by which von Meysenbug depicts not only the acquaintances she makes, but also herself. Debbie Pinfold has pointed out that von Meysenbug could not have expected her travelogue to have any major impact on the political scene, as it was only intended for other students in Hamburg.¹³⁸ But regarding her ideal of education, she could well have intended it as an exemplary discussion of political ideas, and also as a presentation of exemplary people, including herself. Although it appears under the guise of the traditional genre of the travelogue, the progressive aspects of this text are that in it a woman gives voice to her political opinions, meets other exemplary women with whom she can discuss politics, and is able to defend her opinions against representatives of the conservative social order.

Whittle and Pinfold analyse how von Meysenbug develops her individual voice as the text proceeds.¹³⁹ While she appears to borrow a male voice in the first chapter, entitled 'Geschichte, die der Eisenbahnkondukteur erzählt hat',¹⁴⁰ she soon passes into descriptions of other female travellers and renders their dialogues. She finally seems to speak for herself when she discusses matters of religion with a priest she meets on the beach at Ostend. The very positive descriptions von Meysenbug gives especially of the women she meets have a function. Whittle and Pinfold point out that all of these women would have been regarded as quite radical at the time the text was written, and that von Meysenbug intended to ease the threatening effect this could have caused even in the progressive target readership of the text.¹⁴¹ The second aspect is closely connected to the non-threatening description, namely the presentation of the women depicted as 'potential models for von

¹³⁸ Debbie Pinfold, "'Wer die Frauen hat, der hat die Zukunft!'" Women's voices on the revolutions of 1848-49: Fanny Lewald, Malwida von Meysenbug, and Johanna Kinkel', in Marjanne E. Goozé (ed.), *Challenging Separate Spheres. Female Bildung in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Germany*. (North American Studies in 19th-Century German Literature, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 191-209.

¹³⁹ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 50-72.

¹⁴⁰ Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)*, p. 15.

¹⁴¹ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 53-54.

Meysenbug herself and by extension her female audience'.¹⁴² While the women mostly tell something about their lives and the circumstances they find themselves in, thus presenting themselves to the reader on their own terms to be judged suitable as role models, the direct speech in the encounters with the Catholic priest and another, anti-feminist acquaintance has a different quality. For once, von Meysenbug switches from 'we' in the conversations with the women (referring to her fellow travellers) to 'I' in the discussions with the men, who are furthermore representatives of conservative opinion. The religious discussion with the priest is then given for the most part in direct speech, thus mimicking the situation of the argument in which von Meysenbug can hold her ground.¹⁴³ The second, elaborate discussion about the new place women demand in society takes on the character of a treatise, after some initial short banter in direct speech with the new-found acquaintance. The conservative arguments and point of view get quite a lot of space, almost four pages,¹⁴⁴ and are dedicated to proving that democracy and public work for women would mean the end of feminine values and virtues. Von Meysenbug counters these arguments with a treatise of her own, and spends more than sixteen pages setting out her political reasoning.¹⁴⁵ Her main points in this statement are, firstly, women's right to equal education, in order to develop their individual personalities; secondly, education as an end in itself, and not aimed at household work; thirdly, women are to be educated as self-reliant citizens of the state, so that they in turn can be responsible educators of future citizens, their children. Von Meysenbug sees this latter task as the most important one for women: 'Allerdings ist die Familie das A und O und nur der gesunden Familie entsteigt der gesunde Staat'.¹⁴⁶ What reads today as a conventional stance had an implication in von Meysenbug's thinking that should not be underestimated; she seeks to improve the state

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁴³ Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende (1849)*, pp. 86-90.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 130-34.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 134-51.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 141-42.

through the concept of the family, but this can only work if the state acknowledges women as individuals on a legal basis, and allows for public education equal to that of men. While von Meysenbug in later texts, especially in her memoirs, links the task of the family/state with her ideal of motherly love, in the context of the *Reise nach Ostende* this can be interpreted as a quite radical demand: a demand for legal equality, equal education, and in order to achieve this, admittance to the public sphere. It is certainly no coincidence that this call for the improvement of women's position in society is uttered in the last but one chapter called 'Zukunftsgedanken'.

The journey to Ostend comes to a quite pessimistic end. Von Meysenbug has to return to a Germany in which the democratic revolution, and her hopes for a better future for society as a whole and for women in particular, have been thwarted. In the final chapter she describes a discussion she has with a group of friends about a nation's task in world history. In contemplation she draws a parallel between the development of the individual and the development of a state. Like the individual, which has to shape itself to the best of its abilities, the people of a state have to develop their best features in order to fulfil the nation's task in history. But as Germany is apparently not the nation to embody the ideal form of government,¹⁴⁷ von Meysenbug ends her travelogue with a wistful look towards the west and America, a country in which she and many fellow democratic fighters had great hope of establishing, even from afar, an ideal, humanistic state. Whittle and Pinfold point out that this travelogue, or political treatise in disguise, could have been a powerful text in the context of the Frauenhochschule in Hamburg because of the role models presented and because of the rhetorical devices employed in the arguments.¹⁴⁸ It is furthermore a striking illustration of von Meysenbug's personal philosophy, in which the ideal individual is able to present alternatives to the women of her time without falling out

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁴⁸ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of Rebellion*, pp. 46-48.

of the framework of conventional gender roles.

b. Meysenbug's literary self-depiction in her *Memoiren einer Idealistin*

Von Meysenbug gained her status as a role model for independently minded women mainly as a result of her *Memoiren einer Idealistin*.¹⁴⁹ The first volume, entitled *Mémoires d'une idéaliste*, was initially published anonymously in 1869 in French in Switzerland; it covers her childhood, the development of her democratic ideas, and her activities in Hamburg at the newly founded Frauenhochschule up to the year 1852, when she was forced into exile to avoid arrest. In 1876 a German translation of the first part and two additional volumes followed. The second volume relates her life as an exile in London from 1852 to 1861 until her departure from the family of Alexander Herzen, for whose daughters she had acted as governess. The third volume narrates her remaining year in England, which she had to leave because of her declining health, and her extended stays in Paris, where she maintained a close friendship with Cosima and Richard Wagner. The last chapter sees von Meysenbug once again as a substitute mother to Alexander Herzen's youngest daughter Olga, whom he has given into her care for good, and in 1862 she moves to Italy with her. The last part, *Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, follows in 1898, five years before her death. This volume includes episodes from various stages of her later life in Italy, aphorisms, poems, a treatise on the history of the Italian town Rimini, and even a fairy tale set in India.

What is remarkable about the memoirs is that they provide the reader with very few actual dates. Von Meysenbug does not even mention her own birthday, and the title of the

¹⁴⁹ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*. Also available in an abridged version: Renate Wiggershaus (ed.), *Malwida von Meysenbug: Memoiren einer Idealistin* (Königstein: Ulrike Helmer, 1998). Quotations are from the first listed, Schuster and Loeffler edition.

sixth chapter, *Die erste Revolution*, gives no indication as to which revolution is meant.¹⁵⁰ Only by making the link between the important chapter about the revolution of 1848, which features as its title the very first date mentioned in the work,¹⁵¹ and with von Meysenbug's remark that this July revolution sent a spark throughout Europe,¹⁵² is the reader able to deduce that she is referring to the revolution of 1830, which started in France. The other explicitly stated dates often refer to individuals who von Meysenbug apparently considered formative for her life: she mentions that she first had contact with Johanna Kinkel in 1849;¹⁵³ an essay written by Alexander Herzen on 24 July 1848, which was her first contact with him, albeit not in person;¹⁵⁴ Johanna Kinkel's death on 16 November 1858;¹⁵⁵ and she also reprints a poem by Ferdinand Freiligrath dated 20 November 1858, dedicated to Johanna Kinkel and read at her funeral.¹⁵⁶ The last date she mentions is the year 1859 in which the Second Italian War of Independence took place, an event which had a great impact on the Italian exiles von Meysenbug knew in London.¹⁵⁷

This meagre supply of factual dates leaves it to the reader to localise the events in von Meysenbug's life in history, but it also supports the narrative style of the memoirs. Von Meysenbug starts off with a description of the house in which she grew up in Kassel, and wanders through different rooms, mentioning individual memories attached to this house. Only then does she begin a more or less chronological account of her childhood and family, although even here political events and information about her parents are inserted in a seemingly random order. Between the lack of an historical orientation and the enjoyable, anecdotal style, the memoirs can be read almost as a novel. The reader has to trust the narrator, here apparently von Meysenbug herself, to guide them through the events

¹⁵⁰ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, p. 16.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 138.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 16.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 262.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 323.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 122.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 128-30.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 149.

of her life as though they are reading a novel. The title of the memoirs, *Memoiren einer Idealistin*, assist in this because the title does not refer to her name at all, and so does not allow the direct conclusion that these are indeed von Meysenbug's memoirs. Of course, the title without reference to the name is also an expression of modesty and a means of self-promotion, but von Meysenbug also sets the stage for the simple narration of a life – a feature that may have contributed to the vast popularity of the book. If the memoirs depict only the life of one nameless idealistic woman (in contrast to the historical person of von Meysenbug), many other women can identify themselves with the 'heroine' and aspire to a similarly strong-willed character, and independently led life.

In what follows, von Meysenbug narrates the story of her life with the main motif being that of the restless wanderer ('Meine ewig suchende Natur').¹⁵⁸ In the encounters with, for her, important people such as Theodor Althaus, Johanna and Gottfried Kinkel, Alexander Herzen, and many others, as well as in her musings about religion, art, social conventions, and juridical circumstances, she is always searching for the moment of revelation, an insight that would bring her closer to her ideal. What exactly her ideal is remains blurred in the early chapters of the memoirs, apart from the notion that it is something she has to develop out of herself, according to her own standards of morality and justice. In very similar ways to a classic *Bildungsroman*, von Meysenbug depicts her struggles against religion and social norms (and, with this, even against her own family). Similarly to many protagonists of a *Bildungsroman*, she is fascinated with the theatre and acting and finds her first sanctuary in art.¹⁵⁹ Only in communication with Theodor Althaus and, strikingly, in reading Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (just as Karl Philipp Moritz' protagonist Anton Reiser reads *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*) does she realise that she

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., vol. I, p. 74.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. I, pp.14-16.

has to put social action before art if she wants to do something useful with her life.¹⁶⁰ Of course, she encounters a lot of obstacles in her family and wider social circle, and she is also haunted by doubts and uncertainties. A key scene in her development takes place just when she has left the South of France, and is on her way back to the stifling environment of her father's house. On her journey through the Alps she dedicates herself to a life of fighting for her ideal:

Ich sah hinauf zu den weißen Spitzen, die in den Strahlen einer kalten Sonne erglänzten, und es schien mir, als sähe ich mit diamantner Schrift mein Schicksal auf dem Eis verzeichnet. »Die Stunden der Jugend, der Schönheit und Poesie sind denen, die für das Ideal leben, nur gegeben, um ihren Mut aufrecht zu erhalten und ihr Herz zu erfrischen. Aber zum größten Teil ist ihr Leben ein Kampf ohne Aufhören, ein Weg, der durch einsame, unfruchtbare Wüsten führt, wie die Straße, die du wandelst. Willst du die Aufgabe annehmen und nicht zurückschrecken vor den Opfern, die sie dir auferlegt? Willst du bereit sein, dein Herz, das den ewig brennenden Durst nach Schönheit hat, unaufhörlich kreuzigen zu sehen?« [...] [U]nwillkürlich kniete ich auf den Steinen nieder und rief: »Ja, ich nehme die Aufgabe an; ohne zu wanken will ich den einsamen Pfad gehen, den die verfolgen, die die Wahrheit suchen, und ich will dankbar sein für die wenigen Blumen, die ich auf dem Wege finde.«¹⁶¹

The ongoing trials and tribulations von Meysenbug now has to endure add only perseverance to her resolution, to the oath she has taken for the rest of her life.

But it is not only the narration of von Meysenbug's own 'character' in this text that has strong similarities to the novel genre. Another technique is the employment of letters: von Meysenbug does not simply describe the people who played an important role in her life, she lets them speak for themselves through the letters she has received from them. Especially when narrating her time in London she uses a lot of letters from Alexander Herzen, Johanna Kinkel, and Giuseppe Mazzini, which she sets in dialogue with extracts

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., vol. I, pp. 48-49.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., vol. I, pp. 97-98.

from her own replies, so that the reader is able to follow their exchange of letters as though they were a live conversation. This way, she is able to create a dialogue that goes beyond characterising the respective senders and brings them to the same narrative level as von Meysenbug's own 'character'. With von Meysenbug as protagonist, the letters provide the necessary counterparts for dialogues with the 'supporting characters' of her life story. An indicator that von Meysenbug wrote her memoirs with more than historical accuracy in mind is the much criticised ending of the third volume:

Es gibt im Leben jedes Menschen, »der immer strebend sich bemüht«, Augenblicke und Zeiten, wo das allgemeine Sehnen und Suchen der Menschheit, sich auch in ihm, in einer individuellen Form, ausspricht. Diese haben ein allgemeines Interesse; sie zeigen das ewige Antlitz des »einen«, das in allen ist, in einer besonderen Auffassung. Sobald diesem Sehnen und Suchen seine Bahn gefunden ist, sobald der Schlüssel des Lebensrätsels uns von einem Größeren gereicht wird, hören wir auf, individuell zu sein. Wir folgen den Spuren dessen, der die Wahrheit bereits größer und besser hingestellt hat, als wir es vermochten. Unsere persönliche Geschichte hört dann auf – wenigstens für andere, die nächsten Freunde ausgenommen.¹⁶²

For von Meysenbug, this is the argument that justifies her withdrawal from the public stage – and it can be argued that the public sphere of this precise publication is meant, not the political stage, and certainly not literary publication, considering how many texts she published after the success of the memoirs.¹⁶³ Katherine Goodman has interpreted this passage as von Meysenbug's weary resignation from the idealistic stance of her youth:

Meysenbug, staunch individualist and spokeswoman for women's rights, extols the virtues of martyrdom. By 1869 she had willingly dispossessed herself of the individualism for which she had struggled before 1852.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid., vol. III, p. 202.

¹⁶³ See Julia Freifrau Hiller von Gaertringen, 'Malwida von Meysenbug und ihre Verleger', in Hans-Peter Wehlt (ed.), *Briefe als Zeugnisse eines Frauenlebens : Malwida von Meysenbug und ihre Korrespondenzpartner: Beiträge zum Kolloquium des Nordrhein-Westfälischen Staatsarchivs Detmold, durchgeführt in Verbindung mit dem Naturwissenschaftlichen Verein für das Land Lippe e.V. am 24.-25.11.2000. Sonderveröffentlichungen des Naturwissenschaftlichen und Historischen Vereins für das Land Lippe*. (Detmold: Selbstverlag des Nordrhein-Westfälischen Staatsarchiv Detmold, 2003), pp. 327-69.

¹⁶⁴ Katherine Goodman, *Dis/closures: women's autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914* (New

But it can be argued that it is only von Meysenbug as her own protagonist who disappears at the end of the story into the private home. The quoted passage can indeed be read as referring to a fictional character who is a matter of common interest, and as soon as the quest for the meaning of this individual life is brought to a meaningful end, the character has fulfilled the role and stops being a distinguishable character. Von Meysenbug styles herself very consistently as the protagonist who writes her own story, and she also decides when this story is at an end, at least for the general public. This point of view makes the memoirs a very strong document in women's struggle to write, in a very literal sense, women's history.

c. Meysenbug's political self-depiction in her *Memoiren einer Idealistin*

The memoirs have formed the basis for detailed historical and feminist analysis, but the rest of her oeuvre, namely her literary texts, have been neglected or mentioned only fleetingly. However, a fruitful approach is to investigate how von Meysenbug's social and political ideas are presented in her novellas and novels, especially in her longest novel *Phädra* (1885). But because the evolution of her ideas and even ideals is not unproblematic, and as it is closely connected to her own changing living conditions, the first step must be an assessment of the memoirs. Von Meysenbug's life was a very unusual one, and her memoirs present the reader with a remarkable account by a contemporary witness of political revolutions, burgeoning social changes and their main representatives in Europe. Apart from her correspondence, scholars have always regarded them as the most interesting part of her oeuvre; this has led to the belief that von Meysenbug's autobiography, 'unless one wishes to count her relationships with famous men, [...]

remains her single claim to fame.¹⁶⁵ Despite this rather crushing remark, von Meysenbug's memoirs have provided valuable historical accounts, not only as an eyewitness account of the democratic revolution of 1848 in Germany, but also as a document of women's involvement in the political and social changes aspired to in most parts of Europe at that time. As a record of extraordinary female writing (extraordinary because of her circumstances, her acquaintances, and also because of her being a woman who writes her autobiography), the memoirs have been subject to detailed, feminist textual analysis, though this has proven somewhat problematic.¹⁶⁶ On the one hand von Meysenbug's demands for adequate education for women and women's participation in politics were indeed radical for the time. But her justifications for these demands, namely, the improvement of the family and subsequently of the state through better women's (wives' and mothers') education, fit neatly with the conservative ideas of gender roles and divided spheres for men and women of her time:

Daß die Frau vor dem Gesetz mit dem Mann völlig gleichgestellt werden müsse, ist schon zu oft gesagt, als daß es hier ausführlich wiederholt werden müßte. Sie ist ebensogut Staatsbürger wie der Mann; sie hat die wichtigste Aufgabe für den Staat zu erfüllen: ihm Bürger zu geben und zu erziehen und hat ein heiliges Anrecht, in ihren Interessen geschützt und unabhängig zu sein, gleich dem Mann.¹⁶⁷

The other main source of critique is von Meysenbug's apparent retreat from the political stage in 1861. In her memoirs she proclaims that, with her new task of educating Olga Herzen, her life does not belong to the public sphere any more but instead to the highest form of female fulfilment, which has its place in the privacy of the home:

Damit hat mein Suchen ein Ende; damit auch der Abschnitt meines Lebens, den ich den öffentlichen nennen könnte, weil er in Berührung und Beziehung zu

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁶⁶ See Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and deviance: nineteenth-century German women writers and the ambiguity of representation* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 94.

¹⁶⁷ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, p. XII.

öffentlichen Ereignissen und Personen stand. Was darüber hinausgeht, was nun noch folgte, gehört nicht mehr, wenigstens nicht in dieser Form, vor das Publikum. Es würde unbescheiden sein, noch weiter davon zu reden.¹⁶⁸

This withdrawal from an active political life in favour of a conservative role, together with her shift from social and political claims to an aesthetically and morally oriented world-view in later life, has caused many debates in the scholarly literature.¹⁶⁹ The assumption is that von Meysenbug abandoned the fight for democracy and for women's rights by declaring the later part of her life a private one, and Beth Muellner's question sums up the arguments of many critics: 'Kann die Anpassung an geschlechtsspezifische Verhaltensnormen eine revolutionäre Tat sein?'¹⁷⁰ But this point of view is based on the acceptance of von Meysenbug's self-stylisation in her memoirs; if the reader believes her statements, then she withdrew indeed completely from the political stage, and was content with a private life dedicated to the education of Olga Herzen. However, von Meysenbug's correspondence, as well as her literary writings, paint a different picture: while she remained on the outside of any emerging political organisations in the wake of the first German Women's Movement, she developed her political philosophy nonetheless in letters and in personal meetings with her vast and influential circle of acquaintances. The question whether von Meysenbug should be seen as one of the first radicals at the beginning of the women's movement or as a forward thinking, though ultimately conservative, spokesperson must perhaps be answered in relative terms, as Boetcher Joeres points out not only for von Meysenbug, but for nineteenth-century rebellious women in general:

It is perhaps primarily a matter of the degree of their lack of compliance, their

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., vol. III, pp. 201-02.

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. Goodman, *Dis/closures: women's autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914.*; Reuter, *1848, Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*; Beth Muellner, 'Abweichen in Anstand, Malwida von Meysenbug fährt Eisenbahn', in *Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft Jahrbuch 7* (7; Kassel: Malwida von Meysenbug Gesellschaft, 2000), pp.140-51.; Carol Diethe, *Towards emancipation: German women writers of the nineteenth century* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1998).

¹⁷⁰ Muellner, 'Abweichen in Anstand, Malwida von Meysenbug fährt Eisenbahn', p.143.

sustained efforts to challenge a model of acceptance in the gender system, their attempts to go beyond, to be different, to take deliberate steps toward becoming public.¹⁷¹

Von Meysenbug clearly saw herself and the life she led as a role model for young women, as the memoirs' addressees are mentioned explicitly as 'meine jungen bekannten und unbekanntenen Freundinnen (denn an euch richte ich, wie immer, hauptsächlich meine Worte)'.¹⁷² Not only is the striking title of her memoirs a strong indication of this, but the concluding sentences of her preface also make clear that she hopes her book will be taken as encouragement for the fulfilment of her ideals:

Und so möge denn dies Buch noch einmal hinausziehen und es versuchen, etwas zur Erreichung des besprochenen Zwecks zu tun. Und wenn es auch nur e i n Herz gewönne, um im Geist und in der Wahrheit und somit in echter Bildung zu leben, so hätte es sich das Recht erworben, da zu sein.¹⁷³

This self-perception as a (developing) role-model and potential ideal character is not unproblematic. In her substantial study of women's autobiography Katherine Goodman shows how the self-perception of female authors changed during the revolution of 1848. As they took a more active part in public discussion, they no longer felt it necessary to hide their writing ambitions behind the pretence of a coincidence or an amateur attempt, a strategy to legitimise female authorship employed by various women in the eighteenth century. Instead they took a stand in writing about matters which they found important to discuss, disregarding most of the traditional forms accorded to women's writing.¹⁷⁴

Malwida von Meysenbug links her life, writing in retrospect, with politics: In the first fourteen years of her life, her political frame of reference was the *ancien régime*, as her father was a close adviser to both Wilhelm I and Wilhelm II of Hessen, and therefore

¹⁷¹ Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and deviance*, p. 87.

¹⁷² Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, p. XII.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. XV.

¹⁷⁴ See Goodman, *Dis/closures: women's autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914*, pp. 121-22.

quite close to the ruling family. At the age of fourteen she witnessed some events in the wake of the revolution of 1830; although she was more concerned with the fate of her family at that point, the adult von Meysenbug presents those events as key to her development:

Natürlich war es für mich jetzt noch mein Herz, das mein Urteil leitete; es verstand sich, daß die, die ich liebte, recht haben mußten. Aber mein Blick fing an, einen weiteren Horizont zu umfassen. Ich begann Zeitungen zu lesen und den politischen Ereignissen mit großem Interesse zu folgen. Zwar spielte ich noch mit meinen Puppen, doch fühlte ich mich auf der Schwelle eines neuen Lebens. Ich hatte eine zweite Taufe empfangen durch die Hand der Revolution.¹⁷⁵

Another important episode in her development was her confirmation, at which point she became sceptical of church dogmas and rituals. A meeting, and subsequent relationship, with the idealistic theologian Theodor Althaus influenced her views on politics to a very great extent, in that she followed his radical democratic ideas. Althaus appears to have been the great love of her life,¹⁷⁶ and in her memoirs she glorifies him, dedicating a chapter to their first meeting with the heading '*Der junge Apostel*'.¹⁷⁷ In discussions with him she formed her own opinions, and apparently became aware of her individuality and the reasons for her increasingly difficult stance towards her family: 'Ich fühlte, daß ich eine Individualität wurde, mit Überzeugungen und mit der Energie, sie zu bekennen. Ich begriff nun, daß dies mein Verbrechen sei'.¹⁷⁸ The truly life-changing event was the year 1848, in which she witnessed the democratic revolution, and to which she dedicates a long chapter in her memoirs. Whittle and Pinfold give a detailed analysis of how von Meysenbug again links the events of her life to a political framework: her father's death at the very end of the year 1847 corresponds, in von Meysenbug's narrative

¹⁷⁵ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ See Diethe, *Towards emancipation*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁷ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, pp. 73-82.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 117.

composition, to the end of the old monarchy; similarly, Althaus' departure from Detmold at the end of the year 1848 corresponds to the disappointing end of the revolution.¹⁷⁹

d. Meysenbug's concept of *Bildung*

In the preface to the third edition of her memoirs as well as in other political pamphlets, von Meysenbug stresses the importance of developing everyone's, including women's, potential: 'Und doch verlangt es die Gerechtigkeit, daß für ein jedes menschliche Wesen die Freiheit da sei, alles werden zu können, wozu Natur und Befähigung treiben'.¹⁸⁰ The key to this development is *Bildung*, but von Meysenbug has a different kind of education in mind, one which prepares one for a profession, or for participation in public life in general:

Bildung im höheren Sinn ist weder bloßes Wissen, noch eine einzelne, besonders entwickelte Fähigkeit, noch die vollendete Beobachtung kirchlicher und weltlicher Formen, noch das Aufgehen in den Beschäftigungen des materiellen Lebens. Sie ist vielmehr die ethische Durchdringung des ganzen Wesens, die Zentralsonne, von der nach allen Richtungen die Strahlen ausgehen, der Brennpunkt, in dem sich alles Denken, Fühlen, Tun zusammenfindet. [...] Also nicht auf die Masse des Angelernten kommt es an, sondern darauf [...]: selbstdenkende, prüfende, schöpferische Menschen zu erziehen.¹⁸¹

This highly idealistic account of the concept of *Bildung* follows the idea of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* insofar as it proposes the full development of the individual towards becoming an active and worthy member of society. But while Goethe's protagonist looks forward to his full participation in the world, von Meysenbug redirects the indisputably progressive demand for a similar chance for development for women back into the domestic sphere:

¹⁷⁹ Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 30 and 31.

¹⁸⁰ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. I, p. XI.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. XII and XIII.

In gleicher Weise soll es gewiß nicht gesagt sein, daß die Frauen über dem Streben nach größerer intellektueller Entwicklung die Pflicht vernachlässigen sollen, die den meisten unter ihnen vorzugsweise zugewiesen ist: die Verwaltung des häuslichen Lebens. Aber auch da sollen sie nicht bloß erfahrene Verwalterinnen, sondern Pflegerinnen der Ordnung und Anmut sein, durch die auch die einfachsten Bedingungen der häuslichen Existenz wohltuend gestaltet werden [...].¹⁸²

While this presents a more conservative than rebellious stance from a modern point of view, it shows von Meysenbug's political agenda. Equal rights and *Bildung* for women are necessary not only so that women can support themselves independently from their families as long as they are not married, but also for the continuous refinement of the (political and social) state, for example through equal rights in marriage. But as these requirements are not yet given, the need arises for role-models, idealists, who are prepared to show the potential, and desirability, of the progress that could be made in a society with both sexes on equal terms. In the way they lead their lives, these role models urge the desired changes on, be it towards democracy, socialism, or women's emancipation.

e. The development of a political philosophy

Martin Reuter traces the development of von Meysenbug's political philosophy in minute detail, following the chronological frame of her memoirs. In constantly situating von Meysenbug's statements against the socio-historical background and against the prevalent philosophical school of thought of the time, he is able to explain some of the contradictions. This is of course also the most difficult point when it comes to discussing the memoirs: at the time von Meysenbug started to write them, her philosophy had already undergone some significant changes, and she describes its earlier stages as a development towards her final convictions. As such, she is able to include criticism of her previous

¹⁸² Ibid., vol I, p. XIII.

political ideas, as Reuter illustrates:

Von innen nach außen, zur Praxis, zum „Idealismus der Tat“ (Schleicher): das ist die Summenformel für den Lebensabschnitt, der noch in Detmold eine Politisierung von Meysenbugs im engeren Sinne einleitet, von ihr allerdings später immer noch als „unbestimmt suchender Realismus meiner Jugend“ qualifiziert wird. (I 85)¹⁸³

The time she spent in Hamburg and of course the ten years in exile in London shaped her awareness of social shortcomings and necessities, but also caused her to revise her former convictions about the degree of participation of the working class. The claim that everyone has a right to develop their individuality becomes increasingly central to her political programme, as she sees the development of abilities as one of the most resourceful ways to change the circumstances of the individual and, in the long run, even the socio-demographic composition of society:

Diese Fundierung auf Anthropologie, die Wendung zur 'Lebenswelt', mit der Konsequenz einer Pädagogik der Erhebung von der Natur zur Kultur im Sinne der Klassik und des Bildungsbürgertums, dekliniert Meysenbug bis zum Schluss durch. Der Einzelne, das Individuum *muss* sich selbst machen (Hegels Definition des Helden), selbst setzen (Fichte), und da es auf diesem Weg den Abgründen des Schicksals begegnet, muss es „kühn den Leidenskelch der Selbstschöpfung an die Lippen setzen.“¹⁸⁴

She helped Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), the Italian democratic revolutionary and one of the leading figures of the Risorgimento, to form a circle of politically active working-class men in London, which mainly consisted of craftsmen rather than factory workers, and she noticed the same level of pettiness, jealousy and egotistical ambition she had previously condemned in both the democratic and the socialist parties which had been formed by different factions among the exiles:

Im Anfang war ich freudigen Mutes bei der Sache. Je mehr ich aber hinging, desto

¹⁸³ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

mehr sank mein Mut. Ich sah ein, daß dieselben Elemente, denen ich mit Schmerz in den höheren Schichten der Partei begegnet war, sich auch hier vorfanden. Neid, Eifersucht, Egoismus, persönlicher Ehrgeiz mischten ihre unlautern Motive in das Streben nach Verständigung über die höchsten Ziele, nach Feststellung sittlich reiner Grundlagen für das bürgerliche und staatliche Leben und die Bestimmungen über Rechte und Pflichten. Und alles das trat um so widriger hervor, als es mit einem gewissen geckenhaften Bestreben verbunden war, aus der eignen Sphäre herauszutreten und mehr zu scheinen, als man war; ja wohl gar gegen die Damen eine gewisse plumpe Galanterie auszuüben, indem man völlig den edlen Ernst, der jene leitete, verkannte. Mit tiefem Schmerz fragte ich mich abermals: Ist das die Menschheit, die Masse, für die auch du dein Kreuz auf dich nahmst, und von deren Befreiung und Vollendung zu sittlicher Schöne du den höchsten Traum geträumt? Ich fühlte es manchmal wie Menschenverachtung durch mein Herz zucken.¹⁸⁵

These experiences, together with her studies of Schopenhauer's philosophy (which in turn were inspired by her first awkward meeting with Richard Wagner in London), contributed to von Meysenbug's shift towards an individualistic approach to democracy, and away from social-democratic rhetoric:

Zu einem Schluß führten mich jedoch diese Gedanken, nämlich daß wir, die wir alle Idole und falschen Götter zertrümmert zu haben meinten, uns freiwillig einen neuen Götzen geschaffen hatten: das Volk nämlich. »Das Volk« war der Refrain der demokratischen Phrase geworden, als wenn es ein Wesen höherer Art, eine bisher verkannte Gottheit sei, als wenn von ihm der Inhalt der neuen Weltlehre ausgehen und eine verklärtere Moral an die Stelle der alten gesetzt werden würde.¹⁸⁶

She then goes on to explain her reservations with regard to the common people and their all too easily manipulated behaviour in political situations, which is due to lack of education:

Was die Massen, das sogenannte Volk, in ihrem bisherigen Zustand waren, das

¹⁸⁵ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. III, p. 147-48.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 54.

hatten wir in den Jahren Achtundvierzig und Neunundvierzig gesehen: ein Werkzeug in den Händen geschickter Führer. Was sie mit der Freiheit anzufangen wußten, ohne dafür erzogen zu sein, das bewiesen die Plebiszite in Frankreich. Daß in diesen unwissenden brutalen Massen auch schöne menschliche Empfindungen, erhabne Tugenden, rührende Entsagung und Selbstverleugnung vorkommen, daß Talente aller Art dort im Keime vorhanden sein könnten, wer hätte es leugnen wollen?¹⁸⁷

Against this background, the claim of democracy to unify the people across social borders came, in von Meysenbug's eyes, too early. Before a real and working democracy can be installed, she sees the need to educate all people towards democratic goals, not only the working class with regard to their rights, but also the bourgeois and aristocratic classes with regard to their rights and duties towards the less fortunate parts of the population:

Worauf kam es also an? Nicht darauf, die rohe Masse, als solche, zur Herrschaft zu erheben, wie die Demokratie es ihr schmeichelnd versprach, sondern die Wege zu öffnen, die Rechte festzustellen, die Institutionen zu gestalten, damit Arbeit und Verdienst für alle da sein und in die dumpfe Öde der Lasttierexistenz der beglückende Strahl wahrer Bildung dringen könne. Dieses tat und tut, aber nicht nur nach unten, sondern auch nach oben hin, not, um alle Stände zu vereinen zu *einem* Volk, das sich in freudiger Anerkennung um seine Genien und Heroen schare und in ihrem segenspendenden Lichte beglückt lebe; wie es denn ja, nach dem Genius selbst, das größte ist, den Genius zu erkennen und zu lieben.¹⁸⁸

Von Meysenbug relocates this individualistic philosophy to the very beginning of her political awareness: Reuter shows how this philosophy evolves mainly during her time in England, but in writing retrospectively she links the seed of this point of view to the democratic revolution in Germany.¹⁸⁹ In this shift away from the masses and towards the individual Reuter sees the main contradiction, but he is also able to suggest how von

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., vol. III, p. 54.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., III, pp. 54-55.

¹⁸⁹ See quote above, *ibid.*, MeI III, p. 54.

Meysenbug came to focus on the glorified individual. It was barely possible to unify all the demands of the working class with the humanistic ideals of the bourgeoisie of her time, let alone the privileges of the aristocracy, so the possibility of true change in society must have lain with a different social group, or better, with a part that has already risen above society to some extent:

Das große Kulturwerk kann nach Meysenbug nur durch “große Menschen und große Herzen” ausgeführt werden. Sie richtet sich, wie gesagt, an den Idealmenschen der Griechen aus, in scheinbar unschuldiger, wörtlicher Übersetzung an den Besten, *aristoi*. In der Zeit von Mythos und von Epos ist dies der sein Leben einsetzende, kriegerische Heros, in den Zeiten der athenischen Demokratie der als “schön-gut” (*kalos kagathos*) bezeichnete Stadtbürger, der am öffentlichen Leben teilnimmt. In der Perspektive der Geschichtsphilosophie Hegels sind beide die ersten und mit die großartigsten Formen der Individualität. [...] Neben der romantischen Forderung nach einem heroischen Leben (Schopenhauer-Nietzsche) kann die bürgerliche Kulturelite gleichzeitig einen mittleren, vermittelten, medialen Typus anbieten, nämlich im späten 18. Jh. den Genius, oder das Genie, wozu eben der “Dichturfürst” gehört.¹⁹⁰

The most significant shift in von Meysenbug's philosophy indeed occurred after she turned towards Wagner and Schopenhauer's philosophy. The contacts she had in London to German emigrés, as well as to the Italian and Russian circles, seem to have disillusioned her in terms of her faith in political change through the participation in political parties. Wagner offers her the idea of the artist as a reforming, unifying power. Reuter points out that von Meysenbug treats this shift as a consequence, not of her disappointing experiences, but of her devotion to arts and culture. In this way, it seems that a change of political position is necessary: if the uneducated masses of the people cannot be improved by direct political action, then art has to function as an incentive, a role-model for

¹⁹⁰ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, pp. 305-06.

behaviour leading to self-improvement.¹⁹¹

Von Meysenbug's frequent reference to her political involvement and development, in one form or the other, and her method of elevating important political and aesthetic figures, anticipates even at early stages of the memoirs her eventual theoretical mindset of socio-political change, which is based mainly on the development of the individual. As stated previously, her theory comprised three vital ideas: each individual, whether man or woman, has the right to develop his or her potential according to the classical, humanistic ideals of the *Weltbürger* and *Bildung*; these ideal persons then become role models for the rest of society in order to better the current state of society and politics; finally, a nation which has thus been improved from within by role models who excel can then fulfil its role in world history by in turn improving other nations, so that every single nation can contribute its specific achievements to a truly unified Europe. Von Meysenbug had expressed this specific idea quite early on, in *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849).¹⁹²

Ein jedes dieser weltgeschichtlichen Individuen, ein jedes Volk, hat, seinen Anlagen gemäss, die Seite an sich auszubilden, durch die es als eine Erscheinung des Weltgeistes sich manifestiert und somit zu dessen Entwicklung und Veröffentlichung beiträgt; dieses ist seine historische Tat, seine Bedeutung in der Weltgeschichte. Diesen historischen Zweck immer klarer zu erkennen und ihn zum Zielpunkt seines nationalen Strebens zu machen, ist die historische Grösse [sic!] eines Volks. (p. 159)

This idea had yet to undergo significant development. Important factors in this development were mainly people von Meysenbug met in her lifetime. After the thwarted revolution of 1848, these were the people at the Hamburger Frauenhochschule, the truly international group of refugees she met in London, and then outstanding artists and philosophers such as Richard Wagner, Arthur Schopenhauer, Alexander von Warsberg,

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁹² Meysenbug, *Eine Reise nach Ostende* (1849).

Friedrich Nietzsche and Romain Rolland. As von Meysenbug's political philosophy is based firmly on the individual, all these exceptional persons provide ideas for her own philosophy as well as being influential role models for the improvement of society.

f. The novel *Phädra* (1885) – idealistic art or symbolic politics?

It is not quite clear when Malwida von Meysenbug started to write her longest literary text, the novel *Phädra*, but she finished it in 1884 and the first edition was published in 1885 by Carl Reißner in Leipzig.¹⁹³ A second edition was released posthumously in 1907 by her later, habitual publisher Schuster & Löffler in Berlin with a preface by Gabriel Monod.¹⁹⁴ The novel, at first published in three volumes, generated far less attention than the memoirs, and contemporary reviews are not available. The first book of *Phädra* narrates the first protagonist Alfred's adult life, the second book depicts his son Philipp's young adult life and is the core of the *Phädra* narrative. The third book finds the older Philipp in Corfu, where he wants to set up a society in the spirit of idealistic humanism. Reuter points out that von Meysenbug stated in a letter to Ruhl that she had received almost no feedback about this novel, which she saw as the peak of her literary creation.¹⁹⁵ Again, the point that has interested scholars most about *Phädra* is that it started a correspondence with an important man, in this case the Austrian diplomat Alexander von Warsberg, an expert on contemporary Greece and the traveling companion of Empress Elizabeth of Austria. Von Meysenbug herself describes in her memoirs how she needed a reliable source for the part of her novel that takes place in Corfu, and after a while she found von Warsberg's travelogue *Odyseeische Landschaften* (1878-79).¹⁹⁶ She based the descriptions of landscape and folklore on this text, and, a short while after the novel was

¹⁹³ Gaertringen, 'Malwida von Meysenbug und ihre Verleger'.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. In this study, quotes will be according to the second edition because it is the easier accessible one.

¹⁹⁵ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, p. 275.

¹⁹⁶ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, p. 405.

published, she received a letter from von Warsberg. Von Meysenbug repeats part of this letter in her memoirs: von Warsberg tells her how his bookseller in Vienna pointed *Phädra* out to him, as there were several passages in it that reminded him of von Warsberg's own book. According to the letter, von Warsberg devoured the book in one go and was quite impressed by it. In the ensuing correspondence, the two authors discussed the novel in various letters, including the political and moral notions it contained as well as von Meysenbug's writing style. Reuter gives a useful summary of the points of critique von Warsberg made, and reprints the most striking passages.¹⁹⁷ Von Warsberg praises the directness of her writing, the set-up of the characters and individual topics von Meysenbug brings up in the novel, especially her theories on education, but he does not agree with her stance on politics. While his statements betray a lot about his mindset with regard to writing women, he has a point when it comes to the practicability of von Meysenbug's socio-political ideas. He also agrees with her on the problem of her lack of formal education, a problem that von Meysenbug frequently bemoans in correspondence, and the resulting deficits in her style and composition:

Es ist überhaupt ein Vorteil der Frau, wenn sie gescheut ist und dann schriftstellert, daß alles an ihr origineller, neuer, eigentümlicher erscheint. Sie hat auch viel mehr den *courage de son opinion*, der in Wahrheit den Männern beinahe gänzlich fehlt. So war George Sand, so ist die Ouida in ihren besten Sachen, so finde ich nun Sie. Philosophisch freilich erscheinen Sie darum nie. Auch mit Ihrer Politik wären keine Staaten zu regieren. [...] Denn ich muß es Ihnen nur rundheraus sagen: Sie haben nicht gehalten, was die Memoiren anmelden. Ich glaube, Ihnen wie so mancher Frau wäre notwendig gewesen, daß ihr ein Mann ermutigend den Star steche, damit sie selbst sehe, wie viel sie wert ist, daß sie viel mehr in sich trägt, als sie bisher zur Welt gebracht. Das ist die Begattung, die doch beim Weibe in jeder Hinsicht zur Produktion erforderlich scheint.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, pp. 267-76.

¹⁹⁸ Letter dated 22.6.1886, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 269.

Later, after having read her novellas as well, von Warsberg sums up his criticism of the political tendencies in her literary production:

Meine Natur ist eine vorwiegend künstlerische, und da habe ich an Ihnen auszusetzen, daß sie unsauberen Zwecken gar oft, beinahe immer irgendwo, besonders gegen Schluß zu ein, mir die Haare sträubendes häßliches Opfer bringen. Wie schön wäre es, wenn Sie Ihre unangenehmen sozialistischen und politischen Erfahrungen nicht gemacht hätten und dadurch Ihre Natur immer in der ihr ursprünglich eigentümlichen Reinheit und künstlerischen Fülle bewahrt hätten. [...] So wie es jetzt ist, sieht es aus, als hätten Sie einen Schwur abgelegt, nichts zu schreiben, ohne nicht in jeder Schrift wenigstens einmal den politisch-sozialistischen Zwecken zu dienen; so daß die Kunst nur dienendes Mittel zum Zwecke ist.¹⁹⁹

Modern critics tend to agree with von Warsberg on the point of von Meysenbug's abilities as a writer of fiction rather than autobiography. As stated previously, the novel has received almost no scholarly attention so far. Reuter is very ready to dismiss von Meysenbug's literary oeuvre altogether:

In der heutigen Sichtweise sind die literarischen Produktionen Meysenbugs *unter literaturwissenschaftlichen Kriterien* ebenso unlesbar geworden wie etwa die des verehrten Gottfried Kinkel. Es handelt sich tatsächlich um die von ihr selbst befürchtete, blasse Gedankenkunst mit ihren Schemata, Typen, Schablonen, die zudem 'unzeitgemäß' und insofern unverkäuflich gewesen sind.²⁰⁰

Considering the elevated, at times sentimental style so typical of von Meysenbug's character descriptions in her memoirs as well as in her novel, this claim appears to be unjustified. There are certainly several weaknesses in the plot development, and the highly idealistic style does not provide an easy read; but dismissing the novel as unreadable is counterproductive to the attempt to understand von Meysenbug's political idea(s). Reuter does his best to discredit the novel with judgmental statements: '[...] dieses Werk [ist]

¹⁹⁹ Letter dated 17.5.1887, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 270-71.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 272 (italics in original).

durchgefallen'²⁰¹, '[d]ie Handlung ist obskur'²⁰², 'Sehr interessant ist, wie Gabriel Monod bei der Herausgabe des Romans 1905 [sic!] die story [sic!] anpreist'.²⁰³ It has to be granted that Reuter's focus is not on von Meysenbug's fiction; but the twenty-three lines Reuter reserves for an (also subliminally judgmental) plot summary of *Phädra's* 574 pages provide more a distortion of the text than potential access to analysis and interpretation.²⁰⁴ Apart from Reuter, only two scholars take the novel into account: Johannes Kistennich remarks that von Meysenbug gives a very positive depiction of handicraft in it and that the protagonist (Philipp) is an ideal embodiment of her pedagogic principles;²⁰⁵ and Karl-Heinz Nickel analyses von Meysenbug's use of letters in the novel as a structural element for key scenes.²⁰⁶

But if von Warsberg's opinion is an indicator for the reasons why *Phädra* was not so well received when first published, it was not because of what Reuter calls 'Idealismuskitsch',²⁰⁷ but on the contrary because of political tendencies too strong for contemporary taste! Another indicator for this reading is Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's opinion about the novel: 'Der Roman „Phädra“ von Malwida von Meysenbug konnte in den achtziger Jahren des vorigen Jahrhunderts lang keinen Verleger finden, weil er für unmoralisch erklärt wurde. In unseren Tagen würde höchstens seine Lehrhaftigkeit die Bedenken der Verleger erregen'.²⁰⁸ Against this background, an analysis of the novel with regard to both idealistic glorifications of characters and socio-political criticism can

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 273.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 273.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 274.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 273-74.

²⁰⁵ Johannes Kistennich, 'Malwida von Meysenbug als Erzieherin in Europa', *Briefe als Zeugnisse eines Frauenlebens : Malwida von Meysenbug und ihre Korrespondenzpartner : Beiträge zum Kolloquium des Nordrhein-Westfälischen Staatsarchivs Detmold, durchgeführt in Verbindung mit dem Naturwissenschaftlichen Verein für das Land Lippe e.V. am 24.-25.11.2000. Sonderveröffentlichungen des Naturwissenschaftlichen und Historischen Vereins für das Land Lippe 2003*, pp. 157-79, esp. p. 173.

²⁰⁶ Karl-Heinz Nickel, 'Die "Tagebücher meiner Seele". Der Brief im Werk Malwida von Meysenbugs.', *ibid.*, pp. 115-35, esp. pp. 134-35.

²⁰⁷ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratiegeschichte*, p. 272.

²⁰⁸ Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Meine Erinnerungen an Grillparzer. Aus einem zeitlosen Tagebuch* (Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1916), p. 114.

provide a valuable insight into how von Meysenbug put her own political philosophy into a literary text.

i. Meysenbug's modernization of *Phädra*

In the preface to the second edition Gabriel Monod remarks that the novel is based on a true story which happened in von Meysenbug's wider circle of acquaintances. He recounts this story in detail and it clearly provided that part of the novel that also borrows from the Greek myth of Phaedra. Monod also stresses the fact that von Meysenbug experienced the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 directly, as she was in Paris in 1869 and 1870, and also had connections to leading figures of the Commune. He concludes the prologue with a third defining feature of the novel: 'In diesem findet man also neben zahlreichen Gebilden der Phantasie auch viele psychologische aus der Wirklichkeit gegriffene Beobachtungen; und dieser selbst erlebte und beobachtete Teil des Romans „Phädra“ ist es, der ein ganz besonderes Leben ausstrahlt'.²⁰⁹ Reuter classifies the prologue dismissively as mere promotion of the story,²¹⁰ and while it certainly directs the reader's attention to a specific expectation, it also tries to invoke links to von Meysenbug's memoirs. Monod's remark that the novel is based on a true story relates the novel to von Meysenbug's autobiographical writing, in which she has already successfully presented historical events in an artistic way. The same applies for the depiction of the Paris Commune: von Meysenbug draws again on her own experiences, and readers already familiar with her memoirs know that she spent several years in a similar, close-knit community among the exiles in London, and thus a background knowledge of the memoirs might offer insights and comparisons. The psychological observations Monod points out relate to the frequent musings and indeed critical observations on events which make the memoirs such a

²⁰⁹ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Phädra* (2nd edn.; Berlin, Leipzig: Schuster & Löffler, 1907), p. XI.

²¹⁰ Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, p. 274.

fascinating account and historical document. Evoking these similarities between *Phädra* and the memoirs serves, on one hand, of course to promote the novel, as do the recurring references to von Meysenbug's strength as an autobiographical author; on the other hand, it also links the two texts structurally, giving rise to the question of whether *Phädra* can be read as a companion piece to the memoirs.

Although the title suggests a female protagonist, the main focus of the novel is on two male protagonists, Alfred and his son Philipp. Alfred is a young nobleman of both German and French ancestry who lives in Paris. In his youth he fell in love with the farmer's daughter Margarethe who became pregnant and gave birth to their son Philipp. Alfred wanted to marry her but, after being subtly manipulated by his mother, he grew apart from her and fell in love with Bianka, a young and beautiful lady with an extraordinary talent for music. At the beginning of the novel, Alfred receives a letter from Margarethe in which she tells him that she intends to marry her childhood friend Martin, a carpenter, and she begs him to accept her decision and to leave their son with her. Although Alfred still feels responsible for both Margarethe and Philipp, he is relieved that Margarethe has taken the decision out of his hands. He marries Bianka but still cares for his illegitimate son: he sends a regular sum of money to Margarethe for Philipp's education, and frequently rides out to the countryside to visit his son in his stepfather's house. Bianka knows about this arrangement but forbids Alfred to mention his son to her, and later she also refuses to let the teenage Philipp visit his father in Paris. But their own marriage remains childless, and Alfred yearns more and more to bring his son into his own house in order to give him the further education and upbringing that he thinks Philipp is entitled to as his son. Over this issue the marriage breaks down; they do not divorce but live separately. Alfred finally decides to acknowledge his son and persuades Margarethe, Martin and Philipp to move to Paris. At this point, Alfred's half-brother Marcel (himself unknowingly an illegitimate child of Alfred's mother Claudine and her former suitor, the

Baron August) makes advances to Bianka and tries to win her favour. When Alfred eventually finds them playing music together and obviously flirting, he has a final falling out with Bianka. He realises the potential humiliations Philipp might experience when people become aware of his status as an illegitimate child, and decides to send him to a college in England for his further education. Alfred and Bianka stay together for appearances' sake but become more and more estranged. Marcel eventually marries a rich young heiress and vanishes for a long part of the plot. Alfred busies himself with social democratic politics while Bianka supports the conservative attitude of the monarchy. The first book ends with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, and Alfred's decision to join the ambulance corps of the French army.

The second book begins with Philipp's return to Paris shortly after the war has ended. He had left England and joined a volunteer corps to fight in the siege of Paris. His stepfather Martin has become a member of the Commune's national guard, and a drunkard. During the following weeks the combats between regular French soldiers and the national guard increase, and Philipp works as a prison guard in order to try and save as many people as possible. One night, Martin goes missing and Philipp makes his way through the city in search for him. He encounters an execution squad, among them two women, who have shot Dominican monks in the streets. When he stops one of the women, a prostitute, from shooting a priest, she in turn saves his life by pretending to be his lover and getting him away from the rest of the fanatical execution squad. When they have safely arrived at the prostitute's room she tries to seduce Philipp, but he is repulsed by her unrefined, purely sexual approach and flees. Because he still wears his uniform and carries weapons, Philipp is in danger of being shot in the increasingly chaotic Paris, and he has to leave the city. With the passport of a friend from college he passes himself off as the Englishman Arthur, and wanders north until he reaches the sea coast, where he breaks down from exhaustion in a cave at the beach. He is saved by a mysterious, beautiful woman who brings him into the

house of her noble grand-aunt. While he recovers from his experiences in the war he falls in love with this woman who calls herself Madeleine. After several weeks they spend their first night together in the same cave in which Madeleine had found the unconscious Philipp/Arthur, but on the next morning Alfred appears on the beach. Alfred has returned from the war and was searching for Philipp when he was directed to the grand-aunt's castle. Once Alfred sees Madeleine, he unmaskes her as Bianka. Philipp breaks down again at this discovery and Bianka commits suicide. But in contrast to the original myth, in which Phaedra calculatingly kills herself to bring her husband Theseus's wrath down on her stepson Hippolytos, who is then subsequently cursed by his father and dragged behind his chariot to his death, Bianka leaves a suicide note for Alfred in which she takes all responsibility and guilt upon herself. Alfred keeps her death secret from Philipp and takes him to Italy so he can recover. After a year, Philipp learns of Bianka's suicide and he decides to travel to India in expiation of his sins; he also wants to learn about the roots of European civilisation, and hopes to redeem himself by following the ideals of classical humanism.

The third book sees the older Philipp coming back from his travels through India and Egypt and stopping in Athens, where he hopes to meet his father again. On the ship that brings him to Athens he meets the young Count Walther, who was in Egypt as a tourist and is now on his way back to his uncle's home in Athens. He confides in Philipp that he hopes to marry his younger cousin who also lives with his uncle. Philipp is invited to visit them in Athens, and it turns out that the cousin's name is not only Bianka,²¹¹ but that she has also read and treasures Philipp's epic poem with the title 'Phädra', which he had written in Italy just before his travels. Philipp decides not to reveal himself as the author of the poem: firstly, because he does not want to interfere with Walther's hopes of marriage, even though Philipp himself falls in love with young Bianka and she has vowed to love

²¹¹ I will refer to her as young Bianka in the following to avoid confusion.

only the unknown author of this poem; but, secondly, as it turns out that Count Walther is also in friendly contact with Baron Marcel, who could reveal the true story behind the poem. Marcel has become the French envoy while Philipp was in India, and lives with his wife Emilie in Athens. Philipp becomes a frequent visitor to Marcel's home until Emilie falls in love with him and one day tries to persuade him to elope with her. He refuses and manages to avoid a scandal but decides after this to wait for the arrival of his father in Corfu. Once in Corfu Philipp decides to settle down. He buys land in a rural community, has his manor built by local craftsmen, and starts educating the adult children of a poor fisherman's family, Jani and Alexandra. His father agrees to meet him there rather than in Athens, once his business allows him to travel. When his manor is finished, Philipp invites the whole village to a big celebration, and by chance Count Walther and young Bianka arrive on the same day in Corfu and surprise Philipp with the festivities in full swing. In the final passages of the novel, Walther falls in love with Alexandra and Philipp reveals himself to young Bianka as the author of 'Phädra'. The only obstacle now is Philipp's status as an illegitimate child; but soon after, Alfred and Margarethe arrive. Alfred informs Philipp that he has finally married Margarethe, after Martin had died after being deported for his involvement in the Paris commune, and thus Philipp is fully legitimised. The end of the novel sees Philipp anticipating his marriage to young Bianka and receiving a last letter from Emilie, who has reconciled herself with Marcel and now strives to educate their children with Philipp as her guiding example.

ii. Embedded political ideas

From the very beginning, von Meysenbug connects the main topic of her novel, the fate of illegitimate children, with the myth of Phaedra, insofar as the rejection of the unknown, illegitimate son gives rise to the tragic development of the story in the first place.

Additionally, several characters of the novel voice critical positions towards a variety of social problems vividly present in von Meysenbug's time, and in the end most of those points of critique are tied into the emergence of the new ideal role model. It has already been said that Philipp is the embodiment of von Meysenbug's educational ideals – but these ideals also have a political dimension, both directly in the text and in the greater context of von Meysenbug's world-view. It is no coincidence that the main characters belong to the aristocracy; as Reuter points out, von Meysenbug sees the nobleman who takes up the responsibilities that arise from his privileged position as having the biggest potential, and also the necessary means (of education as well as financial means), to reform society towards the goal of a more refined, genteel society and, in the end, to enable a democratic nation.²¹² Philipp is depicted from the very beginning as an extraordinary person, even when he enters the story as a child at the first meeting with his father:

Die Tür wurde in diesem Augenblick aufgerissen und ein wunderschöner Knabe von etwa acht Jahren sprang lachend in das Zimmer und versteckte sich hastig hinter der Schürze Margarethens. [...] „O Gott, ist das“ – rief Alfred und stockte. „Das ist Philipp,“ sagte sie und zog den Knaben hervor. „Dieser Cherub ist mein Sohn?“ rief Alfred und Tränen entstürzten [sic] seinen Augen.²¹³

The child is furthermore described as being very intelligent, mild-mannered, and loving towards his mother and stepfather; he also develops a very strong and cordial relationship with Alfred. Philipp grows up in the house of his mother and stepfather, where he becomes very interested in carpentry, as this is his stepfather's occupation; at the same time, he receives formal schooling with a private tutor Alfred has hired for him. In Martin's workshop Philipp also comes into contact with other craftsmen who discuss socio-democratic ideas; the depiction of this circle and Philipp's reaction towards their ideas is, as mentioned previously, very positive:

²¹² Reuter, 1848, *Malwida von Meysenbug und die europäische Demokratieggeschichte*, pp. 305-06.

²¹³ Malwida von Meysenbug, *Phädra* (2nd edn.; Berlin, Leipzig: Schuster & Löffler, 1907), pp. 21 and 28.

Der aufwachsende Jüngling, den Martin mit Ideen über die notwendig zu erfolgende Ausglei chung der furchtbaren Unterschiede des sozialen Lebens, der Freiheit und Brüderlichkeit, genährt hatte, - folgte mit glühendem Interesse den Verhandlungen, die da abends geführt wurden, und überraschte die Versammelten oft durch einen Ausruf der Begeisterung oder des Mitgeföhls, wenn von den Hoffnungen oder den Entbehrungen des Volkes die Rede war. Alle liebten den schönen Menschen, der wie ein junger Halbgott zwischen den bärtigen Männern mit den schwieligen Händen erschien. Sie hielten ihn für Martins Sohn, und wenn sich einer mal wunderte, warum der Knabe eine so hohe Bildung erhalte, so sagte Martin: „Warum soll der Handwerksmann nicht auch gebildet sein? Und wenn der Junge zu anderm bestimmt ist, so muss doch alles in ihm dafür vorbereitet sein.“²¹⁴

Here, von Meysenbug connects the image of a socio-democratic circle, perceived as potentially dangerous, with the image of the more traditional craftsmen (and not, for example, with the bourgeois politician), who discuss contemporary affairs with a sense of their own responsibility. She also transports the notion that education should not be restricted to certain social classes, and finally, that a person should be educated in order to find out, and follow, their own individual potential. This ties in with von Meysenbug's strongest demand discussed previously in the context of her memoirs, that each person should have the right to develop their individuality regardless of social class or gender. The very positive description of the craftsmen's circle provides also an ideal version of the one von Meysenbug tried to establish in London,²¹⁵ a version in which each member acts only in the interest of the democratic idea, and not to his own advantage.

In what follows, Philipp receives further education that is more in line with traditional aristocratic habits, when he is sent to a college in England. Although his time there is not narrated explicitly, he gives a short account of it when he meets Margarethe again in Paris; but this time it is not a tale of political but of personal development. He tells

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 140-41.

²¹⁵ See Ashton, *Little Germany*, pp. 209-10.

his mother how he became aware of what his status as an illegitimate child actually means in comparison with his fellow students, and how this brought him into conflict with the most important people in his life when he asked his father about it. Notably, this is also the only scene in which Philipp utters a feeling of hatred towards another person, which of course adds to the Phädra story which is about to develop:

Von dir sprach er [Alfred] mit liebevoller Anerkennung; dann aber erzählte er mir das Verhängnis seines Lebens und wie meine Existenz der Grund geworden war, an dem das Lebensglück, das er von jener stolzen Egoistin [Bianka] erhofft habe, gescheitert sei. O, diese Frau, Welch ein steinernes Herz muss sie haben! Wie ich sie hasse, die zwischen uns allen wie die Medusa steht und mit ihrer Starrheit die Blüte von drei Leben versteinert hat, von Papas, von deinem, von meinem. [...] Wohl mir, dass ich bei dir aufwuchs, sonst hätte vieles mich vielleicht schlecht gemacht. Aber deine kindliche Frauenseele hat auch die meine in Unschuld und Güte bewahrt. Jetzt hoffe ich, habe ich Kraft genug, dem Bösen und aller Versuchung zu widerstehen.“ [...] Durch seine Seele wogten stürmische und schmerzliche Gedanken. Seine eigene zwitterhafte Stellung im Leben ging mit bitterer Empfindung an seinem Geist vorüber. Zwar musste er sich sagen, dass er begünstigter sei als tausend andere, die gleich ihm kein legales Vaterhaus hätten, aber doch war es seiner reinen Jünglingsseele ein herber Schmerz, Vater und Mutter nicht in einer Liebe verschmelzen zu können. Den Vater, den er so heiss liebte und der sein Unrecht so edel gut gemacht hatte, musste er dennoch, der Mutter gegenüber, anklagen [...].²¹⁶

Here von Meysenbug takes up the topic of the illegitimate child again, after she has already introduced it in the very first pages not only as a personal problem (Margarethe's rejection of Alfred in her letter) but also on a political level: Alfred has written a political pamphlet in which he advocates the legal equality of all children, legitimate or not. This pamphlet and its contents are only mentioned, and discussed only indirectly in the novel, but when Philipp asks his father about his illegitimate status Alfred sends him this very pamphlet to

²¹⁶ Meysenbug, *Phädra*, p. 203-05.

show him how he fought for his son's rights not only in his own marriage but on a grander scale in order to improve the situation of all illegitimate children. Again, this scheme corresponds to von Meysenbug's idea of political involvement: if there is an injustice in the law itself, it is the noble task of the person who gains an advantage from this injustice to ease the situation as far as possible by his own means, but at the same time it is an even nobler task to take it up with the unjust authorities in order to change the current state. It is quite telling for von Meysenbug's own experiences with political writings and agitation through writing that, although Alfred's pamphlet gets mentioned now and then throughout the novel and receives due respect from various characters, it does not actually change the legal situation. In the end, Alfred has to resort to traditional means (i.e. marrying Margarethe) to legitimise his son. This can be read as von Meysenbug's subtle critique of revolutionary writing which, though it might bring important points to public debate, lacks the necessary action she sees as an early central point of her own political agenda ('Idealismus der Tat').

Philipp's development towards the ideal member of society his father wants him to become ('Doch wenn ich der Menschheit wenigstens ein vollkommenes Mitglied erziehen könnte, so wäre das die Sühne für meine Schuld und ich hätte das meinige für sie getan')²¹⁷ is overshadowed not only by his illegitimate status but also by the affair he has with his stepmother Bianka, unaware of their relationship. In order to maintain Philipp's high moral standards in the causality of the narration, von Meysenbug has to alter Bianka's depiction which leads to an interesting, two-sided characterisation: at first, she is the inherently good but spoiled and, as a consequence, proud society lady who adheres to the strict and destructive moral values of high society; when Philipp meets her again unknowingly, she is not exactly an innocent victim of circumstances, but the wrongfully hurt wife of a stubborn man who just cannot understand her agony at knowing herself to be married to a man who

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

had strayed away from exactly those virtues, endangering her own status as well. The way out of Phädra's dilemma for Bianka is death, but in contrast to the original myth she does not kill herself to bring her husband's punishment on his son, but in repentance for her previous coldness and pride, as she explains in a last letter to Alfred:

Sie waren offen gegen mich und Sie wollten das Vergehen der Jugend gut machen. Ich glaubte, dass unbefleckte Tugend höher sei als erbarmende, mitleidsvolle Liebe – das war mein Irrtum und dies Geständnis ist meine Sühne. Leben Sie wohl, retten Sie sich dem Sohn, retten Sie *ihn* dem Ideal! Dass diese schöne Gestalt sich nie beflecke mit gemeinem Glück!²¹⁸

For Philipp, although the possibility of suicide is hinted at as well, the outcome of the catastrophe is his painful transformation into one of von Meysenbug's ideal constructs, the artistic genius. Philipp's recovery from his breakdown after having learned his lover's true identity takes place in Italy; one night, he asks his father to accompany him in climbing Vesuvius which has become active during their stay. On the top of the mountain, he asks Alfred about Madeleine's/Bianka's fate; after hearing about her suicide and her last letter, he understands her sacrifice in a religious context, and also understands himself as saved from guilt:

Der Jüngling schwieg und Alfred sah nur, beim Schein der unterirdischen Flammen, dass eine Träne langsam über seine Wangen rollte. Plötzlich aber rief er, indem er die Hand wie abwehrend gegen den flammenden Schlund ausstreckte: „Schweigt, Dämonen der Nacht, ihr seid besiegt! Du aber, reines Licht,“ rief er, sich gegen den Mond wendend, der eben in ruhiger Klarheit hinter einer Wolke hervortrat und das Land zu ihren Füßen mit Silberglanz überstrahlte, - „sei begrüßt als ein Bote der Versöhnung; ihr, leuchtende Sterne, singt in in [sic] Himmelschören droben: ‚Friede sei auf Erden! Die Liebe erlöse endlich die Menschheit vom Übel und die heiligende Tat nehme die Schuld von uns‘. Vater,“ fuhr er fort, indem er des Vaters Hand ergriff und ihn fortzog, „komm, komm! Fort – fort von den Geistern der Tiefe – fort zur erlösenden Tat!“ [...] Tief gerührt und

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 328.

beglückt staunte Alfred den schönen Sohn an, der, Begeisterung im Auge, mit flammenden Wangen, einem Halbgott gleich, vor ihm stand.²¹⁹

The redemptive act, it turns out, is Philipp's composition of the poem 'Phädra'. The religious connotation goes even further, when Alfred reads the poem he remarks: 'Deine „Phädra“ ist ein göttliches Gedicht; ein neues Evangelium, das von der Schuld erlöst und die wahre Liebe lehrt'.²²⁰ The implications of this terminology are staggering, and show perhaps the strongest allusions to von Meysenbug's social as well as political ideals: this social ideal sees Bianka in the role of Philipp's (Christ-like) saviour. Philipp is only now, through her sacrifice, enabled to create a new, better world, first in writing, then, as the novel progresses, also as the idealistic role model into which he develops during his travels, thus becoming the apostle of Bianka's sacrifice for love and true *Bildung*. It is a common topos in literature that the woman dies while the man repents, especially if the woman has become guilty in one form or another; von Meysenbug's take on this topos reflects her idea of an enabling power in women, which can and has to be used for the betterment of society, but, obviously, with Bianka's death von Meysenbug fulfills the topos according to the patriarchal requirements of the literary image, and not in a progressive spirit.

It is safe to assume that von Meysenbug knew Jean Racine's play *Phèdre* (1677), either the original version or the German translation made by Friedrich Schiller in 1805, based on the version of the myth recorded by Euripides.²²¹ Von Meysenbug slightly adjusted the setting for her version of the story: Bianka has not met Philipp before they meet in her grand-aunt's home, and her motivation for previously avoiding him lies not in her desire for him, but in a misplaced sense of virtue which led her to shun her husband's

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 340-41.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 343.

²²¹ Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, ed. Edward D. James and Gillian Jondorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), Friedrich von Schiller, *Phädra. Trauerspiel. Übersetzt von Friedrich von Schiller* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1805).

illegitimate child. Racine lets the tragedy unfold even though Phèdre never acts on her love for Hippolytus – as Watanabe-O’Kelly points out, Phèdre’s desire, her display of sexuality, is enough to set the tragedy in motion.²²² In contrast, von Meysenbug lets Bianka consummate her desire for Philipp, but this manifestation of her sexuality is immediately punished by Bianka taking her own life by throwing herself off a cliff into the sea, like Phèdre’s servant Oenone. In Bianka’s case, the sacrifice is great because of the immense and tragic entanglement in guilt, but in the end it results in a role model that is fit to restructure society in its closer environment. In *Phädra*, von Meysenbug takes her ideal of the mother who raises and educates her children for the improvement of the state to a metaphysical level: although Bianka is not Philipp’s biological mother and did not educate him as a child, it is her suffering and sacrifice that brings his true, ideal personality into the world – the birth of an artist (the poem ‘Phädra’) as well as in the formation of a new, idealistic society (Philipp’s improving influence on everyone he meets in the last book of the novel, and the settlement in Corfu). It is thus no coincidence that the part of the plot which gives the novel its name ends with the emergence of the ideal role model: von Meysenbug puts her focus on the role women play in the improvement of society in her very own, idiosyncratic way, namely as powerful enablers (of men). Strikingly, it appears that women’s sexuality does not have a place in von Meysenbug’s ideal society; on the contrary, only through Bianka’s death, as penance for her desire, is it possible for Philipp to undergo the last, necessary transformation. In the incarnation of young Bianka, von Meysenbug places her idea of a progressive woman at Philipp’s side: young Bianka is able to subordinate her sexuality in favour of an idealised, abstract love for the (to her) unknown author of the poem ‘Phädra’. Only when this abstract love is proven true and pure is young Bianka allowed to fall in love with Philipp, the embodiment and enactor of

²²² See Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, 'Tod und Weiblichkeit. Phädra - Weibliche Identität zwischen Göttern und Männern', *Programmheft zu 'Phädra'* (Salzburger Festspiele, 2010).

the ideal concepts she loves for their own sake. Throughout the third book, the origin of Philipp's ideal individuality is always present, just as Theseus's presence is felt throughout the whole play by Racine, as Watanabe-O'Kelly points out:²²³ the poem 'Phädra' functions as a connection between Philipp and young Bianka, who is marked as his worthy counterpart in her unwavering loyalty and sympathy to the, to her unknown, author and his fate. If Theseus fails as husband, father, and ruler in Racine's play, as Watanabe-O'Kelly analyses it, Bianka/Phädra succeeds, not as wife and mother, but as 'ruler': in her memory, and through her transforming sacrifice, Philipp's idealized society takes shape in Greece (though on Corfu, not Crete). All that is necessary for women, von Meysenbug seems to say, is to set aside their interest in the well-trodden path of marriage, family, and not least sexuality, in order to become the second half of a new society. Only if women are able to extricate themselves from society's expectations that they seek fulfilment in marriage and motherhood, and from their own desires in the same direction as well as physical desires, will they be able to be a formative force – like young Bianka at Philipp's side, and, not least, von Meysenbug for the development of the German women's movement.

The novel *Phädra* and von Meysenbug's memoirs are similar when it comes to the author's political philosophy. In both texts, education forms the basis on which individuality grows and takes shape; in both texts, difficult social positions (Philipp with the stigma of illegitimacy, von Meysenbug in the restricted gender roles of her time) and the attempt to change them results in conflicts (Alfred's and Bianka's estrangement, von Meysenbug's estrangement from her family). Finally, in both texts a role model emerges from life's trials and tribulations, and prevailing prejudices are rebuked in favour of a society which encompasses the possibility of individuals beyond the conservative norms: Philipp is living proof that an illegitimate child is no less capable of leading an exemplary life and thus eliminating the social stigma of a sinful being, and von Meysenbug herself

²²³ See *ibid.*

shows that it is possible for a woman to overcome the imperative of conservative gender roles and to lead a fulfilled life (although von Meysenbug concludes her *Phädra* without having made this point for young Bianka's course of life):

Daß die Frau um ihrer heiligsten Überzeugung willen einen ebenso treuen Kampf kämpfen und um ihretwillen die Schranken der Verhältnisse durchbrechen könne, so gut wie der Mann – diese meine Ansicht war nicht Theorie geblieben, ich hatte sie verwirklicht. Daß ferner die Frau auf sich selbst ruhen und sich eine ehrenhafte Stellung durch Arbeit und achtunggebietendes Leben erwerben könne – auch hierin war ich meinen ausgesprochenen Grundsätzen treu geblieben.²²⁴

²²⁴ Meysenbug, *Memoiren einer Idealistin und ihr Nachtrag: Der Lebensabend einer Idealistin*, vol. III, p. 184.

Chapter 4

Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Fighting and Writing for the Motherland

Mathilde Franziska Anneke née Giesler was born in Ober-Leveringhausen, which today is called Sprockhövel, on 3 April 1817.²²⁵ She received a thorough education from private tutors, and was always encouraged to read what interested her by her parents and family friends.²²⁶ Her family moved first to the town of Blankenstein in 1820, which Anneke calls her hometown in her unfinished and unpublished autobiography,²²⁷ and later to Hattingen in 1834. Here Anneke met her first husband, the wealthy wine merchant Alfred von Tabouillot. They married in 1836 and in 1837 Anneke gave birth to her first daughter Johanna, called Fanny. The marriage was unhappy and Anneke moved first to Wesel in 1837, then to Münster in 1839 while awaiting her divorce. Annette Hanschke has corrected some of the historical errors about Anneke's divorce which took effect in 1841, not 1843 as several publications state.²²⁸ The trial went through three levels of jurisdiction and lasted from 1838 to 1841. It ended with Anneke being judged the guilty party, despite evidence of Tabouillot's abuse and cruelty towards her. Unusually, Anneke retained custody of her daughter, but, as the guilty party, she had no claim to financial support from Tabouillot for herself or her child.²²⁹ In Münster, Anneke earned her living by writing for local newspapers. Additionally, in the years between 1839 and 1846 she edited and published two prayer books and three almanacs, all rather conservative and in tune with the prevalent Biedermeier style, and she even wrote a play that was staged in Münster with

²²⁵ The biographical data is taken from Maria Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), Manfred Gebhardt, *Mathilda Franziska Anneke. Madame, Soldat und Suffragette. Biografie* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1988), and Klaus Schmidt, *Mathilde Franziska und Fritz Anneke. Aus der Pionierzeit von Demokratie und Frauenbewegung* (Köln: Schmidt von Schwind, 1999).

²²⁶ See Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, pp. 17-19.

²²⁷ Reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 20-28.

²²⁸ Annette Hanschke (ed.), *Frauen und Scheidung im Vormärz: Mathilde Franziska Anneke. Ein Beitrag zum Scheidungsrecht und zur Scheidungswirklichkeit von Frauen im landrechtlichen Preußen* (Geschichte in Köln, 34; Köln: Janus Verlagsgesellschaft, 1993) 67-98.

²²⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

some success.²³⁰ She also came into contact with Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, but it appears that the famous poet preferred to avoid her because of her status as a divorced woman. In some of her letters to her mother Droste-Hülshoff also harshly criticised Anneke's writing abilities as well as her general appearance and personality, which she considered 'bloodless'.²³¹ From 1845, her journalistic writings started to develop a more political character, which consequently led to a decline in Anneke's public support. She withdrew more and more from polite society and turned towards like-minded people of the democratic opposition in the so-called *Kommunistenklub*, where she met her second husband, Fritz Anneke. He was a former Prussian officer who had been discharged because of his democratic views. They married in 1847 and moved to Cologne soon afterwards. There they continued to involve themselves in democratic circles: together they founded Cologne's *Demokratischer Arbeiterverein*, with Fritz Anneke becoming one of its main agitators. Mathilde wrote her first political pamphlet in 1847 in response to Louise Aston's expulsion from Berlin, becoming one of the few voices to defend Aston.²³² In 1848, Anneke started to edit and publish her own newspaper, the *Neue Kölnische Zeitung*. While her husband was nominally the editor, Anneke was in fact doing all the work, as Fritz Anneke was arrested and imprisoned for his democratic engagement in the *Arbeiterverein* even before the first edition was written or published. Anneke kept the newspaper going even when the city came under siege, and she herself was heavily pregnant. When the newspaper was forbidden and confiscated by the censors after only a few weeks, Anneke went on with her work, but concealed the newspaper behind the title *Frauen-Zeitung*. She thus published the first political women's paper in Germany, even if, as Marion Freund points out, the choice of title was a rather half-hearted attempt to convince the censors of

²³⁰ Mathilde Franziska von Tabouillot, *Oithono oder Die Tempelweihe* (Wesel, 1842).

²³¹ See Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, p. 29.

²³² Mathilde Franziska Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen', in Susan L. Piepke (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist* (2006; New York: Peter Lang, 1847).

its redundancy.²³³ However, as Anneke herself predicted in the editorial of the first edition, this newspaper was short-lived as well and it saw only three editions before it was again confiscated by the censors. Anneke gave birth to her son Fritz in July 1848 and in November, after the siege of Cologne was lifted, Anneke was able to start the newspaper again under its previous name. Her husband Fritz was released from prison in December 1848 and in May 1849, when the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, the newspaper edited by Karl Marx, was closed down, her newspaper became its successor. Marx explicitly asked his readers and journalists to direct all inquiries and contributions to Anneke as the editor of the *Neue Kölnische Zeitung*.²³⁴ Also in May 1849, Fritz Anneke travelled to Baden in order to join the volunteer corps and support the revolution, then still in its infancy. Anneke followed him in June and participated in the ensuing campaign as a mounted messenger. After the revolution failed, they had to flee the country and went first to Strasbourg and then Switzerland, although they eventually emigrated to the United States. There they moved from New York to Milwaukee where there was a large German community. Fritz Anneke worked at first in several different jobs, whereas Anneke continued writing for different newspapers, searched for a publisher for her *Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge*,²³⁵ and gave lectures in Milwaukee about contemporary German literature. In 1853, Fritz Anneke started the first German newspaper in the United States, the *Newarker Zeitung*, and Mathilde founded the first German-speaking newspaper for women in America, the *Deutsche Frauen-Zeitung*.²³⁶ This time the title was not a camouflage and she concerned herself with questions regarding women's legal and social

²³³ See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, p. 55.

²³⁴ For a detailed historical and topical analysis of Anneke's newspapers see Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, pp. 35-50 and Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 47-65.

²³⁵ Mathilde Franziska Anneke, *Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge* (Newark, 1853). Reprinted in Tende (ed.), *Mutterland. Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge* (1982; Münster: Tende, 1848/49).

²³⁶ See Schmidt, *Mathilde Franziska und Fritz Anneke. Aus der Pionierzeit von Demokratie und Frauenbewegung*.

situation in her new homeland, but also focused on the prominent discussion of slavery.²³⁷ Anneke firmly took the position of political emancipation for both slaves and women, which brought her into contact with such early American feminists as Susan B. Anthony, Elisabeth Cady Stanton, and Ernestine Rose. In September 1853, Anneke spoke at a women's convention for the first time, with Ernestine Rose as her interpreter, and was subsequently invited to tour the large cities of the East Coast with her talks on women's suffrage, equal education, and social change towards a truly democratic America. In 1858, Anneke met the American poet Mary Booth, who became her closest friend and literary collaborator. In 1859, Fritz Anneke went back to Europe as a journalist observer of the Italian War of Independence and later in the year Anneke followed him with their children and Mary Booth. They settled in Switzerland but, when the Civil War began in the United States in 1861, Fritz Anneke went back to join the Union army in the hopes of reaching the rank of general. Mathilde stayed in Switzerland until the war ended in 1865, growing more and more estranged from her husband. She wrote for several German-speaking newspapers about the war and politics in America, and also published short stories on abolitionist topics, as well as translating a novel by an unidentified author.²³⁸ Anneke went back to Milwaukee in 1865 and founded a school, the *Milwaukee Töchter-Institut*, together with her friend Cäcilie Kapp, while Fritz Anneke, disillusioned after the war, lived in Chicago and worked for a trust that helped German settlers to buy land. Anneke's school offered a syllabus that was rather uncommon for a school for girls, as it included mathematics and natural sciences, and in this differed greatly from the more common form of *Höhere*

²³⁷ See Marion Freund, 'Mathilde Franziska Anneke und Louise Otto-Peters. Zwei Wege in die Frauenbewegung - Amerika / Deutschland', in Johanna Ludwig, Susanne Schötz, and Hannelore Rothenburg (eds.), *Louise-Otto-Peters-Jahrbuch II / 2006* (25; Beucha, Leipzig: Sax-Verlag, 2007), 134-48.

²³⁸ Mathilde Franziska Anneke, *Das Geisterhaus in New York* (Jena und Leipzig: Hermann Costenoble, 1864), Mathilde Franziska Anneke, 'Die gebrochenen Ketten', *Milwaukee Herald*, (Juli 1864), Mathilde Franziska Anneke, 'Die Sklaven-Auction', *Didaskalia*, Nr. 174 (June 1862). Reprinted in Maria Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten. Erzählungen, Reportagen und Reden (1861-1873)*, ed. Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgarter Nachdrucke zur Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, vol. 11; Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 1983).

Töchterschule, in which education usually revolved around domestic and social skills.²³⁹ After the first financially hard years, the school became very successful and was in high demand, so that Anneke could live modestly from the income from this and from her journalistic articles and speeches for women's and abolitionists' conventions. In 1872, Fritz Anneke died in an accident in Chicago. Although he and Mathilde had lived separately, they had remained in regular contact, and she was devastated by his death. Anneke continued to write and speak publicly for the American Women's Movement until 1880, when she made her last appearance at the women's convention in Milwaukee. In 1884, her early play, *Oithono*, was staged anew in Milwaukee, where, in contrast to its modest success in Germany, it was received with great acclaim. Mathilde Franziska Anneke died in Milwaukee on 25 November 1884 and, although many obituaries criticised her stance on women's rights as too revolutionary or even absurd, all lauded her journalistic contributions to, and her importance for the development of, American society.²⁴⁰

a. Early political writings

Anneke's first independent political publication was the vindication *Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen*, published in 1847 in reaction to Louise Aston's expulsion from Berlin.²⁴¹ The original manuscript and the printed brochure are lost today, but in addition to Susan Piepke's English translation, there is a typewritten copy in the archive of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, USA, and a microfilm copy of the same typescript in the *FrauenMediaTurm* archive in Cologne.²⁴² Excerpts from the

²³⁹ See Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, p. 308.

²⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 413-15 and Freund, 'Mathilde Franziska Anneke und Louise Otto-Peters. Zwei Wege in die Frauenbewegung - Amerika / Deutschland'.

²⁴¹ Reprinted in English translation in Susan L. Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 26-40.

²⁴² Mathilde Franziska Anneke, "'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen'" in: Nachlaß Mathilde Franziska und Fritz Anneke', *Anneke-Papers* (Box 6 Folder 7 (1847); Madison, USA: Archive of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1791-1884a) and Mathilde Franziska Anneke, "'Das Weib im Conflict mit

pamphlet have been published by Wagner, and these are usually the sources found in scholarly publications about and biographies of Anneke.²⁴³

In this pamphlet, Anneke takes up Louise Aston's defence after her own vindication *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* had been published in 1846.²⁴⁴ Anneke repeats the events and circumstances which led to Aston's interrogation and subsequent expulsion, following Aston's account very closely, but then uses Aston's particular case to point out the general injustices and social double standards that women encounter, usually explicitly addressing the women among her readership. Anneke continues to analyse Aston's first volume of poetry, *Wilde Rosen*,²⁴⁵ in the manner of a character sketch of the author and concludes that those poems do not appear to come from a potentially dangerous woman, as the authorities in Berlin might believe, but quite the reverse:

Ein poetisches Kunstproduct laesst uns in der Regel nicht zu einer bestimmten Klarheit ueber den Gegenstand, den es behandelt, gelangen. Aus den eben analysirten Gedichten aber haben wir diesmal mehr als die *Ahnung* eines verfehlten Lebens und einer verfehlten Liebe gewonnen; wir haben beinahe die *Ueberzeugung* eines gaenzlich verlorenen Lebensgluecks geschoepft. Und in dieser schmerzlichen Ueberzeugung blieb uns selbst kaum noch eine schwache Hoffnung auf die Errettung einer so reichen, zerschmetterten Weibesbrust, drum sargten wir ihr Angedenken zu unsern vielen Toten ein.²⁴⁶

Anneke acknowledges the fact that Aston's apparent life motto ('Freiem Lieben, freiem Leben/Hab ich ewig mich ergeben'),²⁴⁷ given in one of the poems dedicated to George Sand, will not sit well with the majority of women: '[M]it solchem Bekenntnis, das in

den socialen Verhältnissen" in: Nachlaß Mathilde Franziska und Fritz Anneke', *Anneke-Papers* (Rolle 5; Köln: Feministisches Archiv und Dokumentationszentrum Köln (=FrauenMediaTurm), 1791-1884b), pp. 353-72.

²⁴³ Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, pp. 59-61.

²⁴⁴ Louise Aston, *Meine Emancipation, Verweisung und Rechtfertigung* (Brüssel: C. G. Vogler, 1846a).

²⁴⁵ Louise Aston, *Wilde Rosen* (Berlin: W. Moeser und Kühn, 1846b).

²⁴⁶ Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen', typescript p. 4.

²⁴⁷ Aston, *Wilde Rosen*.

seiner nackten Auffassung der Dichterin von harmlosen Frauenherzen nimmer vergeben wird, ist der Kampf ihres Herzen abgeschlossen [...]’.²⁴⁸ But she remarks equally that, while the men among Aston’s acquaintances might have supported her poetry and were pleased to be associated with her, either in person or by reputation, they all fall curiously silent when it comes to helping her to face the authorities:

Fuer das gekraenkte Weib trat kein ritterlicher Mann mit der scharfen Waffe der freien Rede oeffentlich in die Schranken und doch erzaehlte man sich, dass gerade eben Einer aus aus fuerstlichem Stamm und Rang, mit Reichthum und Ehren ausgestattet, um ihre Liebe vergeblich geworben; doch wusste man, dass ein Saenger unserer Zeit ihr sein Lied geweiht, – ja dass denkende Maenner die Zelle ihres Leidens und Dichtens umstanden – und keiner war, der in dem Augenblick ihrer Verbannung mit der Courtoisie mittelalterlicher Romantik die Lanze fuer sie gebrochen – keiner, der mit dem Feuer der Wahrheit und Ueberzeugung das Wort der Vertheidigung laut und vernehmlich fuer sie erhoben – keiner, der mit der Beredsamkeit unserer Tagsschriftsteller, in glaubwuerdiger Weise Auskunft gegeben haette auf unser Fragen: „Was hat denn dieses Weib verbrochen?“²⁴⁹

Interestingly, Anneke criticises not only the reporters who had slandered Aston in their newspaper articles, but also the men who were of the same political mind as both Aston and Anneke. She speaks about employing the ‘scharf[e] Waffe der freien Rede’, a claim that most social democratic agitators felt entitled to use when pointing out the reactionary government’s use of repressive forces against their own goals. Yet, as Anneke implies, it did not appear to cross their mind that they might employ that claim for Aston’s benefit. Both the ‘Saenger unserer Zeit’ (Rudolf Gottschall, who dedicated his poem *Maria and Magdalena* to Aston) and the ‘denkende Maenner’, members of social-democratic circles, fail to act according to their label in this case. The reasons for this failure are again implied and refer to the double standards found even among those men who agitate and argue for a

²⁴⁸ Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen', typescript p. 1.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

democratic state, but who clearly forget to include women's rights in their agenda.

After introducing Aston as a character worthy of sympathy, Anneke moves on to her self-vindication, which she regards highly for its clarity and convincing line of argument, and which she also defends from the accusation that Aston's private affairs should not have been made public:

Fast waehten wir, dass ihre '*wilden Rosen*' schon ihren Grabhuegel umbluehet haetten, da ploetzlich zuckt ein kraeftiger Lebensstral aus dem todtgeglaubten Herzen. [...] [E]in thatkraeftiges, lebensfrisches Weib tritt hier vor die Schranken hin und klagt einfach und laut und klar die finstre Gewalt an. [...] Mehr als alle Vertheidiger, die jemals fuer das im Staub getretene Geschlecht sich in die Schranken warfen und auf so verschiedene Weise gewirkt haben, hat dieser kleine Beitrag zu dessen Geschichte geleistet. [...] Warum auch sollte das Weib ueberhaupt die schweigsame Dulderin fortan noch sein? [...] Die Stimme dieses Buechleins rief manche Schlaeferin wach, die von dem Broddeln ihres Kochtopfes am Heerde noch nicht zu tief eingeniht waren.²⁵⁰

In the following, Anneke presents a summary of Aston's pamphlet, interlaced with her own emphatic arguments and questions, usually directed to her female readers. Anneke alternates between criticising common moral standards, especially in the expectations of women themselves, and encouraging her female readership to set exactly those internalised standards aside in order to see with their own eyes how unjustly they are being treated by both law and custom. She does so in rather strong words, as her defence of Aston's divorce - in which she demands understanding and independent, critical thinking, rather than condemnation, from her readers - shows:

Die Ehe wurde geschieden. Und schmaecht sie darum nicht, Ihr Frauen, die Ihr Euch willig an ein 'Glueck' gewoehnen lernet, nach welchem Ihr wahrlich niemals Sehnsucht im jugendlich ergluehten Busen getragen habt. Begreift es, dass Euer

²⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

erlogenes Glueck Euch zu *laechehenden Slavinnen* gemacht hat[.] [...] Und doch wollen wir diesen Tugendheldinnen unserer duldsamen christlichen Gesellschaft nicht zu nahe treten. Befangen under [sic!] dem Zwange der Verhaeltnisse, genaehrt von Jugend auf an *Vorurtheilen*, duerfen sie nicht anders – ja *koennen* sie nicht anders mehr als *nachurtheilen*.²⁵¹

The topic of education that Anneke raises here in passing would become one of her main demands in her later participation in the American women's movement and in the design of her own school for girls. Critical thinking and self-reliance were generally not promoted in women, and Anneke clearly saw this as a powerful mechanism employed by both the conservative government (with regard to the proletariat) and patriarchal society (with regard to women) in order to maintain their respective positions of power based on knowledge. This also ties in with the second main topos that Anneke exemplifies in her pamphlet and which appears repeatedly in her literary works as well: the idea that women, as the primary carers for children, had the power to change and pass on a different form of society, if they were only aware of that power and had the means of putting it into practice. Anneke is not alone in the idea that women are the educators of tomorrow's democratic society, for the topic is also found, for example, in Malwida von Meysenbug's and Johanna Kinkel's writings. What is noticeable in Anneke's case, though, is the scope of her understanding of the contemporary power structures and her subsequent demands to change those structures for the benefit of women in the short term and of a democratic society in the long term. There is also a development of a programmatic awareness that runs through her political texts as well as, in a more covert manner, through her literary works. The foundation for this awareness was undoubtedly laid by her own experiences of divorce and the lack of a legal lever, as well as her difficult situation afterwards, when she

²⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 6-8.

tried to work for her living but found herself unprepared for any profession.²⁵² In the vindication she wrote for Aston, Anneke impressively deconstructs the mechanisms and reasons for women's skewed situation. At the same time, she connects this with a passionate appeal to her female readers to become aware of their power, which Anneke understands as the power to create and pass on tradition but one to which they have been blind. She begins by echoing the same question Aston had asked, but not elaborated, in her pamphlet: how is it possible that a male thinker and writer can publish atheist thoughts without (many) repercussions, but a woman who expresses such thoughts merely in conversation, not even in published writing, can be legally expelled from a city?

Warum erscheinen die Ansichten die den Maennern seit Jahrhunderten bereits angehoren durften, einem Staate gerade *bei den Frauen* so sehr gefaerhlich? Etwa weil sie die Macht der Verbreitung dieser Ansichten mehr denn Jene in Haenden haben und diese in ihrer ausgedehnteren Verbreitung, die heutige Welt- und Staatsordnung zu erschuettern drohen? – Weil sie mit ihrem Herzblut den bessern Glauben an eine neue Menschwerdung naehern [sic! „naehren“] und in der folgenden Generation Euch das gesuendere freiere Geschlecht ueberliefern koennen, das sich nimmermehr zu feilen Slavenknechten [sic! „Slaven knechten“] lassen wird? *Darum?* – Ja, darum: weil die Wahrheit, von den Frauen getragen, als Siegerin hervorgeht, welche Throne und Altaere der Tyrannen und Despoten stuerzt. [...] [W]eil sie uns zu der Erkenntniss bringt, dass wir gleich berechtigt sind zum Lebensgenuss wie unsere Unterdruecker; dass diese es nur waren, die die Gesetze machten und sie uns gaben, nicht zu unserm, nein zu ihrem Nutzen, zu ihrem Fromm. [...] Und der Tag ist gekommen wo sie an Eure Herzen anklopft. Oeffnet sie weit, weit und nehmt Theil an Eurem und Eurer Kinder Erbtheil. Bleibt laenger nicht die Betrogenen!²⁵³

Piepkre remarks that Anneke 'pitches her argument toward the end of the essay to women in

²⁵² See Freund, 'Mathilde Franziska Anneke und Louise Otto-Peters. Zwei Wege in die Frauenbewegung - Amerika / Deutschland'.

²⁵³ Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhaeltnissen', typescript pp. 11-12.

their role as mothers and educators of their children²⁵⁴ solely to avoid attacks and criticism against her radical arguments. While other authors such as Meysenbug also demand better education for women to enable them, in turn, to educate their children towards a free, democratic state, their ideas seem to remain in the context of the nuclear family, the idea of a functional family being the smallest unit of a functional state. But Anneke seems to go far beyond these dialectics; in fact, she puts the formation of a democratic state solely in the hands of all women, going beyond the small circle of the family and grasping at a utopian idea: that women, if freed from the status quo and aware of their own abilities and power, can, through the generations, create their own genealogy of society and statecraft, equal in power to that of the current patriarchal state, but on democratic principles with free, equal subjects, both male and female. It is no coincidence that Anneke speaks in her later text *Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge* of Germany as her 'Mutterland'. At the same time, she explicitly includes men in this hypothetical future when she writes: '[W]arum noch laenger die christlich duldende Magd eines Herrn der zum *Despoten* ihres Herzens geworden ist, weil er selber ein *Knecht* ward?'²⁵⁵ Anneke wishes democracy to free both men and women from the subject status they have under the monarchy, and transports the mechanisms of power from the state to gender relations. She also appeals to women's abilities to influence their children towards a democratic mindset: 'An *Euch* liegt es, sie fuer die *Wahrheit* oder – fuer die *Luege* empfaenglich zu machen; an *Euch*, dem *freien Vater* den *freien Sohn* zu zufuehren, damit er vollende was und wie Ihr begonnen! – an *Euch* liegt es, *Toechter* zu erziehen, die keinen *Slaven* jemals mit ihrem *Laecheln* begluecken werden!'²⁵⁶ Anneke clearly understood the double bind women found themselves in, in that they were oppressed both by the state and by the structure of society;

²⁵⁴ Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist*, p. 40.

²⁵⁵ Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhältnissen', typescript p. 5.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

a similar awareness of what today is called intersectionality in feminist theory can be seen in Anneke's later literary texts which deal with abolitionist politics and slavery in the United States.

While Anneke clearly sympathises with Aston, she is not sparing in her criticism of Aston's first novel, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau*, published in 1847.²⁵⁷ The novel definitely has autobiographical features, but Anneke goes far further in equating the female protagonist with Aston right from the beginning. She praises Aston's skill in portraying the different characters in the novel, but reproves her stark black and white contrast in the depiction of the protagonist and the other characters, seeing this as solely due to Aston's vanity: 'In den schroffsten Gegensätzen haelt die Verfasserin die Schilderung ihrer eignen Persoenlichkeit, die ihr sehr wohl gefaellig ist, gegenueber der ihr sehr missfaelligen des, dem armen Maedchen freilich aufgezwungenen Ehegatten[.]'²⁵⁸ In the following, Anneke criticises not so much Aston's attempts to show herself in the best possible light, but her apparent inability to separate her own personal experiences from the systemic mechanisms inherent in society. She sees Aston's attempt at a literary vindication as a missed chance to address general deficits in women's legal and social standings:

[S]ie zeugt keineswegs von der Hoheit eines ruhigen, die Verhaeltnisse klar erfassenden Characters dieser Frau, der, anstatt den erbaermlichen *Institutionen* unserer Gesellschaft der Schuld zu zeihen, den *Personen*, welche durch jene geleitet und gezogen worden sind, sich so feindlich gereitzt gegenueber stellt. Die Verfasserin hatte sich noch nicht zu *der* Freiheit des Geistes emporgeschwungen, die nothwendig dazu gehoert, das eigene Unglueck zu begreifen und es als *ihr eigenes Unglueck* zu negiren, um dasselbe mit kritisirendem Blick und mit kunstgeuebter Hand als einen Beleg mehr fuer das unaussprechliche Elend, dem gerade das weibliche Geschlecht unter dem heiten Wirrsal der Dinge preisgegeben

²⁵⁷ Louise Aston, *Aus dem Leben einer Frau* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1847).

²⁵⁸ Anneke, 'Das Weib im Conflict mit den socialen Verhaeltnissen', typescript p. 15.

ist, darstellen zu dürfen.²⁵⁹

Anneke also sharply criticises the protagonist (or rather Aston) for being compliant in the arranged marriage in which she finds herself, enjoying the wealth and social status of her husband at least on the surface, instead of refusing to be traded. She should instead live in poverty, but with pride and with an awareness of her own worth. Anneke again combines this criticism with an appeal to her female readers to withstand the apparently easy solutions of society, even if the consequences of such a choice are devoid of status or even social approval, and to remind themselves of their intrinsic value as persons: 'Diese [Basis] ist das Vertrauen zu uns selbst, zu unserer weiblichen Würde und *oftanscheinend* [sic! 'oft anscheinend'] nur gebrochenen Kraft jenes Vertrauen, das niemals wanken darf, das wir mindestens festzuhalten *streben* müssen wie einen letzten Notanker.'²⁶⁰ Anneke does not yet connect her observations with a demand for legal or political changes such as suffrage for women, as she will do in her later essays linked with the women's movement in America. In this early text she analyses instead the attitudes of both seemingly progressive, democratically inclined men and those of the average woman towards the question of social equality on the basis of Aston's tangible example.

Anneke's other and probably best known early text was written in exile, after she and her husband had left Germany for Switzerland and before emigrating to America. Although Anneke wrote her *Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge*²⁶¹ shortly after these events, she was unable to find a publisher until 1853, when she published it herself in Newark, New Jersey.²⁶² Her account of the military operations and proceedings have been analysed historically as a valuable eye witness account, and both Wagner and Freund give a detailed account and historical background information on

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶¹ Reprinted in Anneke, 'Mutterland. Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge'.

²⁶² See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen!*, p. 291.

the accuracy of Anneke's memoirs.²⁶³ At the same time, it is one of the few texts written by a woman who was herself active in voluntary military service (other examples being Amalie Struve and Emma Herwegh), although historians have pointed out that quite a few women participated in local uprisings, street fighting, and building barricades.²⁶⁴ Again, Anneke and Aston meet on this topic at least in spirit: while Anneke was writing her memories in 1848-49, Aston published her novel *Revolution und Contrerevolution* in 1849.²⁶⁵ While both writers recount actual events, they deal quite differently with their material: Aston fictionalises a large part of the plot to showcase her protagonist, whereas Anneke writes in the first person, from her own point of view. Watanabe-O'Kelly remarks that 'her account resembles that of a modern 'embedded' war reporter',²⁶⁶ which stands in contrast to Aston's (largely) fictional web of intrigues, with Alice at its centre and occasionally as the motor of events. Another topic on which Anneke and Aston differ is the matter of cross-dressing. While Aston's Alice happily dons men's clothing and takes up sabre and pistols before joining the battle on the barricades in Berlin, Anneke takes some time to refute apparent newspaper reports about her appearance on this campaign:

Hier will ich, wenn auch in Parenthese nur, erwähnen einer Ehre, die mir, wie ich höre, meine alte Freundin, die "Kölnische Zeitung", hat angedeihen lassen. Sie lässt mich nämlich zur Zeit im badisch-pfälzischen Feldzuge in dem fabelhaftesten Kostüm, das wohl jemals eine Frau getragen haben kann, auftreten. Ein wuchtiger Schleppsäbel, ein Hirschfänger, Muskete und Männerkleidung sind die Requisiten, die sie aus ihrem Lügenschrein auch für mich in Bereitschaft gehalten, und womit sie mich, zu dieser gelegene [sic] Zeit, ausgerüstet hat; während ich doch, wie bereits oben bemerkt, unbewaffnet und in meiner gewöhnlichen Frauentracht die nur durch ein leinenes Beinkleid zu einem Reitanzuge complettiert wurde, den

²⁶³ See *ibid.*, pp. 271-91, and Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, pp. 35-72.

²⁶⁴ See a.o. Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 279-80.

²⁶⁵ Louise Aston, *Revolution und Contrerevolution* (Mannheim: J.P. Grohe, 1849).

²⁶⁶ Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present*, p. 234.

Feldzug an der Seite meines Gatten mitgemacht habe.²⁶⁷

Watanabe-O'Kelly shows in her analysis of the female warrior in German literature that the topos of cross-dressed women on the battlefield is loaded with the ideology of femininity and transgression, which can only officially be tolerated for a limited time or a certain event and has to be undone in the end to restore the proper order of things in terms of gender relations.²⁶⁸ Anneke seemed to be aware that her depiction in the manner of the *Kölnische Zeitung* could potentially undermine her authority as an eye-witness and writer in this case and thus chose to clarify this point, ridiculing the newspaper, which had formerly been her competitor, at the same time. It is of course almost impossible to reconstruct what possible revisions Anneke might have made between writing down her memories in 1849 and their publication in 1853. The question of whether she reacted to Aston's depiction of Alice and the criticism Aston received on that account, and whether Anneke then deliberately kept her distance from an overly radical image of a fighting woman, must remain unanswered. Only in the later stages of the German Women's Movement, at the turn of the century and the beginning of the twentieth century, did women reclaim the more martial images of classical literature by dressing up as amazons or other mythical female warriors for women's conventions organised by the, at that time, various women's associations, as Watanabe-O'Kelly has shown.²⁶⁹ All scholars have pointed out that Anneke justifies her involvement in the campaign in two ways.²⁷⁰ The first reason she gives is the love for her husband which made her follow him into the war, the second is her love for her country, which she understands to be threatened by reactionary

²⁶⁷ Anneke, 'Mutterland. Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch pfälzischen Feldzuge', pp. 47-48.

²⁶⁸ See Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present*, esp. pp. 183-211.

²⁶⁹ See Watanabe-O'Kelly, 'Transgressivität oder Konformität? Die Figur der Kriegerin in Festspielen der deutschen und englischen Frauenbewegung um 1900', in Clemens Risi, et al. (eds.), *Theater als Fest, Fest als Theater. Bayreuth und die moderne Festspielidee* (Leipzig: Henschel 2010).

²⁷⁰ See e.g. Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 272-74, Gebhardt, *Mathilda Franziska Anneke. Madame, Soldat und Suffragette. Biografie*, Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*.

forces and hindered from developing into a free, democratic nation.²⁷¹ Both justifications are in accordance with established motives of literary characters, although there is a slight twist in the case of the conflict between monarchy and democracy, and Anneke's love falling on the side of the revolutionary instead of the conservative forces. Another literary allusion is made explicitly, when Anneke compares an evening she spends with the officers of her battalion in a rural pub to Schiller's play *Die Räuber*, and firmly aligns her side of the conflict with its hero, Karl Moor.²⁷² Using the literary model, she draws on the sympathies and moral superiority usually given to Moor's group in the play. With the character of Amalia von Edelreich in the play she also has a slot for her own presence in this scene, although Anneke clearly prefers to stand beside her husband, even though he is rebelling against the legally constituted government, rather than be killed for the sake of the reactionary moral high ground.

Once again, Anneke mainly addresses the women among her readers and asks that they be lenient with her for stepping out of her accustomed sphere and onto the battlefield. In the following matter-of-fact report Anneke gives about military proceedings and the day-to-day life of camp and travel, she inserts some episodes in which she shows how other women react both to the state of war and to Anneke's presence among the soldiers. Freund points out that in her depiction of an occasion in which young women greet and adorn the revolutionary forces with flowers, Anneke cleverly argues with the positive stereotypes usually ascribed to the female gender character:

[Das Schmücken] [wertet] sie nicht allein als Zeichen dafür, daß ihre Geschlechtsgenossinnen „den Ernst eines Kampfes“ durch ihr Gefühl „so tief, so unendlich tief erfassen gelernt“ hätten. Mehr noch, sie interpretiert diese weibliche Geste geradezu als Beweis für »das Gute« ihres eigenen Kampfes, das sie zugleich den Konterrevolutionären unter dem Hinweis darauf abspricht, daß sich die

²⁷¹ See Anneke, 'Mutterland. Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch pfälzischen Feldzuge', p. 10.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 29.

Gegenseite solcher symbolischer Ehrenbezeugungen ihrer Meinung nach nicht rühmen konnte[.]²⁷³

Generally, Anneke recounts the events in a calm manner, only occasionally expressing annoyance with or disgust at the behaviour of deserters or soldiers committing cruelties, and with that of their commanders who do not stop them.²⁷⁴ She rarely reaches the tone of passionate appeal which makes her first pamphlet so effective, but both at the beginning and at the end there is a passage that reaches out emotionally to the reader. Interestingly, she also sets the terms ‘Vaterland’ and ‘Mutterland’ in direct opposition in these passages. In the beginning, Anneke describes how she is in exile, at the border of her homeland, and falls into a kind of elegy while saying goodbye. She repeats ‘Vaterland’ three times, twice as ‘armes Vaterland’, and the last time as ‘mein Vaterland’, following each address with a description of the destructive behaviour the nation has shown towards its people in the past.²⁷⁵ At the end of her memoirs, Anneke brings the reader back to her position at the border, just as she and her husband are crossing into France, and again she says goodbye, but this time it is the ‘Mutterland’ she addresses twice: “Lebe wohl deutsche Erde Lebe wohl mein Mutterland!’ also klang durch die Seele mir. [...] Fort und fort klang durch die Seele mir: ‘Lebe wohl, deutsche Erde! Lebe wohl, mein armes, unglückliches Mutterland’.”²⁷⁶ Here Anneke refrains from linking the image of the homeland she is about to leave with qualifying attributes; it appears that the fatherland stands for the status quo the democratic revolutionaries wanted to change, but the motherland is what the revolution has turned the land into, or at least attempted to, with equal help from both men and women. Upon leaving, Anneke stresses not her misgivings about the fatherland of the past, but the unrealised potential of the motherland, the home of the democratic revolution.

²⁷³ Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, p. 279.

²⁷⁴ See *ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Anneke, ‘Mutterland. Memoiren einer Frau aus dem badisch pfälzischen Feldzuge’, p. 9.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

b. Political topics in Anneke's literary texts

Anneke continued to write journalistic articles in German for German-speaking newspapers on the American East coast once she and Fritz Anneke had more or less settled in America. The level of her understanding of English is rather difficult to ascertain: on the one hand, she never writes in English and for her first talk at a political women's assembly she needed Ernestine Rose's assistance as an interpreter. On the other hand, she appears to have been able to communicate with English-speaking newspaper agents and publishers, as well as with her close friend, Mary Booth. Additionally, as Dorothea Stuecher points out, she translated an anonymous serial novel from English to German and published it in 1866 under the title *Das Geisterhaus in New York*.²⁷⁷ Her letters, in so far as they are preserved, are also written in German, so that it is not possible today to assess her working knowledge of English. Her most productive literary phase, however, was in the years between 1861 and 1865, when she lived in Switzerland and had to observe the American Civil War from afar. During that time she wrote her short stories *Die Sklaven-Auction* and *Die gebrochenen Ketten*, some fictionalised travel reports,²⁷⁸ the aforementioned translation, and she also wrote her only published novel, *Umland in Texas*.²⁷⁹ Although all texts are written for a European, German-speaking readership, as some explanatory passages that are directed to the reader show, all the texts are situated in America and, apart from *Das Geisterhaus*, all feature anti-slavery politics. In her study, *Joyous greetings*, Bonnie T. Anderson explores the connections between the abolitionist movement and the American, French, and German women's movement. Anderson examines the common theme of equal rights for underprivileged groups which underpinned both movements, how the two

²⁷⁷ Dorothea Diver Stuecher, *Twice removed: the experience of German-American women writers in the 19th century*, ed. Don Heinrich Tolzmann (New German-American Studies / Neue Deutsch-Amerikanische Studien, vol. 1; New York, Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 139-40.

²⁷⁸ Both reprinted in Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*.

²⁷⁹ Mathilde Franziska Anneke, 'Umland in Texas', *Sonntagsausgabe der Illinois Staatszeitung*, 15th April to 3rd June 1866. Reprinted in Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*.

intersected, and in which areas of political claims and demands they differed.²⁸⁰ She also shows how the abolitionist part of the conjoined movements gained more and more priority over the women's rights aspect, and how campaigners for equal rights for women subordinated their focus in favour of the abolitionist movement, in the hope that, once the anti-slavery laws had come into effect, they would in turn be supported by their abolitionist allies.²⁸¹ Parts of these contemporary discourses can be found in Anneke's literary texts as well. The novel *Das Geisterhaus in New York* will not be included in this analysis, as it is hard to distinguish between the (lost) original and Anneke's possible adjustments to the text. In the three remaining texts, the black woman, doubly oppressed as woman and as slave, is a recurring motif, as Wagner points out.²⁸²

In the first short story, *Die Sklaven-Auction*, the young slave Alfons meets the (historical) abolitionist Gerrit Smith²⁸³ on the steps of the Capitol to ask for his help in freeing the slave girl Isabella, who is supposed to be sold in an auction the same day and whom he loves. Alfons narrates his life story to Smith, focusing on his mother and little sister: in order to spare her daughter the desperation, the physical abuse, and the sexual exploitation of the life of a slave, the mother had killed her when she was still a little girl and died shortly afterwards herself. Alfons had to witness this, and now Isabella is the only person he still cares for. Smith agrees to help him, and tells him to meet him later at the auction. In the next part of the story, a Dutch merchant discusses Smith's latest speech against slavery in Congress with a sleazy pub owner who tells him about a particularly beautiful slave girl in the upcoming auction. The merchant, not having seen such an auction before, decides to watch the proceedings in order to see the state of affairs Smith is campaigning against with his own eyes. The next part of the story narrates the auction

²⁸⁰ Anderson, *Joyous greetings*, pp. 115-28 and pp. 133-34.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, esp. chapter 5 'Emancipating Themselves', and pp. 204-06.

²⁸² Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 6.

²⁸³ See e.g. Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 6.

itself in vivid detail. Anneke depicts the crowd of bidders as cruel, lecherous men who make no secret of their intentions to either break a slave's will with whippings or to exploit them sexually. Wagner points out that Anneke's use of coarse language and swear words contributes a lot towards characterising the mindset of the crowd, but was also rather unusual in a literary text at that time, especially in a text written by a woman, and was probably alarming for the reader.²⁸⁴ Before it is Isabella's turn in the auction, a small boy is offered to the crowd. The Dutch merchant, watching the auction without comment so far, takes pity on him and buys him with the intention to free and accept him as his own son, as he and his wife are childless. He is then secretly approached by Isabella, who borrows his pocket knife in order to quickly cut off her long hair before she is being dragged on the stage for the auction. The auctioneer is aghast at this action, as he fears it will lower her price, and he starts to advertise her in only thinly veiled sexual terms. In an oppressive, fast-paced passage, the bidders try to outdo each other, and poor Alfons has to keep still and wait for Smith's intervention. In the end, Isabella is purchased by Smith and set free immediately. She and Alfons receive a piece of farmland on Smith's vast estates and the Dutch merchant returns home with his adopted son.

As Wagner and Piepke point out, Anneke wrote this story with a clear polemic against slavery in mind.²⁸⁵ Anneke addresses a readership that lives in the Northern states of America as well as in Germany and that has probably not given much thought to the actual, day-to-day situation of slaves, in contrast to theoretical debates about slave laws and abolition. Therefore she employs frequent asides to the reader in order to explain certain circumstances. In the first part of the story, for example, Alfons confesses to Smith that he can read and begs him to keep this quiet. The narrator then explains that slaves were not allowed to be taught how to read and write, and the ones who nonetheless acquired this

²⁸⁴ Wagner, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten*, p. 6.

²⁸⁵ Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist*, pp. 104-5, Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, pp. 5-6.

knowledge could be whipped or chained. In the same fashion, when Smith jovially calls Alfons his fellow man, Alfons quickly reminds him of the fact that, as a slave, he is not allowed to call himself a man. These are explicitly polemical statements aimed at eliciting shock, if not anger, from the readers, and the matter-of-fact manner of delivery in the text only strengthens the impact. When it comes to the fate of the women in this story, Anneke is more subtle: the reader learns the fate of Alfons's sister and mother through his eyes and his grief for them, so that even the grim topic of a mother killing her child does not become a despicable act, but is shown as one of ultimate desperation. Especially remarkable is that Alfons remembers another, older slave who tells his mother after the killing: '[...] Du hast recht gethan in den Augen Gottes.'²⁸⁶ Here, Anneke pitches the religious arguments of the slave owners against the actual spirit of Christianity and brings into sharp focus the wrongdoings of a society with a legal system that is, on the whole, worse than infanticide when it makes this course of action preferable to being subjected to the law.

The topic of infanticide appears again in a sub-plot of the story *Die gebrochenen Ketten*. The protagonist is the slave girl Lelia who becomes the apple of discord between the adult children of her mistress upon her death. While the old lady had been kind to her and treated her virtually as a daughter, her children, Mr Kingsbury and Madame Randall, display the typical mentality of rich slave owners. The brother wants Lelia as part of his inheritance because he plans to use her for his sexual pleasure, whereas the sister wants her because of her superior sewing skills, but also secretly begrudges Lelia her good relationship with her deceased mother. Both are unwilling to concede, so in the end they agree to auction off all the slaves and share the profit. When the rest of the household's slaves learn about this, they despair about their suddenly uncertain future – the married couple Juno and her husband, only called 'old man', face separation from each other as well as from their teenage son Jon. He considers running away and trying to reach Canada,

²⁸⁶ Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 32.

but is quickly persuaded not to do so, as a captured runaway could legally be whipped to death. Only one slave, the washerwoman Nancy, hardly reacts to the bad news. She has recently given birth to her sixth child and now expects to have to watch it being sold into slavery as all her other children had been. Lelia in the meantime learns that Mr Kingsbury plans to purchase her at the auction – in desperation she turns to his sister and begs her to take her as her slave instead. The sister is unrelenting and the day comes when all slaves have to leave the house for the auction. But before it can take place, Jon bursts in to deliver the (historical) news that the President (Lincoln) has officially banned slavery in the District of Columbia, where they apparently live. Wagner convincingly analyses how Anneke puts the reader, psychologically, in Lelia's shoes when she realises the scope of her status as a slave, and how vulnerable she is to the arbitrary behaviour of strangers. Equally, the reader achieves a clearer understanding of the relief and reach of the concept when, at last, Lelia and the other slaves are pronounced free.²⁸⁷ While they all celebrate their freedom, Nancy still does not react. When Juno and Lelia tend to her, they discover that she has killed her baby, and when they try to make her understand that she is now free, she does not comprehend the word and dies herself. Lelia then delivers the same message to Madame Randall and to the reader that also featured in *Die Sklaven-Auction*, although more subtly than here:

Da saß Nancy in derselben unveränderten Stellung, in der man sie seit gestern schon sah, eine dunkle Marmorstatue. Lelia bog sich über sie und das Kind, das schlief tief und still den Todesschlaf. [...]

„Unmenschliche Kreatur!“ schalt Mrs. Randall, „sie hat es ermordet; da will man uns noch glauben machen, daß die Schwarzen Gefühle haben, gleich den Weißen. Da ist ein Beweis.“

„Ja wohl, und ein starker!“ antwortete eine feste Stimme. „Weil ihre Gefühle mächtiger sind, als die Eurigen, und ihr Herz opferfähiger, so konnte sie es ruhiger und

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

gottgefälliger in ihren Armen zum sanften Tode, denn zur fluchwürdigen Sklaverei eingehen sehen.“

War es Lelia, das kleine furchtsame Mädchen, welche [sic] in diesem sichern und ruhigen Tone sprach?

In Anneke's last published novel, *Uhland in Texas*, the topics of the abolition of slavery and German immigrants are interwoven. Piepke points out that there are some utopian elements in the novel, especially in the depiction of the German settlers' treatment of each other. While Anneke and her husband had rather discouraging experiences with the lack of helpfulness of their fellow immigrants, in the novel a family of newly arrived political immigrants are welcomed warmly, almost gushingly, and supported wherever necessary.²⁸⁸ The new arrivals are Carl von Wallenstein with his adult children, his twin sons Engelbert and Adalbert, and his daughter Antonie. The moment they leave the ship that brought them to Texas they meet Wallenstein's old friend, William Gilmore, and his adult daughters, Indianna and Marianna. Gilmore owns a large estate and numerous slaves, but he is depicted as an enlightened slave owner who treats his slaves well, to the point that his manservant Marzell remarks to the Wallensteins: 'Master Gilmore's Sclaven haben niemals nöthig, von Freiheit zu träumen.'²⁸⁹ Although all the Wallensteins are rather uneasy about seeing Gilmore in this role, they accept the slaves he gives them as a welcome gift to America. The slave twins Romulus and Remus are given to Adalbert and Engelbert respectively, the father receives Marzell, and Josephine, previously in Indianna's service, decides to go with Antonie. They all stay on Gilmore's estate for some time, meanwhile making the acquaintance of the brutal slave owner Robert Hale, Marianna's fiancé, and the abolitionist priest John Hamilton, who is Marianna's and Indianna's cousin. Gilmore assists Wallenstein in purchasing an estate of his own, which he names 'Uhland'

²⁸⁸ Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist*, p. 53.

²⁸⁹ Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 54.

in honour of the German poet, whom he and Gilmore apparently met when they were students. This estate has humanist, utopian features as Piepke points out,²⁹⁰ and Stuecher calls it an ‘ultimate synthesis of the Old and New Worlds to shape as an American plantation in the West where German Humanism was cultivated by cultured German-Americans.’²⁹¹ Anneke’s main motifs appear in the novel as well: Robert Hale wants to buy the slave Flora from Gilmore so that he can give her to Marianna as a wedding gift, but also because he already plans to make her his mistress even before he and Marianna are actually married; and John finds a grieving old slave woman in a hut on Gilmore’s estate whose grandson has just died – yet her grief is transformed into contentment when John baptizes the child at the last moment, and she says to the dead child: ‘Du bist nicht länger ein Sclave mehr!’²⁹²

Anneke’s depiction of the women in this novel is rather curious. As Stuecher remarks, they appear altogether rather passive, and Antonie’s fate is to waste away and die under unspecified circumstances.²⁹³ Additionally, Stuecher points out emphatically that there are no mothers in the whole novel.²⁹⁴ One explanation for both could be, as Stuecher suggests, that most immigrant women writers emulated the writings of their fellow male immigrants, with the focus on exploring, discovering, and harnessing the new land before them, and thus ended up with traditionally active, male protagonists and their concerns.²⁹⁵ In Anneke’s case this is not very convincing, as she was very aware of narrative mechanisms and had previously made female protagonists the main focus of other texts. Under closer inspection, at least Indianna and Marianna turn out to be not quite so passive after all. When Marianna finally learns about all the intrigues and petty cruelties her fiancé

²⁹⁰ Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist*, p. 53.

²⁹¹ Stuecher, *Twice removed: the experience of German-American women writers in the 19th century*, p. 73.

²⁹² Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 105.

²⁹³ Stuecher, *Twice removed: the experience of German-American women writers in the 19th century*, p. 73.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Hale has committed, she breaks off the engagement immediately and grows more confident and dignified through her action. Indianna is characterised from the beginning as strong-willed, independent, and something of a rascal. She challenges the German twin brothers to races on horseback, tries to teach Antonie how to drive a horse drawn cart, and is sorely tempted to stab Hale to death, were it not for the lack of a weapon. Both women fall in love with Adalbert and Engelbert (respectively), and while this is depicted with a rather idealised romanticism, they both help without hesitation in the fight when at the end of the novel the Umland estate comes under siege by Hale and his band of criminals. At the very end it is revealed that the sisters have Native American roots; Stuecher analyses this convincingly as a symbol for Anneke's utopian design for the new American woman:

The mixture of these two cultures created a new woman who was somewhat indifferent to men and rejoiced in her independence rather than being crushed by love's setbacks. Indianna had no need to be "emancipated," the cultural perjorative reserved for Anglo-American women, she was simply born a free spirit. [...] Neither "German" nor "American", Indianna represented the first example of Anneke's vision of a new womanly ideal for the New World.²⁹⁶

Antonie, however, is a different matter. Piepke remarks that Antonie, as a representative of the women of the Old World, simply cannot leave the old norms and expectations of female behaviour behind her, and thus has no place in the new, utopian world.²⁹⁷ While this is certainly one aspect, the circumstances of her rather inexplicable illness and death give hints of another subtle criticism. Her wasting away is preceded by a marriage proposal from Robert Hale, which he makes by letter just before the engagement between him and Marianna is called off. Antonie does not mention this to her brothers or the two American sisters, but when she is playing her harp for them it clearly overshadows her thoughts.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁹⁷ Piepke, *Mathilde Franziska Anneke (1817-1884). The Works and Life of a German-American Activist*, p. 54.

Only once she is on her sickbed and dying does John finally find the courage to confess his love for her, but in a rather curious scene:

[John] nahm ihre kalte Hand und hielt sie fest in seinen beiden Händen. Eine warme Thräne fiel auf sie nieder.

„Wie liebte ich Dich,“ flüsterte er.

Sie lächelte noch einmal. Und in diesem seelenvollen Lächeln sah er kein irdisches mehr, sondern einen Gruß seiner Geliebten aus besserem Lande.

„Guten Morgen, John!“ lispelte sie und schwand dahin.²⁹⁸

Robert Hale, as the cruel slaver, is representative of the old, undemocratic ideas, the mere presence of which is enough to stifle a potential coexistence of old and new images of femininity. John Hamilton is representative of two principles at the watershed: as a priest, he embodies the old ideas of the Christian Church with regard to both slavery and women's place in society and, as an abolitionist, he stands for the modern fight for slaves' and, potentially, women's rights. With this in mind, the past tense in this love confession makes sense: it is the old image of femininity that he loved, and this has no place in the utopian future and must die out. Antonie's answer refers to the dawn of this future, in which both principles, religious and political, must now prove themselves in the struggles to come, as John has to do in the rest of the novel.

This also ties in with the absence of mothers in the novel. Anneke's idealistic concept of the Motherland, a nation in which democratic principles are held up and passed down by the mothers, needs women who are free from the established, harmful gender images prevalent in the Old World. In the utopian *Uhland*, both sets of siblings cannot have mothers, because as immigrants of the first generation, these mothers would still be relics indoctrinated by the old ideas Anneke criticised so vehemently even in her first essay. With Indianna and Marianna as the new ideal, the future – the New World, both geographically

²⁹⁸ Wagner (ed.), *Mathilde Franziska Anneke: Die gebrochenen Ketten*, p. 153.

and ideologically – is just about to start. They are the new mothers, the starting point for a new genealogy, and it is a breathtakingly radical notion that Anneke puts the power to create such a new world order into the hands of women. Not exclusively of course, for the set-up of the marriages between the two families states clearly that this future has to be fought for and constructed by both men and women; but the power of transformation and tradition falls firmly on the side of the mothers.

This conviction also shines through in Anneke's later speeches and essays which promote equal rights and suffrage for women. In a speech written for the opening ceremony of an assembly hall in Milwaukee in 1872, Anneke first addresses the men:

An Euch, Ihr Repräsentanten der Freiheit, die Ihr Euch im Vollgenuß derselben erst dann befinden werdet, wenn Ihr keine Ungleichheit mehr neben Euch duldet, will ich mit der ganzen Überzeugungstreue und Begeisterung meines Herzens appellieren. Befreit das Weib. Erhebt es zur wirklichen Erzieherin der Menschheit, zur Hüterin Eurer Freiheit.²⁹⁹

Then she turns to the women in the audience, emphasizing the importance of a legal foundation for the equality of men and women, not merely a moral one:

Der Tag der sittlichen und geistigen Erhebung der Menschheit beginnt in Wahrheit mit unserer Befreiung, wenn unsere Lebensbeziehungen unter dem Gesetz gleicher Gerechtigkeit stehen und wir als Menschen lernen, unsere stärksten Sympathien mit Menschen zu pflegen, die an Rechten und Pflichten uns gleich stehen. [...] Der Besitz einer Stimme im allgemeinen Wahlrecht ist ein Mittel des Selbstschutzes, das jedem zustehen muß, eine Garantie für seine Wohlfahrt, eine Garantie zur geistigen und sittlichen Erhebung, ein Symbol der Gleichberechtigung, die Losung der Zeit.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 221-22.

Here Anneke finally connects the observations she had already made in her essay supporting Louise Aston and her concept of a truly democratic state with explicit political demands.

Chapter 5

Fanny Lewald – the ambivalent ‘Première Dame’ of women’s literature

Lewald’s political programme, as it is outlined in her various political texts and letters discussed below, shines through in most of her literary texts but with different degrees of progressiveness (as perceived from a modern point of view), and it sometimes fades out almost completely when it would get in the way of a storyline that follows what Ward calls the ‘heterosexual marriage plot’.³⁰¹ The main reason for this absence, especially noticeable in her later novels and novellas, is considered by most scholars to be her marriage to Adolf Stahr. Lewald belongs to the group of female authors who, despite being very outspoken about women’s equal rights and emancipation, still saw women’s primary role and occupation in the home and within the family. Ward dedicates large parts of her lengthy and thorough study to this ‘double voiced discourse’ always present in Lewald’s texts.³⁰² However, to explain Lewald’s developing conservatism as due to her marriage (which meant that she no longer had a personal stake in women’s rights to personal development, education, and employment), and the general disappointment with the failed democratic revolution that a lot of authors expressed especially in the 1860s and 1870s, falls too short. As Gabriele Schneider, Kay Goodman, and Ward point out repeatedly, Lewald stylised herself heavily in all of her autobiographical texts, which include most of her correspondence and most of her diaries, work books, and day books as well.³⁰³ In her autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte*³⁰⁴ Lewald predominantly depicts her general emancipation and development towards political awareness, but she also lays the

³⁰¹ See e.g. Margaret E. Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation* (Studies on themes and motifs in literature, 85; New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 309.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ See Goodman, *Dis/closures: women's autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914*, pp. 149-165, Gabriele Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman: Die Erzählerin Fanny Lewald* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 1, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1372; Frankfurt am Main - Berlin et. al.: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 41-62, Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 29-30.

³⁰⁴ Fanny Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1886-62).

foundation for her self-conception as an author. The image she builds up of herself is modelled quite obviously on Goethe, as both Schneider and Ward analyse in depth in their studies.³⁰⁵ Lewald also remained critical of other female authors of her time, sometimes in a rather nasty way, as becomes apparent from her essays, and she also mocks the figure of the overly emotional, navel-gazing and soul-searching female author in some of her literary texts.

Fanny Lewald was born in Königsberg on 24 March 1811 as the oldest daughter of a reasonably rich Jewish family. Her autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, published in 1863, is one of the more prominent texts usually discussed by scholars. In contrast to most of the other authors selected for this thesis (save Malwida von Meysenbug), Lewald gives a detailed account of her childhood, including lively descriptions of her social environment in Königsberg as well as of the town and its history. Goodman, Schneider and Vanessa van Ornam have pointed out in their detailed studies of the autobiography that Lewald attempts to write her life story not only with reference to Goethe's exemplary memoirs, but also, in retrospect, as an evolving story of her emancipation.³⁰⁶ One aspect of this process is generally attributed to Lewald's conversion to Christianity: while the Lewald family did not observe the customs of the Jewish faith, the father offered conversion to Christianity at first only to his sons, as he regarded this mainly as a professional advantage in the mostly Protestant Königsberg.³⁰⁷ Fanny and her sisters were not included in this offer, as the father thought it best for his daughters to remain in their accustomed environment and mental sphere, since they would, in his opinion, not need the same professional advantage in the

³⁰⁵ See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*.

³⁰⁶ See Goodman, *Dis/closures: women's autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914*, Gabriele Schneider, *Fanny Lewald* (rowohlts monographien; Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), Vanessa van Ornam, *Fanny Lewald and nineteenth-century constructions of femininity* (North American Studies in nineteenth-century German literature, 29; New York et. al.: Peter Lang, 2002).

³⁰⁷ See Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol. 1, pp. 113-15.

job market.³⁰⁸ The father changed his mind, though, with regard to Fanny when she fell in love with a Protestant minister. Since marriages between Jews and Christians were prohibited, the match would have required special permission from the Prussian government. The relationship never developed that far, though, as Lewald's father exerted his power as head of the family and forbade the couple to meet again. Lewald herself never knew why her father took this decision and never dared to ask him, but some scholars speculate that the father came to know about the young man's poor state of health and decided to break off the match before it could develop into marriage and leave his daughter a young widow.³⁰⁹ Three years after her brothers Lewald converted to Christianity as well, but the whole process left her even more distanced and disillusioned from both the Jewish and the Christian faith.³¹⁰ While Lewald's emancipation from doctrinal religion is widely regarded as her first step towards a critical assessment of social and political groups and opinions, it is her emancipation from her larger-than-life father and his principles that enabled her to lead a self-determined life, and Lewald makes that the focus of her autobiography. The first of three volumes of Lewald's memoirs describes her childhood exclusively, and while she makes a great effort to depict her family life and especially her father in the most positive light, there is a palpable sense of tension in the way the adult writer depicts her very authoritarian father.³¹¹ The breaking point in the relationship between Lewald and her father was reached when he tried to marry her off to an older Königsberg merchant, and Lewald refused to do as she was told for the first time. The father did not impose his will in this matter but Lewald narrates in her memoirs how keenly she felt the confusion of her parents and younger sisters who regarded her refusal with incomprehension, with the result that Lewald no longer felt welcome, but rather a

³⁰⁸ See *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ See Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, p. 24.

³¹⁰ See Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol. 1, pp. 149-55, Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, pp. 25-27.

³¹¹ See Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, pp. 18-19, Whittle and Pinfold, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 79-86.

burden, to her own family.³¹² In the didactic style of writing Lewald adopted for her autobiography she uses this occurrence to reflect upon the necessity for adequate, meaning equal, education for girls and young women. She inserts a whole chapter in which she lays out her argument, similar to a vindication, for the necessity of women's education in order to prepare them for a working life before and even during marriage.³¹³ Lewald was more radical in her demands on this point: while other female authors like von Meysenbug regarded women's participation in the world of work as suitable and necessary until a husband came along, Lewald argued that a second income would benefit the whole family, as well as the woman's personal development, and women should therefore seek employment whether they were married or not.³¹⁴ Lewald's difficult position in her family remained unresolved for several years, until her cousin August Lewald encouraged her to turn towards a writing career.³¹⁵ He had previously published some of Lewald's letters and reports about her observations of the celebrations in Königsberg on the occasion of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's coronation in 1840 without her knowledge (and without crediting or paying her, one might add), and regarded her talent as suitable for a journalistic, if not a literary career. This decision also resulted in a contest of wills between Lewald and her father, but in the end he agreed to let his thirty-year-old daughter try to earn her own living as an author, under the condition that she published anonymously, and would keep her professional writing a secret from her sisters. Lewald agreed and soon published her first two novels, *Clementine* (1842), in which she concerned herself with the topic of arranged marriages, and *Jenny* (1843), probably her most widely read novel about the discrimination of Jews in Prussia. The success of these two novels set Lewald on the path to becoming a celebrated author, and apart from her novels and shorter narratives she also published

³¹² See Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol. 2, pp. 256-58.

³¹³ See *ibid.*, vol. 2, chapter 11, pp. 255-72.

³¹⁴ See *ibid.*

³¹⁵ See Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, pp. 41-42.

several political essays and letters in which she continued to argue for equal rights, education, and even suffrage for women. Her father eventually agreed to her publishing under her own name and allowed her to move to Berlin. Lewald was soon able to support herself from her income as a writer and occasional journalist, a fact she reports with pride in her autobiography, but still kept secret from her younger sisters and extended family.³¹⁶ Lewald's autobiography ends with her arrival in Italy, a journey she had dreamed of all her life, and the place where she met her later husband Adolf Stahr. In bringing her memoirs to a close at this point Lewald signalled that, in contrast, for example, to von Meysenbug, who depicted her whole life as a potential role model for women, she regarded especially the process of her emancipation towards a self-sufficient and independent individual as the part of her life that might function as a role model. Only with the successful conclusion of this development was she then able, with her fully fledged personality, to progress in the world and in society in the way she did, and not least was she only then able to meet her future husband as an equal. Lewald's life story from the closing part of the memoirs onwards is depicted in earlier texts, the immediate 'successors' (in chronological order of her life, not in writing order) being *Italienisches Bilderbuch* (1847) and *Erinnerungen aus dem Jahr 1848* (1850), in which she depicts her relationship with Stahr as well as with other famous authors, politicians, and philosophers of her time. She remained a very productive author, often supporting Stahr as well as herself financially with her writing. She published her last novel, *Die Familie Darner*, and her last politically coloured collection of essays, *Zwölf Bilder aus dem Leben*, in the year before her death in 1889.

³¹⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 42, Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, p. 90.

a. Political Essays and Lewald's concept of authorship

A recurring element in Lewald's political texts is the criticism of women's behaviour and attitudes that always runs alongside her criticism of the systematic injustices and patriarchal attitudes that put women at a disadvantage. In her taking women to task for their conservatism towards emancipatory changes or their judgemental behaviour towards their peers she is highly unusual. Lewald is one of the few, together with Hedwig Dohm, to publicly criticise women in a systematic way, instead of appealing to them as if they were on common ground already, or, in the case of Louise Aston, appealing to them to set aside their moral differences in a specific case. One element that might have enabled Lewald to take this critical distance and voice her usually well-founded criticism is to be found in her autobiography. Möhrmann and Ward point out that during her childhood, Lewald believed women to be of lesser standing than men, and that she could not help herself from feeling dismissive towards most women she encountered, including to some degree her own mother.³¹⁷ The tensions and conflicts with her mother and her younger sisters that arose as a consequence, including the conspicuous absence of mothers in Lewald's literary texts, have been analysed by van Ornam and Ward.³¹⁸ While it is never adequate to base a textual analysis on a close biographical reading, it is worth keeping in mind that Lewald expressed this attitude very early in her autobiography, and that she clearly places it chronologically as one of her early childhood impressions of the world around her. This is not to say that Lewald was secretly as misogynistic as the majority of nineteenth-century society and therefore half-hearted in her demands, a stance that Ward rightly criticises as too short-sighted in her account of Möhrmann's arguments. However, it seems quite obvious that, on the basis of Lewald's statement about her childhood stance on women, she had to learn for herself to find worth in women's position and to acknowledge their contribution to society,

³¹⁷ See Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau*, Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation* pp. 44-48.

³¹⁸ See van Ornam, *Fanny Lewald and nineteenth-century constructions of femininity*, esp. Chapter Four; Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 104-14.

if only indirectly. The drive to fight for equal rights and opportunities, first for herself in the context of her family, then in a wider context for all women, obviously stems from Lewald's inability to identify with the gender role that was prescribed for her by society. In this she is no different from other political female authors but her reaction, or rather her depiction of her consequent actions, differs in that she orients herself very strongly along the institutionalised guidelines as to what is deemed a worthy occupation for men in her time, and aspires to those rather than to the typical occupations for women. Lewald clearly stylises herself as above ordinary women in both education and willpower, and thus lives a successful alternative life. At the same time she rebukes the majority of women for striving to achieve similar goals, especially when it comes to her image as an author. Ward points out:

However important female friendships had become to her – especially those with other women writers – she did not wish to ally too closely with them. In fact, she argued consistently throughout her long career that the same standard should be used to measure women writers as men. To treat women differently, she maintained, was to automatically marginalize and trivialize them. In a typical passage, she even chooses the term “*weiblicher Schriftsteller*” (female writer), using the masculine form of the noun, instead of the more common form available in German, *Schriftstellerin*, in which an *-in* suffix denotes a woman in a particular occupation, Since in German the pronouns must then agree grammatically with the subject, a translation into English underlines the extent to which Lewald was male-identified in this regard[.]³¹⁹

At the same time, Lewald frequently argues that, if men ask the well-known question about why equal education for women is necessary, since there are no famous female writers, composers, artists etc. to justify the demand, this would be the same as expecting someone to swim without being taught how to swim.³²⁰ In this conflicting argumentation it becomes all the more clear that Lewald not only identified herself as an author subject to the same

³¹⁹ Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 113-14.

³²⁰ See Fanny Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen* (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1870a).

criteria and value judgements as a male author, but also that she apparently considered herself the exception among female authors who could demand to be judged in that way. Her view of the difference between the majority of female authors and herself is a matter of craftsmanship:

Es galt, wie später mein Mann das genannt hat, »als ehrlicher Arbeiter mit dem Schurzfell zu arbeiten«, es galt kein vornehmer Dilettant, kein gefühlsselig sich mit dem ungefähren Anschein der Dinge begnügender Blaustrumpf zu sein, sondern ernst zu arbeiten, wie der Jurist, der Philolog, wie jeder Mann es in seinem Fache thun mußte, wo etwas Ordentliches geleistet werden sollte.³²¹

Lewald's harsh criticism and ridicule of other aspiring, yet in her eyes pathetic, female authors also occur repeatedly in her political letters and literary texts. Although she agrees with the general principle that 'worthy' authors should be reviewed and judged regardless of gender, and therefore the term 'Schriftstellerin' should become unnecessary, Lewald uses the term herself when referring to sub-par female authors. Her main concern appears to be to avoid being put into this category herself, and therefore not being able to compete against the established, male authors.

In England, Frankreich und Italien erkennt der Volksgeist diesen Grundsatz auch durch die Sprache an. Der Schöpfer eines geistigen Werkes heißt der Autor, welchem Geschlechte er auch angehöre; in Deutschland ist es anders, und die deutsche literarische Kritik ist in diesem Punkte selbst noch hinter dem Volksgeiste zurückgeblieben. Denn während das Volk sich längst gewöhnt hat, diejenigen deutschen Frauen, welche ihm in ihren Werken ein Anerkennenswerthes darzubieten hatten, zu seinen »Schriftstellern« zu zählen, behandelt die Kritik die weiblichen Dichter in der Mehrzahl mit einer vornehmen Herablassung oder mit einer Art von Galanterie, die beide in meinen Augen eine Kränkung sind, weil sie selbstredend den Gedanken in sich verschließen, für die geringen Fähigkeiten, für

³²¹ Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol. 3, pp. 233-34.

die Unbedeutendheit einer Frau sei das Geleistete gut genug, sei das Nichtgelungene zu entschuldigen.³²²

She then uses an argument that is also employed in her criticism of special schools or universities for women, namely, that separation along gender lines and treating one side as a special case which needs a different education just affirms established disadvantages and prejudices instead of enabling equality.

[D]ie Entwicklung eines Menschen kann nur innerhalb einer völligen Gleichberechtigung mit seinen Mitstrebenden eine vollständige werden, und wer über die Reihen der Allgemeinheit erhoben wird, nimmt davon eben so sehr an seiner Entwicklung Schaden, als derjenige, welchen man unter dem Niveau der Allgemeinheit zurückzuhalten strebt.³²³

The despair about women's contemporary level of education, together with the demand for an equal, formal education, is a thread that runs throughout Lewald's texts, but it appears that she is generally reluctant to credit other women with the acknowledgement that they might have achieved a similar level of education and development to Lewald's on their own. Only a few of Lewald's female friends are exempt from this, notably Therese Bacheracht, another author whose friendship Lewald cherished, although she could not agree with the style or the general tenor of her literary production.³²⁴ Lewald stylises herself as exemplary, similar to von Meysenbug, but where the latter reaches out to her readership to encourage them to attempt a similar independent lifestyle, Lewald lectures her readership about their shortcomings and the methods necessary to overcome their, it is implied, self-imposed obstacles. Therefore, she assumes a rather patronising position, even when she makes correct observations about the lack of opportunities for women in almost all areas. With this attitude towards other women in mind, some of Lewald's contradictions

³²² Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 51-52.

³²³ Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 52-53.

³²⁴ See Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, pp. 52-54 on Bacheracht friendship, Christina Ujma (ed.), *Fanny Lewald (1811-1889). Studien zu einer großen europäischen Schriftstellerin und Intellektuellen* (Forum Vormärz Forschung - Vormärz-Studien, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011).

in her political stance, manifest in her political as well as literary texts, become more explicable to modern eyes. The ‘double-voiced discourse’ that Ward quotes, referring to Sigrid Weigel, lies therefore, in Lewald’s case, not so much in the effort of a female writer trying to both comply with and subvert established, male-dominated discourses of writing and authorship, but in Lewald’s deigning to consider a ‘common ground’ that she apparently feels she does not share with the majority of women. Therefore she has to try and think herself into the position of a ‘common woman’ with her conservative point of view in order to reach her presumably less educated, prejudiced readership that might not yet be ready for the progressive social changes Lewald proposes in her essays. The pinnacle of Lewald’s stance towards the political participation of her fellow women can be seen in an article on women’s suffrage Lewald published in 1870, and which will be discussed, out of chronological order, in the following section.

i. ***Die Frauen und das allgemeine Wahlrecht (1870)***³²⁵

In *Für und wider die Frauen* (1870) Lewald takes up a stance in support of women’s suffrage, and it is one of the few texts where she comments on the matter directly. She gives an account of two letters from female readers she has received, one from America and one from Switzerland. The Swiss reader tells her that on the question of formal education for women, Switzerland has made considerable progress, and that nobody would keep a girl from studying and practising medicine if she wished to do so. For all this progress, the Swiss women are not eligible to obtain suffrage, since they do not participate in military service.³²⁶ The American reader on the other hand asks Lewald to contribute texts to the Woman’s Suffrage Association of Missouri, and explains that she and her

³²⁵ Fanny Lewald, 'Die Frauen und das allgemeine Wahlrecht', *Westermanns Monatshefte*, 28/April - September 1870 (1870b), pp. 97-103.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

fellow associates see women's suffrage as only one element of a just and functioning republic.³²⁷ Lewald refrains from adding her comments to these excerpts but goes on to draw out the parallels between the different situations in Switzerland, America, and Germany, in which she displays a detailed knowledge of the legal situation of trade regulations and workers' associations. In this comparison she adduces the example of Germany, where women are categorically excluded from taking up apprenticeships, from which she then concludes the necessity for legal representation:

Wäre das der Fall [that women are not allowed to apprentice themselves], so wären auch in diesem Punkte die Frauen mit der einstigen Aenderung dieses Gesetzes auf den guten Willen der männlichen Gesetzgeber angewiesen, und wer von dem guten Willen Anderer in diesen wichtigsten Angelegenheiten abhängt, ist eben ein Unfreier und ein Höriger, und thatsächlich, darin hat die Amerikanerin Recht, weniger gut gestellt, als der freigelassene stimmberechtigte Neger.³²⁸

Instead of using this argument to demand a legal equality, not only in marriage but also in the work force, Lewald goes on to appeal to master craftsmen and merchants to keep their eyes and minds open for women who show an inclination and skill for their trade, and whom they could take under their wing in allowing them to work in their shops or offices.³²⁹ Nevertheless, Lewald agrees with her American reader that women should have the right to vote when it comes to legislation, as they are just as much subject to the law as men are:

Ich glaube nicht, daß bei uns in Deutschland der Zudrang zur Emancipation, zu Handel, Gewerbe und Wissenschaft von Seiten der Frauen auf weit hinaus ein so großer sein wird, daß man darüber zu klagen haben dürfte; das hindert jedoch nicht, daß es gerecht und nothwendig ist, die Schranken wegzuräumen, welche die Frauen bisher davon zurückhalten konnten. Meine Schweizerin hat in ihrem Brief Recht: „mögen sie sich versuchen!“ Und ich füge noch hinzu: Hat man den Frauen die

³²⁷ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

³²⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 124-29.

Gleichberechtigung gewährt und sie verstehen sie nicht zu benutzen, so hat sie keine Gefahr für das Allgemeine gebracht, sondern nur denjenigen Recht gegeben, welche die Frauen der Emancipation für unwerth halten. Bewähren sich aber die Frauen in der Gleichstellung – um so besser für die Gesammtheit und für sie. [...] Und es fragt sich eben deshalb, in wie weit es möglich oder statthaft und gerathen sei, den Frauen irgend einen Antheil bei der Wahl jener Männer zugestehen [sic], welche in den Parlamenten die Gesetze berathen, denen – wie meine Amerikanerin es sehr richtig bezeichnet hat – die Frauen gradeso unterworfen sind als die Männer.³³⁰

Lewald detaches the question of women's suffrage from whether they engage in military service or not, and instead focuses on the fact that women are equally subject to the law (and taxes, as she points out in other places), and therefore should have a say in the formation of said law. Nevertheless, she remains rhetorically vague as to whether she agrees to give women suffrage or not. A German-speaking newspaper in St Louis, the same city where her previously mentioned American reader lived, contacted her after the publication of the collection of letters, and questioned her more closely on her stance towards women's suffrage. Lewald replies in an open letter in *Westermanns Monatshefte* in April 1870 in which she explains her opinion in more detail, and also puts forward a rather original suggestion, which is very typical for her focus on practicality instead of theorising her stance. Ward discusses this article in her study as well, but does not really comment on the fact that this article is a doubtful contribution at best towards women's political emancipation. Instead she stresses the efforts Lewald makes to convince her readers that no great harm will come from women's political involvement, thereby glossing over the structural and theoretical issues that arise from the stance Lewald takes in this article.³³¹

³³⁰ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, pp. 130-31.

³³¹ Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 251-53.

As a first caveat, Lewald remarks that she cannot possibly comment on the situation in America, and has to content herself (and her readers) with an account of the situation in Germany. She thereby splits the English term 'suffrage' into the two German terms 'Wahlrecht' and 'Wählbarkeit', referring to the right to vote and the right to be elected respectively. She repeats her arguments from the previous letters, namely that women are just as capable as men of fulfilling their social duties, and that they should not be hindered in their choice of education and employment by legal restrictions that deny them access. She also argues that, if uneducated women are to be kept from suffrage, then the same should be true for uneducated men; since this will hardly come to pass, she sees no reason for denying suffrage to anyone, man or woman, regardless of educational and social background.³³² So far, Lewald's explanations of her reasoning are progressive indeed. However, she then follows her usual strategy in subjecting the theory to a 'reality check' (the fact that Lewald considers these general, logical arguments as 'theory' might serve as an insight as to how averse she is to actual theoretical tracts, which is surprising since she so favoured and demanded a thorough formal education, and was herself well acquainted with the works of Kant, Spinoza, and Feuerbach):³³³

Gehen wir aber von dieser theoretischen Anerkenntniß zur Praxis über, und frage ich mich selber: welchen Erfolg würde es haben, wenn man heute bei uns in Deutschland die Frauen mit den Männern gleichstellte? wenn man ihnen das Stimmrecht und das Wahlrecht in allen öffentlichen Angelegenheiten verliehe? - so glaube ich mich nicht zu irren, wenn ich behaupte, daß zunächst die Kunde von einer solchen Emancipation, von den deutschen Frauen – eine verschwindende Minderzahl ausgenommen – nur mit Erstaunen und mit Verwunderung, als etwas sehr Ueberflüssiges aufgenommen werden, und daß sie zunächst wohl ohne Einfluß auf unsere allgemeinen Verhältnisse bleiben würde.³³⁴

³³² See Lewald, 'Die Frauen und das allgemeine Wahlrecht', pp. 97-98.

³³³ See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, pp. 62-81.

³³⁴ Lewald, 'Die Frauen und das allgemeine Wahlrecht', p. 98.

Although Lewald claims that she sees no difference in the ability to vote between uneducated men and women, she nevertheless postulates that women should not receive active voting rights as long as they are not educated enough to grasp the scope of their responsibilities:

Ich sehe also auch von dieser Seite keinen Grund, die Frauen von dem Stimmrecht auszuschließen, selbst dann nicht, wenn wir sie uns ausschließlich als Gattinnen, als Mütter und als Hausfrauen denken, was denn doch eine große Anzahl, und unter ihnen vielleicht ein überwiegend gebildetes Contingent von Frauen, nicht ist. Aber – ich sehe ebensowenig die Nothwendigkeit ein, den Frauen das Stimmrecht zu ertheilen, so lange nicht eine beträchtliche Zahl die Bedeutung ihrer Forderung vollkommen klar erfassender Frauen das Stimmrecht und die Gewährung der Staatsbürgerrechte erstrebt und fordert.³³⁵

Lewald distances herself from the statements she wrote down in *Für und wider die Frauen* by saying that she had to shorten and sharpen her argument for the sake of the genre, and to impress her point more memorably upon the reader. In summary, Lewald explains that the majority of women in Germany are currently (meaning in 1870) neither educated nor mature enough to use their right to vote responsibly, and would rather treat the process of going to the polls both as a social entertainment than as a citizenly duty. She concedes though that there is a minority of educated and responsible women who would already be able to exercise their right to vote truthfully, and those women should be granted an exceptional right to vote – by men. Again, Lewald puts practical considerations above theory, with devastating conclusions, one might add:

Ich wollte nämlich, man finge damit an, die Frauen für *wählbar zu erklären*, ohne ihnen in der großen Masse das Wahlrecht einzuräumen. Theoretisch ist solch ein Gedanke nicht zu rechtfertigen, das gebe ich zu; und doch möchte er in der Praxis vielleicht das sicherste Mittel zur allmäligen [sic] Gleichstellung der Frauen, zu ihrer Erhebung und Bildung darbieten; [...] so müßten überall die Männer anfangen,

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 99.

sich selbst durch einen Akt der Gerechtigkeit zu ehren und zu erheben; sie müßten anfangen, denjenigen Frauen einen Antheil an den öffentlichen Geschäften einzuräumen, von denen sie glauben, daß sie für dieselben nützlich werden könnten, und den von ihnen gewählten Frauen selbstverständlich auch das Wahlrecht zu gewähren. Diese Erhebung, diese Emancipation der Frau durch die Achtung und Anerkennung des Mannes ist, wie die Zeiten das bürgerliche Verhältniß der Geschlechter zueinander ausgebildet haben, vielleicht diejenige, gegen welche die Empfindung der Männer sich am wenigsten auflehnen dürfte [...].³³⁶

In summary, Lewald makes the generally interesting suggestion that educated and socially engaged women should start their political involvement by recognising their eligibility for election. This would have to be discovered by responsible men who then voted them into positions where they could apply their practical talents, e.g. organisational skills, for the benefit of all of society (in contrast to ‘just’ for their family’s benefit), and prove as representatives for all women that women are indeed deserving of rights and governance. Then women have to prove themselves further, as a class of their own, so that they may gain men’s recognition and deserve being granted overall suffrage. One does not need to be overly cynical to see the pitfalls in this idea.

Lewald concludes her statement for women’s suffrage – or rather, their eligibility to be elected – with the repetition of her own personal life’s motto, ‘Arbeiten und nicht müde werden!’,³³⁷ meant as an encouragement for all women to keep improving themselves and working for eventual political recognition by responsible, sensible men. In this Lewald’s changed attitude towards the working class in general becomes apparent as well: as Schneider points out, Lewald distances herself from her earlier socialist tendencies later in her life, and starts to regard contact with working class people as something to be avoided, and the worker in general as uninterested in his or her further education and

³³⁶ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

therefore improvement.³³⁸ While Lewald's disillusionment with the power or cohesion of the working class as enablers of social change is shared by many of her contemporary intellectuals and men of state, she does go to great lengths in this short article to argue the general exclusion of working class women from political participation – for it is undoubtedly clear that she is thinking of bourgeois women with organisational or intellectual talents, not of working class female overseers or the like, whom she would like to see recognised, and elevated to state office, by male peers.

ii. Early political essays

Lewald's earliest political essays are *Einige Gedanken über Mädchenerziehung*, and *Andeutungen über die Lage der Dienstboten*, published anonymously in 1843. Ward convincingly classifies both essays as belonging to Lewald's oeuvre, and relates Lewald's later political stance to the two questions raised in these early essays.³³⁹ Lewald voices her critical thoughts about the prevalent education for girls, and their depressing consequences, for the first time in a reaction to another woman's article that advises against formal schooling for girls. In the second essay she tackles the equally thorny issue of female domestic servants in bourgeois families, and the perceived, and actual, problems that arise from contemporary service and living arrangements. She is again critical of the social circumstances that lead to the manifestation of those problems, namely, the lack of proper training as well as supporting social structures for maidservants.³⁴⁰ However, her most outspoken essays, that have received the most contemporary and scholarly attention, were published first as a succession of letters in monthly journals and then as collections in book form. One year after the publication of *Meine Lebensgeschichte* the first collection, entitled

³³⁸ See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, pp. 49-51.

³³⁹ Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 200-09.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Osterbriefe für die Frauen, appeared in 1863. In this collection of letters which are explicitly addressed to Lewald's female readership, she again takes up her discussion of the situation of female servants and their relationship to the bourgeois housewife. In summary, Lewald recognises the plight of the servants in the prevalent order of things, compares this to the established institutions of support that are available to the male apprentices of craftsmen, and proposes on the one hand the creation of similar institutions for female servants, but on the other hand she reminds her fellow bourgeois housewives that they have responsibilities towards their servants as well. The style in which Lewald goes about arguing for this quite specific social change, in awareness as well as in formal implementation, is very typical of her self-presentation, but also of her introduction and presentation of ideas. In most of her political texts, Lewald follows a distinct structure of argumentation. She addresses her readers directly, usually in the form of a letter, and explains what has prompted her to write the article at hand. This preamble functions on the one hand as a contextualisation of her position in the discourse, on the other hand as a formalised smoke screen against potential critics who might take offence at a woman writing on political matters on her own initiative. After this preamble, Lewald then describes the current state of affairs she wants to discuss, often with polemical rhetoric, and draws parallels to similar situations or institutions available to the male part of society. With this method she is able to raise awareness of institutionalised injustices and commonly believed, yet hardly challenged prejudices in society. Additionally, the comparison to already existing mechanisms, e.g. for young male apprentices, already provides her with models and possible solutions to the questions she asks her readers. This argumentative section is often followed by practical examples or anecdotes from her own experience, or from those her readers have shared with her in letters. This part is probably the most important in Lewald's attitude towards political argument: for her, theorising is all well and good for formally educated men and scholars, but in order to spread the

message among the vast majority of the population, one needs practical examples more than elaborate theories, as she states in the later collection of letters *Für und wider die Frauen* (1870):

Größere als ich, die bedeutendsten Denker unserer Zeit, haben sich in ihren theoretischen Werken ausführlich und so erschöpfend über dieses Thema ausgesprochen, daß für den, der diese Schriften kennt, fast nichts mehr hinzuzusetzen bleibt. Aber für die Einsicht derer, welchen jene umfassende Schriften nicht zugänglich sind, und für die große Zahl jener Andern, welche zu sagen lieben: daß dies Alles in der Theorie recht schön, in der Praxis aber nicht ausführbar sei, oder daß es in der Praxis doch anders herauskomme – für diese ist es vielleicht von Nutzen, wenn eine Frau ihnen aus dem ziemlich weit reichenden Kreise ihrer persönlichen Erfahrungen immer und immer wieder die Beispiele vorhält, welche für diese gute Sache sprechen.³⁴¹

These examples affirm what Lewald often regarded not as a matter of political campaigning, but of common sense, and at the same time enable her to open up her argumentation to a dialogue with her readers, by showing that she listens to previous readers' responses, as well as appealing to her readers' own experiences in similar situations. Both Freund and Ward point out that one recurring theme of Lewald's political letters is the attempt to create a certain bond amongst women, a notion of community that would ideally transcend class boundaries and would form a kind of social network of 'sisterly' support.³⁴² Lewald herself, though, remains in the role of the tutor and the real life example in this matter, yet she rarely includes herself when talking about the improvements that have to be made in order to create a supportive structure. Referring to shared anecdotes, examples from real life, and appealing to the reader's own experiences includes the reader actively in the thought process, and thus in the argumentative framework of Lewald's pleadings. In this frequently employed argumentative structure Lewald also comes back to

³⁴¹ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, p. 56.

³⁴² Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*“, pp. 427-33; Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, pp. 218-32.

two points again and again: the necessity for women's formal and vocational education, and women's own responsibility for social change and legal as well as social emancipation. She sarcastically points out that she keeps coming back to the same demands in her letters:

“Im Uebrigen,“ so schloß der alte Cato jede seiner Reden, „bin ich der Ansicht, daß Karthago zerstört werden muß!“ – „Im Uebrigen,“ so möchte ich jeden meiner Briefe schließen, „bin ich der Ansicht, daß wir zunächst Realschulen für die Frauen, und wenn diese reichlich besucht werden, dann auch Gymnasien für die Frauen haben müssen – damit das Werk der Emancipation, wie jeder andere verständige Bau, auf einem soliden Fundamente aufgerichtet werde.“³⁴³

These two topics recur in almost circular motions throughout her essays, usually just after several of her practical examples, and are the only occasions on which Lewald herself drifts off into theorising her arguments within the greater context of legal and political theory.

iii. *Osterbriefe für die Frauen (1863)*

In her introduction to the *Osterbriefe*, Lewald comments upon her dedication of the text to women on the one hand, and to the ‘deutschen Arbeiter- und Handwerker-Vereinen’³⁴⁴ on the other hand, and explains why she chose this double dedication. She assumes that the group of people she wants to reach with her letters, the uneducated female manufacturers, will not have the possibility to actually read them. Therefore Lewald addresses the women of her own sphere, the educated women, and the men of professional societies, and tasks them with educating the group of female workers who lack opportunities for on-going education. Lewald assumes further that most of the men in such professional societies have an interest in political matters that concern them professionally

³⁴³ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, p. 118.

³⁴⁴ Fanny Lewald, *Osterbriefe für die Frauen* (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1863), p. ix.

at least, and are therefore more likely to see the benefit of improving the lot of their female colleagues. But Lewald also addresses this group on a personal level, as the fathers, brothers and (future) husbands – and therefore, one might add, legal guardians - of the women she tries to reach with her texts. Whether Lewald was correct in her assessment of her target group, or whether she thought that the changes she proposed should be implemented by her social peers rather than the workers she wrote about, remains unclear. Lewald certainly saw the social and legal injustices that dominated the class consciousness of contemporary society and wrote passionately against those established structures, but it needs pointing out that in doing so she was clearly subject to bourgeois class consciousness as well. Since she identified herself mainly as an author, it was perfectly legitimate to approach these topics through writing, but if her main concern really was to reach the barely educated working class, her choice of a bourgeois publisher, and the placing of her letters in an equally bourgeois weekly journal, seems counter-intuitive. It seems more likely that, in accordance with Ward's theory of her trying to establish a feeling of 'sisterhood' amongst her readers, Lewald tried to change the mindset and class awareness of her own social stratum first, in order to rally supporters for the greater social changes that would then benefit the uneducated masses as well. This attempt at a top-down reform is in danger of patronising or even silencing the actual demands of the disadvantaged part of the power equation – in Lewald's letters the reader learns at length that maidservants surely would appreciate a regular afternoon of lessons in history, book keeping, or natural science by the lady of the house. It is remarkable that Lewald chooses to present her suggestions as a directive in which she does not include herself: instead of using a wording along the lines of 'we should', she points out to her fellow housewives what they should do. Schneider gives some examples and remarks:

“Schafft Schreibebücher an, und laßt die Mädchen, die es nöthig haben, eine halbe Stunde schreiben“ (S. 90) [...] Erzählt ihnen die Geschichte der Stadt [...] leset

ihnen Märchen vor" (S. 91) [...] Erklärt ihnen, wie unser Staatswesen zusammengesetzt ist [...] Erklärt ihnen was die Genossenschaften, Feuerversicherungen, Lebensversicherungen [...] bezwecken [...] Erklärt ihnen, was Zinsen, was Staatspapiere, was Eisenbahnaktien sind" (S. 93). Die Litanei der Vorschläge reißt nicht ab; die mit Hilfe von Wiederholungen und Anaphern erzielte Eindringlichkeit wirkt penetrant.³⁴⁵

On the other hand, Lewald takes the dominant part of the power equation to task with regard to the ways the bourgeois family members can make a practical, day-to-day difference to the lives of people considered less fortunate. It is Lewald's principle of ranking practicalities above theories at its best, and at its worst. The down-to-earth approach and practical, common sense suggestions to improve the daily life of both female factory workers and maid servants on the one hand, and the bourgeois family on the other hand, are definitely able to erode class barriers and establish a feeling of community. However, these suggestions are not adequate to change the mechanisms of society's class system, out of a lack of awareness of the variety of factors that work within a society, such as economics, the form of government, and class consciousness in the so-called lower classes themselves. Lewald was definitely aware of the power of economic factors, she repeatedly stated that, should a maid servant earn a wage with which she could subsidise her family as well as her own needs more easily, the power relation between her and the employer could develop from total dependence towards mutual respect for the work and services rendered. However, Lewald primarily saw sufficient wages for female workers and servants as a way to enable them to save up for their dowry, and only in unfortunate cases as a means to earn their living for the rest of their lives. Apart from her unchallenging assumption about women's life plans here, she does not take into account either that, firstly, the higher wages she demands would hardly be of a level to enable social mobility, and that, secondly, there would be no guarantee that the women who

³⁴⁵ Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, p. 285.

worked for the wages would have them at their disposal, as the legal situation would have made it possible for their father to claim them as his own. Schneider remarks, with reference to Claus-Dieter Krohn and Bernd Peschken:³⁴⁶

Fanny Lewalds Haltung entspricht der des liberalen Bürgertums, dem vorgeworfen werden kann, den Zusammenhang von sozialen und politischen Fragen übersehen zu haben: „Der Einsatz der Liberalen für die Interessen der Arbeiter verdeutlicht, daß ihnen die Politisierung der gesellschaftlich Machtlosen völlig fern lag; in ihren stereotypen Angeboten von ‘Bildung‘ und ‘Selbsthilfe‘ zeigte sich die elementare Verkennung sozialer Probleme“.³⁴⁷

While Lewald earnestly wants to change the lot and the educational level of female factory workers and servants and expresses insightful and progressive ideas as how to go about it, she does not challenge the overall assumption that the bourgeois life style and mindset is the one that should prevail, and the one to which the lower classes should aspire within their limited means. In her far reaching, detailed practical advice Lewald loses sight of the more abstract requirements on the political side of women’s emancipation that go beyond a thorough, equal education.

iv. *Für und wider die Frauen (1870)*

In the collection of letters published under the title *Für und wider die Frauen* in 1870 and dedicated to John Stuart Mill in the preface, Lewald focuses primarily on the topic of women’s education, or the lack thereof, and how this is reflected in the attitude of the majority of bourgeois women. Lewald decries the state of superficial knowledge that most women acquire through the little schooling they get, and shows how that affirms the established prejudices about female gender roles and women’s capacity for formal

³⁴⁶ Claus-Dieter Krohn and Bernd Peschken (eds.), *Der liberale Roman und der preußische Verfassungskonflikt* (Stuttgart, 1976).

³⁴⁷ Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, p. 48.

education. Lewald differs in her approach from other authors such as Dohm or Anneke in that she does not place a lot of the responsibility for the status quo exclusively on patriarchal society but points out that it is women's own responsibility to strive for change, and that they have to be critical of themselves if they want society to change the prevailing image it has of the bourgeois, idle woman. Schneider points out that Lewald's humour is always present in her texts, but usually in a hurtful way, not in a way that would induce a sense of community or equal ground between women.³⁴⁸ One particular passage might illustrate this point:

Wenn ich mir die Frauen ansehe, denen ich in den Straßen unserer Städte, in Badeorten, in den Theatern, und in den Sälen unserer Gesellschaft begegne, so frage ich mich freilich selber unwillkürlich: Kann man denn wirklich ernsthaft an die Emancipation der Frauen denken? [...] Ich möchte eine große Anzahl von Ihnen, meine Leserinnen, fragen: Glauben Sie, daß ein verständiger Mann Ihnen irgendeine ernsthafte Bedeutung zutrauen kann, wenn er Sie auf Stelzenschuhen, in einer Kleidung, die von hinten und von vorn in ihren Aufbauschungen aussieht, als wäre ein altes Gardinenbett Ihr Schönheits-Ideal und als ließen Sie Ihre Kleider bei dem Tapezierer machen - glauben Sie, daß man Ihnen einen ernsthaften Gedanken zutrauen kann, wenn man sieht, wie es keine Abgeschmacktheit in Kleidung und Frisur mehr giebt, die Sie mitzumachen und wo möglich noch zu übertreiben, nicht sofort beflissen wären, um durch diese Übertreibung die Blicke der Männer auf Sich zu ziehen? Kann ein Mann Sie in diesen "Costümen" oder in Ihren Salon-Toiletten, die in allen Farben des Regenbogens schimmern, wirklich für seines Gleichen halten? - Ich versichere Sie, es fällt das selbst verständigen Frauen und Mädchen häufig schwer genug.³⁴⁹

While Lewald mostly criticises the entertainment-seeking and fashionable women of her own social class, it seems odd that she ridicules them on the basis of appearances. There is an undertone here that suggests that women have to prove themselves worthy (e.g. by wearing sensible clothes and resisting the demands of fashion) before they might be

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 277.

³⁴⁹ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, pp. 145-46.

considered as equals, and that the fault lies with them for being silly if they are not taken seriously. This contradicts Lewald's stance in other letters that women should be regarded as equally suited for intellectual work and education, no matter what their station in life happens to be. Lewald also criticises the fact that a lot of women are not lacking in ability, but are too afraid of hard work to achieve their own independence, which in turn leads to a false affirmation of gender prejudices:

Es klingt, als wollte ich spotten oder eine Satyre schreiben; aber es ist schwer, mit Gleichmuth über Dinge zu reden, über die man durch lange Jahre gegen eine hartnäckige Verblendung zu streiten gehabt hat. Und dabei läuft im Grunde Alles, was man gegen die Selbstständigkeit der Frauen vorzubringen pflegte, auf Unwahrheit und Selbstbetrug hinaus: sowohl die Hinweisung auf das Eldorado des Familienlebens, für das die Mädchen ausschließlich berufen sein sollen, als die Vorstellung von den Gefahren, welche aus der gewerbthätigen Arbeit für die Frauen erwachsen können.³⁵⁰

Lewald also rightly criticises the fact that a lot of young women who would like to earn their own living are still entrenched in bourgeois prejudices about what is suitable work for them. Therefore they aspire to be writers or poets but recoil from the notion of learning a trade, hanging on to the notion that their independence should be given to them instead of earning it by hard work:

Die Einen hatten gar nichts Ordentliches gelernt und nur allerlei bunte Lectüre getrieben, aus der sie ein unbestimmtes Verlangen nach einer glückbringenden Selbstständigkeit in sich aufgenommen hatten; die Anderen besaßen die eben auch nicht übermäßigen Kenntnisse, welche das Gouvernanten-Examen erfordert. Alle aber hielten, hinter mehr oder weniger verschleierten Worten, die geheime Ueberzeugung zurück, daß sie zu Schriftstellerinnen geboren wären [...]. Sie haben mir oft recht leid gethan, die guten Seelen, wenn ich in das feine und künstliche Spinnwebgewebe ihrer Hoffnungen und in alle die rosigen Erwartungen, welche sie auf mich und meinen Beistand gerichtet hatten, mit der groben Frage hineinfahren mußte: was haben Sie denn gelernt? welche Fähigkeit oder Fertigkeit besitzen Sie,

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

auf die sich die Aussicht einer ersprießlichen Thätigkeit bauen ließe? [...] Sie wollten eben »auf ihre Façon selig werden« und nicht auf die meine, und ich bin ihnen immer sehr prosaisch vorgekommen, wenn ich ihnen den Rath gegeben habe, es doch mit einem bürgerlichen Gewerbe zu versuchen, da man Schriftsteller und Dichter nicht wie Graveur oder Putzhändler werden könne.³⁵¹

Schneider points out that Lewald's concept of emancipation is primarily one of economic independence, before and during marriage, and therefore requires the right to work and the appropriate education towards this goal.³⁵² While Lewald still saw the primary job of women inside the family, she was of course aware that not all women could, or wanted to, marry, and that those women needed not only the means to sustain themselves, but neither should they be hindered from pursuing the line of work they liked best, since male apprentices could choose, another topic Lewald analyses in depth in the *Osterbriefe*. This opinion makes Lewald one of the more progressive writers on women's education; she stresses the benefits that a previously employed woman can bring to a marriage, but in contrast to many of her contemporaries, she does not see this primarily as useful for childrearing, but in purely economic terms, making her as free of the ideology of the housewife and mother as possible. However, this progressive and affirmative account of what women could do is directly linked to Lewald's harshest critique of women in general, that is, that the majority are still too caught up in their ideals and prejudices to actually get to the practicalities of true emancipation. Lewald turns this into an argument against the theoreticians but the critique remains sharp:

Man darf allen denen, welche etwa heute noch gegen unsere Emancipation zur Arbeit eingenommen sein sollten, die tröstliche Versicherung geben, daß die Frauen in der Masse gar nicht so entsetzlich darauf erpicht sind, sich ihr Brod durch ihre Arbeit selber zu verdienen. Sie sind dazu im allgemeinen noch viel zu oberflächlich, viel zu gedankenlos! Es ist ihnen im Großen und Ganzen noch sehr

³⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 3-5.

³⁵² See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, pp. 103-08.

angenehm, wenn ein Anderer das Geld zu ihren Chignons und Schleppen, zu ihren kleinen und großen, zum Theil sehr leeren, Vergnügungen erwirbt.³⁵³

While Lewald mainly criticises the attitude of bourgeois women, Schneider points out that although she had some information about the life and realities of servants and industrial workers, she had in general a rather abstract notion of what the living conditions of the working class really were.³⁵⁴ The criticism she utters against the majority of women in *Für und wider die Frauen* is clearly levelled at her own social circle, and in particular at the notion that women inhabit a special status in society, which might be of advantage in some situations, but on the whole prevents women's full emancipation: 'Wer wirklich ein Befreier des weiblichen Geschlechts werden will, muß daher vor Allem dazu thun, es von seiner unheilvollen Sonderstellung zu erlösen'.³⁵⁵ With this argument Lewald also expresses her scepticism towards universities for women and towards school education in which girls and boys are taught separately. Her explicit demand calls for equal, ungendered requirements in education (though on a par with the requirements men already have to fulfil): 'Behandelt uns wie Männer, damit wir tüchtige Frauen werden können [...]'.³⁵⁶ Another factor in Lewald's argument is that it is far too early to establish universities for women, or to grant access to universities to women in general (specific cases would merit an exception), because the majority of women are not ready for the demands higher education would place on them.³⁵⁷ She states in this context that women are not at fault for their superficial knowledge but simply the victims of social standards and the resulting gender-specific education:

Und Alle, die uns diese Fehler vorwerfen, und wir Alle, die der Masse der sogenannten guten Hausfrauen kleinliche Vorurtheile, schwere Zugänglichkeit für

³⁵³ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, pp. 11-12.

³⁵⁴ Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, pp. 54-55.

³⁵⁵ Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, p. 67.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³⁵⁷ See *ibid.*

bessere Einsichten und Gott weiß was noch vorwerfen – haben Alle Recht. Aber die Frauen sind an ihrer Oberflächlichkeit nicht Schuld.³⁵⁸

At the same time, Lewald did not exactly mince her words when it came to dealing with the display of superficial knowledge, as this episode, which Lewald recalls at the end of her letters, shows and which she recounts somewhat despairingly, but also with a certain undertone of smugness:

Ich habe einmal dabei gesessen, als ein neunzehnjähriges Mädchen seine Ansicht über Goethe und die Goethe'schen Romane mit großer Entschiedenheit geltend zu machen suchte, während Heinrich Simon, Adolf Stahr und Johann Jacoby das Thema durchsprachen und ihr aus Höflichkeit das Mitsprechen nicht versagten, bis endlich meine Bemerkung: „wo drei solche Männer sprechen und ich zuhöre, um zu lernen, könntest Du wohl still sein!“ die kleine alberne Person zum Schweigen brachte.³⁵⁹

It seems that Lewald, though very rigorous and down to earth in her demands regarding women's formal education, is not exactly willing to acknowledge other, especially younger women's efforts to engage in intellectual pursuits and to participate in educational discussions. As Ulrike Helmer in her epilogue to a new edition of Lewald's *Meine Lebensgeschichte* points out, Lewald saw men as the educators of women: men are seen as the 'Erzieher, Aufklärer, Lehrer der Frau'.³⁶⁰ Brigitta van Rheinberg adds in her biography of Lewald: 'Sie [Lewald] betonte dabei ausdrücklich die Pflicht der Männer, ihren Frauen, Schwestern und Töchtern bei deren Weiterentwicklung zu helfen.'³⁶¹ We can conclude from the episode quoted that she appears to have believed in strict teacher and pupil structures, as opposed to intellectual exchange, in this matter.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.140-41.

³⁶⁰ See Ulrike Helmer (ed.), *Nachwort. "Meine Lebensgeschichte. By Fanny Lewald. Vol. 1* (Frankfurt: Helmer, 1989), p. 276.

³⁶¹ Brigitta van Rheinberg, *Fanny Lewald: Geschichte einer Emanzipation* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 1990), p. 179.

Lewald's principle of ranking practice higher than theory finds its expression in this collection of letters as well. As illustrated, she favoured a thorough, equal education for boys and girls together, and the establishment of vocational schools over grammar schools and universities, at least for the time being. She also illustrates her opinion by recalling a conversation with a merchant, the owner of his own company: after a lengthy discussion about the financial advantages working class girls bring to their families, Lewald asks the merchant whether he would consider employing middle-class girls in his office. He declines, pointing out the difficulties he had in preserving the girls' virtue, since the young men engage in rough banter and even intrusiveness with the (working class) servant girls, and he would not like to expose genteel girls to that. Lewald keeps challenging his assumptions about both genders and their respective behaviour towards each other, so that in the end the merchant has to admit that she might be right, and that employment side by side might not only be possible, but even beneficial for everyone involved. But:

Nun denn, trotz alle dem wurde der Versuch doch nicht gewagt. Der Kaufmann und die Eltern der Mädchen gaben Alles zu, was man irgend wollte, aber von beiden Seiten hatte man Scheu, gegen die bestehenden Vorurtheile und Gewohnheiten anzugehen [...].³⁶²

Lewald indirectly criticises the fact that the prevailing theories and ideals prevent a practical solution, effectively disabling common sense amongst otherwise very practical people. With her refusal to underpin her practical demands with a theoretical foundation, or even framework, she effectively robs her argument of a political dimension that, in the long term, would be able to enshrine all her practical demands in a political and legal form. Without this, Lewald remains on the level of bourgeois ideology regarding women's place in the family and men's role in creating and running the state, despite her ferocious advocacy of women's emancipation in the workplace.

³⁶² Lewald, *Für und wider die Frauen*, pp. 29-30.

b. Political Theory and Practice in Lewald's literary texts

Based on Lewald's attitudes towards women's participation in theoretical discourse about politics and their practical involvement in it, it is not surprising that in the many novels, novellas and stories she wrote there are hardly any women who utter political statements. In her early novels *Clementine* (1842) and *Jenny* (1843), as well as in the novellas *Eine Lebensfrage* (1845) and *Der dritte Stand* (1846), Lewald discusses progressive social possibilities of change in questioning both gender and class boundaries, as discussed in depth by Schneider, Ujma, Ward, van Ornam and Freund, to name just a few.³⁶³ Schneider, in particular, discusses in the most detailed manner Lewald's change from Vormärz progressive narrator towards a didactic, rather conservative, Biedermeier narrator, and, starting in the 1870s, even a patriotic writer.³⁶⁴ The most common topics Lewald concerns herself with in her early writing career are arranged marriages, discrimination against Jews and in particular Jewish women, class differences and class transgression between bourgeoisie and nobility and between bourgeoisie and the working class.³⁶⁵ Most of these topics do play a certain role in her later works, though it changes in favour of a more conservative attitude in which she regards bourgeois life as the benchmark.³⁶⁶ Schneider points out that this ossification in Lewald's topics and attitude also manifests itself in the development, or rather lack of development, in her style of writing in her later novels, especially those she wrote as serials for publication in bourgeois magazines:

Ehemals progressive Ideen verblassen schließlich im Laufe der Zeit, eine geistige, politische Entwicklung findet nicht statt, Emotionen erstarren zu Floskeln, Figuren zu

³⁶³ See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*; Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, Ujma (ed.), *Fanny Lewald (1811-1889). Studien zu einer großen europäischen Schriftstellerin und Intellektuellen*, van Ornam, *Fanny Lewald and nineteenth-century constructions of femininity*, Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*.

³⁶⁴ See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, pp. 163-95 and pp. 316-25.

³⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 331.

³⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

Typen, so lauten zusammengefaßt die sprachlichen und konzeptionellen Mängel der Familienblattromane, die schließlich ihr Absinken zu Romanen der Unterschicht, zum Trivialroman, zur Folge haben. Auch die erwähnten Familienblattromane Lewalds sind von diesen Mängeln nicht frei [...]. Das Repertoire der Stoffe und Motive Fanny Lewalds ist weit weniger breit als das der von ihr verwendeten Gattungen, worin sich die biedermeierliche Liebe zur Formenvielfalt dokumentiert.³⁶⁷

Lewald remains faithful to her principle of practice over theory in her literary texts. While she creates some female characters that diverge distinctly from the established literary images of women, as van Ornam analyses in her study,³⁶⁸ a common characteristic of her literary women is that they are all embodiments of lived, practical emancipation in Lewald's sense of the word, whereas the male characters are the ones who talk political or social theory. One of the most striking examples of this distinction can be found in the novella *Martina*, published in the collection *Neue Novellen* (1876), about which Schneider remarks:

Auffallend sind progressive Äußerungen des männlichen Protagonisten, der die grundsätzliche Andersartigkeit der Frauen in Frage stellt [...]. Vielmehr versucht er zu erklären: *Die Frauen sind dasjenige geworden, wozu man sie gemacht hat. Man hat sie wie Kinder und Sklaven gehalten, sie haben auch alle die Eigenschaften und Fehler von Kindern und von Sklaven und da man sie noch heute in dem Dogma erzieht, daß sie an sich nichts sind, haltlos sind, und nur durch den Mann zu etwas werden können, so suchen sie natürlich einen Mann und suchen sich an ihm um jeden Preis den Halt zu schaffen, durch den sie etwas werden sollen, gleichviel wozu.* [Martina, p. 19] Diesen Einsichten stehen Handlungsweise und Aussagen der Titelheldin diametral gegenüber [...].³⁶⁹

At this point it is important to clarify Lewald's concept of emancipation. In her literary texts, her most emancipated and exemplary women are the ones who work for their living in a modest, down-to-earth fashion, and who take pride in their financial independence.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 311-12.

³⁶⁸ van Ornam, *Fanny Lewald and nineteenth-century constructions of femininity*.

³⁶⁹ Schneider, *Fanny Lewald*, p. 111, italics by Schneider.

They do not waste their time constructing political or social theories about the nature of the challenges and obstacles they had faced, but simply overcome them out of necessity and with the guidance of their truthfulness to themselves and their willpower. Schneider also gives an accurate summary of Lewald's critique of some images connected to the term emancipation:

Sie [Lewald's literary women] haben praktische Lebenserfahrung; Theorien der Frauenemanzipation sind ihnen meist fremd, sie leben sie. Bezeichnenderweise werden sie als „wirklich“ emanzipierte Frauen nicht selten Zerbildern [sic] des Typs der „Emanze“ nach dem Vorbild der George Sand gegenüber gestellt.³⁷⁰

Those female characters usually wear men's clothing, have short hair and smoke cigars: the allusions to George Sand on the one hand, and Louise Aston on the other are quite obvious here. Lewald's concept of emancipation, Schneider states, lies in women's development towards their true selves, mostly catalysed by the necessity to work, whereas only the fashionably emancipated women remain trapped in this role as in one among many, and fail to grasp the meaning of true emancipation. Referring to Regula Venske's analysis Schneider confirms that Lewald's female characters are examples of an 'Interimsemanzipation', meaning that those characters enjoy their work and independence and the life experiences and wisdom they acquire from them, as long as they last – and that is until they marry.³⁷¹

c. *Auf rother Erde* (1850)

Another example of the gendered distribution of theory and practice can be found in the early novella *Auf rother Erde* (1850), analysed in detail by Marion Freund and

³⁷⁰ Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman*, p. 118.

³⁷¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 118-21.

Whittle and Pinfeld.³⁷² In this text, set in a rural area of Westphalia in the year 1848, Lewald pits the rich farmer Schmidt and his daughter Marie against the bourgeois industrialist and privy councillor Werder and his son Anton. Schmidt is depicted as the proud farmer who wants to preserve the legal interests of his class, such as advantages in inheritance law that he sees threatened by the social democratic government. Werder is in contrast depicted as the small-minded, egoistical industrialist who has gained a deputy's seat in Parliament but uses this to preserve his personal advantage instead of supporting the democratic cause of the government. Lewald characterises him in her typical fashion by again stressing that theory is not as convincing as practice, which is an important argument in her own political stance:

Dass jede in sich richtige Theorie im Leben früher oder später auszuführen sei, war eine Erkenntniss, gegen welche der Geheimrath sich mit voller Energie sträubte, weil sie ihm nicht in seine gewohnte Vorstellungs- und Handlungsweise passte.³⁷³

While the fathers of both families discuss political discrepancies and the opposed interests of their respective class, the novella mainly traces Anton's coming of age in both political opinion and, closely connected to his empathy with the rural working class, his personal development. He falls in love with Schmidt's daughter, Marie, but her grandmother Margarethe fears that his bourgeois upbringing will lead to him dishonouring and abandoning Marie, in a repetition of Margarethe's fate at the hand of Anton's grandfather. Freund shows that, while Anton undergoes the classical course of a bourgeois *Bildungsroman* hero in his personal development and his political disagreement with his father, Marie does not develop at all, but is depicted with lots of idealised naturalistic and

³⁷² See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 420-44 and Whittle and Pinfeld, *Voices of rebellion*, pp. 92-99.

³⁷³ Fanny Lewald, *Auf rother Erde* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1850), pp. 18-19.

religious imagery.³⁷⁴ The couple is able to overcome the class barrier that divides them in the end, but only at the cost of emigrating to America where they continue to live as farmers, the profession which Anton had devoted himself to in order to win Marie's hand from her sceptical father. Again Lewald's conviction that men are the educators of women forms part of the end of the story:

Jetzt, während der Erzähler diese letzten Zeilen schreibt, ist Marie schon seit einem Jahre Antons Weib. Sie schafft rüstig auf der Farm am Mississippi, welche ihr Mann gekauft hat, und ist seine Lehrerin in der Landwirthschaft, wie er der ihre in allen anderen Gegenständen.³⁷⁵

Freund remarks that it might be seen as progressive that Anton accepts practical education from his wife.³⁷⁶ At the same time, it is rather clear that Lewald again sticks to her perception of the bourgeois family as the model that women should aspire to, as she adapts, or even raises, Marie in the course of the novella to the bourgeois image of the housewife and mother, with an added Lewald-esque practical working ability that enables her to run her husband's farm while he is still learning this practicality from her. Margarethe, Marie's grandmother, appears as the only other woman that might be capable of subversive opinions. Her life story reveals her to be a tragic victim of the double standards and righteous virtue of her time: once wooed by Anton's grandfather, she promised to wait for him while he created an economic existence for himself. He struggled for several years to do so, and in the end married another woman who brought some means into the marriage, thereby founding the family's substantial fortune. Margarethe suffered the stigma of the abandoned lover, and her brother (Marie's father), who had taken over as head of the family after their father's early death, expelled her from her parental home. Margarethe vowed never to set foot in her brother's house again unless he forgave her, and

³⁷⁴ See esp. Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, pp. 427-33 and pp. 42-44.

³⁷⁵ Lewald, *Auf rother Erde*, pp. 170-71.

³⁷⁶ See Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*, p. 444.

Anton meets her still living on her own and separated from her family, earning a meagre living as seamstress and washer-woman, but nevertheless proud that she has kept her vow all her life. In Margarethe Lewald points out the double standards regarding society's demands of women's virtue, and also the possibility for a woman to live a modest life on her own. On the other hand, Margarethe is clearly marked as an outsider by her status as a spinster, and while she keeps her pride through all the difficulties that life throws at her, it is also clear that she is quite melancholy about her fate of living alone without a family of her own. Margarethe also declares herself Marie's guardian, so that her fate shall not be the same as Margarethe's own, and advises her against seeing Anton until he has obtained her father's permission to marry her. It is quite difficult to see a form of emancipation in this behaviour; however, Ward points out that Lewald was almost obsessed at times with the topic of personal renunciation as a prerequisite to a life to the benefit of society.³⁷⁷ Margarethe certainly has the potential to demonstrate an alternative model for a proud woman's life, but the overall depiction leans rather towards the standard 'heterosexual marriage plot', in Ward's words, as the ideal path.

d. *Adele* (1855)

In the short novel *Adele* (1855) Lewald focusses on a young woman's misplaced ambitions to become an author; one could even describe the depiction of the protagonist as Lewald's unspoken yet quite palpable delineation of someone with ideas above her station, namely, the idea of being an author, who shuns the love of an honest, down-to-earth potential husband in favour of those ideas. The novel revolves around the pampered and only superficially educated daughter of good family, Adele, and her older cousin Samuel, who has studied theology and earns his living as a private tutor to the sons of rich families.

³⁷⁷ See Ward, *Fanny Lewald: between rebellion and renunciation*, esp. chapter three, pp. 129-99.

Because Adele's father is not very apt at running the family business, a publishing house, and brings it to the brink of ruin, Samuel agrees to take over the financial supervision in an attempt to save the family from bankruptcy. He lives together with the rest of the family and meets Adele when she is just a teenager who is greatly in love with an aspiring, Byronesque poet who feels flattered by and entitled to her worship. When this budding romance falls foul of the poet's marriage to a rich heiress, Adele pours her hurt feelings and her self-delusion of a tragic yet noble renunciation into a novel. The only thinly, even clumsily veiled identities of the protagonists of that novel lead to a scandal in the family's home town, yet Adele feels flattered by the attention she gets, failing to realise that people are not interested in her as an author but in seeing her as the scandalous woman who dared to make her failed love public. Samuel, in turn, is repulsed by Adele's trespassing across the boundary of what he sees as woman's natural place, the home, by publishing a novel (and such a superficial and bad novel to boot), and stifles his growing attachment to the girl. When Adele's father dies quite suddenly, the publishing house cannot be saved and has to be sold. Samuel moves to a smaller town and starts his own publishing house with some of the contacts he was able to make in his uncle's employment, and Adele and her mother move to Leipzig, where she makes use of her name as a published woman and manages to earn their living by writing. Adele realises that her previous education has not prepared her for the life she now faces, and with that comes also the realisation that the novel she considered her first and most soulful work is, in actual fact, quite banal and full of self-deceiving sentimentality. Nevertheless, Adele has to earn money by writing insubstantial novels for the entertainment of the bourgeoisie, since she has not learned anything else that would provide her with a profession. She does this more or less successfully and is able to carve out a modest living for herself and her mother, who eventually dies and leaves Adele to live on her own. She even remains in contact with Samuel who visits her in Leipzig each time he travels to the annual book fair. From this situation, the two of them develop a

comfortable familiarity with each other, and after going through several tearful misunderstandings and quite humorous trials and tribulations they finally realise their love for each other. Content to accept each other with all the quirks both of them have acquired during their single lives, they laugh about the fairy-tale fantasies they had in their youth, and the now mature couple marries to live happily ever after.

Lewald succeeds in weaving an entertaining tale (in which especially Samuel's fixation on his old coat provides great comedy) and criticising at the same time the literary ambitions of female writers who, in Lewald's opinion, simply lack the skill for thoughtful and stylistically accurate writing. The novel is on the whole rather light-hearted and Lewald touches only provisionally upon her standard topics of the lack of women's professional education, unrealistic ideals of romantic love and self-deception of great artistry. Nevertheless, she makes quite clear that she considers young Adele's airy delusions of grandeur to be a frequently occurring fault in aspiring female writers, and that these delusions of artistic ability, despite the lack of proper training, have to be overcome, as well as the false image of female self-sacrifice for the benefit of an undeserving lover (which Adele indulged in after her break-up with the poet). Especially in her depiction of the young Adele, and her continual ignoring of the down-to-earth, yet perhaps somewhat stuffy Samuel, Lewald becomes almost acid, until she redeems her protagonist through the application of emancipating work, growing self-awareness and, in the end, marriage.

e. *Die Dilettanten* (1867)

The novel *Die Dilettanten*, published in 1867, features what Schneider describes as Lewald's Biedermeier style of the closed narrative form.³⁷⁸ The novel begins with a frame narration in which a nameless first person narrator describes her (one assumes) stay in a

³⁷⁸ See Schneider, *Vom Zeitroman zum stylisierten Roman: Die Erzählerin Fanny Lewald*, pp. 163-95.

health spa, and a conversation that develops over lunch between an amiable group of guests. The conversation turns towards the topic of dilettantes, especially in the musical profession as performers and teachers. All agree that there is nothing worse than having to endure an amateur performance of mediocre skill, and from this the narrator takes her cue to tell the story of a couple among her acquaintances which might serve to illustrate the devastating effects dilettantism has on the acquisition of general life skills.

The internal story features the protagonists Arthur and Mary, as well as Malwine in the later part of the story. Arthur is described as a 'Sonntagskind' from a middle-class family who has proverbial luck when it comes to fulfilling his wishes. He begins to study classics but is prevented from taking his teaching qualification exam by his call to military service. After he finishes he is employed by the rich industrialist Werdek, who has taken a shine to the well-mannered and pleasantly well-read young man, as a travel companion. After some extensive travel, Werdek takes Arthur into his home as a kind of socialite and editorial assistant for his democratic newspaper. At Werdek's lavish mansion Arthur also meets Werdek's young wife, Mary. The three of them live together peacefully, and just as Mary starts to develop romantic feelings towards Arthur (of which he is not aware), Werdek dies unexpectedly and leaves Mary a rich widow. Mary's mother arrives and is somewhat scandalised by the living arrangements the three of them had and, to prevent the development of any scandalous attachments, she takes Mary back to her parental home. Arthur tries to continue Werdek's newspaper but finds himself unable to judge and comment on the political proceedings adequately. Before he has to worry about his financial support, though, the mourning period for Werdek is over for Mary, and she gratefully agrees to marry him. The two of them live happily for the first year of their marriage but then boredom sets in, since none of them has an actual task or employment to fulfil. Into this situation steps Mary's old friend Malwine, a piano teacher, who is

described as ugly but full of energy and a sense of purpose. The three of them create a similar living situation to before Werdek's death, and Malwine begins to notice the difficulties and discrepancies in character between the couple. Arthur is at first somewhat apprehensive of her not too pleasing features and her no-nonsense air but familiarity develops quickly between them. At one point Malwine confides her life story to Arthur, and here Lewald picks up her familiar topics again. Malwine was an orphan who was taken in by Mary's parents, so she grew up with a sense of devotion to the beautiful Mary, and vowed to herself that she would do all she could to serve her benefactor. However, when Mary married, she did not take Malwine with her to her husband's home because Werdek did not like having Malwine around. So Malwine turned to her talent as a piano player as a means of securing a profession. She trained herself to be a piano teacher and found employment in a private school for girls, where she had to instruct all the pupils, regardless of talent or interest for the instrument. At first she felt resentment about her perceived uselessness in the wider society, but then she learned to see merit in her station and in the job she did. She tells Arthur:

[...] [U]nd wie die Kinder um mich her gediehen, wie ihre Begabung sich hoffnungsreich entfaltete, da fand ich es immer weniger schwer, nichts weiter zu sein, als eine Musiklehrerin, als ein unschönes nicht mehr junges Mädchen, das sich Anderen mit gutem Willen dienstbar macht, während es sich doch nur auf sich selbst verlassen darf. Ja, ich war endlich meinem Sterne recht dankbar dafür, daß er mich durch meine Armuth davor bewahrt hat, zu einem jener dilettantischen Halbtalente zu werden, die nutzlos in unserer Gesellschaft umherflattern, und sich und Andere nur ermüden, wenn sie sich zu erheben gedenken, während sie des fremden Beifalls nicht entbehren können. Ich? – ich bedarf jetzt Niemand! Denn ich weiß, das, was ich nöthig habe, Arbeit und die Möglichkeit zu nützen und zu lieben, das finde ich auf die eine oder auf die andere Weise zuverlässig und überall, wohin ich immer komme.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ Fanny Lewald, *Die Dilettanten* (Berlin: G. Grothe'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1867), p. 88.

This statement can be seen as characteristic of Lewald's prototypical literary figure of the emancipated woman. Her statements are undeniably progressive and speak of the self-confidence to be worthy on her own, without needing someone from whom she has to draw her worth, just as Lewald phrased it in her political essays. That Malwine is intended as a role model is confirmed by the frame narration which breaks into the flow of the internal action at this point, a narrative strategy Lewald uses to stress Malwine's importance:

Bravo! bravo! rief der Oheim, der die Gewohnheit hatte, mit seinen Bemerkungen die Unterhaltung zu unterbrechen, und den wir deshalb scherzhaft den griechischen Chorus zu nennen pflegten. Einen Lehrstuhl sollte man in allen Lehranstalten für die Männer sowohl wie für die Frauen errichten, um es ihnen von ihrer Jugend an vorzuhalten, daß nicht Jedem Alles möglich ist, und daß Jedwedem sein Glück nur nach seinen Anlagen zugemessen werden kann.³⁸⁰

After this interlude the internal story continues with Malwine's firm establishment in the household, where she succeeds in bringing structure into the daily life of the married couple. But the discontent both partners feel is not as easily removed, and here Lewald comes back to one of her other main topics of gender relations, that of men's role as educators. Mary exclaims despairingly in front of Malwine:

Du bist des Lehrens, du bist es auch gewohnt, Kinder zu erziehen und dein eigenes Leben zu leiten, sagte sie. Nun wohl denn! Seit du wieder einmal in meiner Nähe bist, fühle ich es wieder: ich, ich bin auch ein Kind und zwar ein verzogenes Kind, denn Werdek und Arthur sind mir keine Erzieher gewesen.³⁸¹

In the following, Malwine accuses Arthur of neglecting his duties as a husband because he does not concern himself with Mary's further education. Malwine and Arthur realise that they feel more attracted to each other, and more suited to each other's characters, than what is feasible in their situation, and they agree that Malwine shall depart and seek

³⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 98.

employment as a piano teacher again, in which she succeeds. Arthur asks Mary whether she is willing to give him an opportunity to turn his life to useful work, and when she agrees he enrolls at university again, this time studying medicine. They live together in a small student apartment in a university city, and Mary, now deprived of her maidservants and butlers, begins to apply herself to the household and functions as Arthur's assistant in learning for his medical exams. The couple, but especially Arthur, remains grateful to Malwine for her good advice and the role model of a fulfilled life in employment she has provided for them. Lewald also underlines the radical potential of Malwine as a literary figure when she lets Arthur muse about what Malwine's fate would have been, had she only met the right man; and not very implicitly, he pictures himself as that man, since he and Mary might have found an understanding with each other, but they are far from the complementary couple that forms the basis of the ideal marriage Lewald tries to depict:

Und dann wieder stellte er sich vor, wie auch Malwine sich bestimmt noch ganz anders entfaltet haben würde, wäre ihr das Loos zu Theil geworden, das Weib eines geliebten Mannes und eine glückliche Mutter zu werden. Er wusste jedoch keinen Mann, der sie verdiente oder dem er sie gönnte. [...] [S]o sagte er sich: Thor, der ich bin! warum will ich ein unschätzbar Gutes noch besser haben? Warum grüble ich über das, was sein könnte, da wir ja Alle glücklich sind [...]?³⁸²

At first glance it looks like Lewald, again, takes back some of the radicalism by posing the question of women's 'natural' profession as wife and mother. However, she follows this up by the notion that in general, men are not yet prepared, and perhaps not yet worthy, of being the partner of such an emancipated woman as Malwine. In Lewald's ideology, Malwine has acquired her independence and found herself. Just imagine what potential she might have as the partner of a worthy man, and as mother to a future generation, Lewald seems to ask the reader. This might appear to be a reference back to the conservative stance of women's place in the home as providers for their families, but Lewald manages

³⁸² Ibid., pp. 126-27.

to underpin this with her ideology that a woman who has emancipated herself through a profession is able to bring a new dimension to her (primary, in Lewald's view) role as wife and mother. It is this back and forth between radical trail-blazing and conservative retreat that makes Lewald a difficult author for a modern reader. Her lack of a theoretical framework for her progressive demands and ideas, combined with her internalised disdain for women's capacities on the basis of their inadequate education, and her subsequent hunger for recognition and validation by exceptional men led her to write literary women who might embody her ideas of the practical sides of emancipation and independence. These ideas are, however, hardly suited to providing role models for the long-term demands of women's political and legal emancipation.

Chapter 6

Louise Otto-Peters – Women’s politics and solidarity as a matter of course

Louise Otto, born in Meissen on 26 March 1819, is widely regarded as one of the progenitors of the organised German Women’s Movement, having founded the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* (ADF) in 1865.³⁸³ But Otto had concerned herself with politics much earlier, in particular with the so-called ‘social question’ and ‘women’s question’. As one of the few female journalists of her time, succeeding only Therese Huber and Nina d’Aubigny (von Engelbrunner) in this profession, she had surprisingly few problems in finding opportunities to publish her articles, political as well as literary reviews, and commentaries on current affairs.³⁸⁴ She began to publish as a journalist as early as 1843, with articles about her concept of femininity, as well as women and politics.³⁸⁵ Her friendship with Robert Blum and other democrats enabled Otto to contribute regularly to their newspapers, namely to *Der Wandelstern* (edited by Ernst Keil) and to *Sächsische Vaterlandsblätter* (Blum), and in the autumn of 1843 she became a regular staff member on these two publications.³⁸⁶ Curiously, she published mostly under her own name, Louise Otto, and only chose the pseudonym Otto Stern for one newspaper, *Unser Planet*, edited by Ernst Keil.³⁸⁷ Christine Otto, who to avoid confusion will be referred to as C. Otto, points out that this pseudonym became superfluous rather quickly since almost everyone knew who Otto Stern really was.³⁸⁸ In August 1845 Otto revealed herself in the article *Erklärung und Geständnis*, published in *Der Wandelstern*, in which she connects her reasons for choosing a male pseudonym with the criticism she expected

³⁸³ See Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*, p. 24.

³⁸⁴ Thanks to Christian Deuling, Nottingham, for the hint concerning the early German-French journalist Nina d’Aubigny. Graduate School ‘Theories and Practices of the Archive’, Marbach, 16-20 April 2012.

³⁸⁵ See Johanna Ludwig and Rita Jorek (eds.), *Louise Otto-Peters: ihr literarisches und publizistisches Werk: Katalog zur Ausstellung*, ed. Louise-Otto-Peters-Gesellschaft e.V. (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag 1995).

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁸⁷ See Christine Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans“ : das Erzählwerk von Louise Otto-Peters* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995), p. 75.

³⁸⁸ See *ibid.*

from society. She had resorted to this subterfuge in order to persist in a male-dominated field such as journalism, and in order to be taken seriously by her readership when writing about questions of the time, literature and women's rights. Once she was established as a reliable journalist, she was able to set aside her fears of being prevented from achieving her self-proclaimed purpose in life, and with them the pseudonym.³⁸⁹ In the years following the democratic revolution of 1848, Otto founded the *Frauen-Zeitung* (1848-1853), the first political women's newspaper to be published in Germany, which she also edited mostly on her own. While Mathilde Franziska Anneke used the same title of 'Frauenzeitung' to disguise her short-lived, democratic newspaper in Cologne, Otto intended her newspaper to do exactly what it said on the cover: 'Dem Reich der Freiheit werb' ich Bürgerinnen', that is, to raise awareness of politics among women and to convince them of the value of a democratic state. Unlike Anneke, Otto was able to edit and publish the newspaper without having to resort to a male spokesperson, since the law that had placed all women under legal guardianship ('Geschlechtsvormundschaft') had been abolished in Saxony in 1828. However, her newspaper was apparently considered dangerous enough to warrant a new law, promulgated in 1850, which explicitly forbade women to be editors of newspapers in Saxony. Otto commented on the relevant legislation, §12 of the Press Law for the Kingdom of Saxony, in her newspaper:

Es fällt mir nicht ein, den Einflüsterungen klügelnder Schmeichler zu glauben, welche mir einreden wollen, man habe – (weil eben noch nirgends und durch kein anderes deutsches Preßgesetz den Frauen die Führung von Redaktionen verboten worden) in dem betreffenden sächsischen Preßgesetz-Entwurf auf mich speziell Rücksicht genommen – allein ich kann nicht umhin, darin eine Anerkennung des Wirkens der »Frauen-Zeitung« zu finden, denn ehe sie bestand und ehe die Frauen selbst sich fühlen lernten als Frauen eines Volkes und sich berufen fühlten, seiner Sache zu dienen mit gleicher Begeisterung wie die Männer, wenn auch in anderer Weise, hätte allerdings so leicht kein Gesetz »zur Zügelung und gegen den

³⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

Mißbrauch der Presse« es berücksichtigt, daß diese Schutzwehr auch mit gegen die Frauen aufzurichten sei.³⁹⁰

Despite Otto's somewhat coquettish assertion that she did not believe herself to be the motivation for this law, it became commonly known as the *Lex Otto*.³⁹¹ Her newspaper, however, moved from Leipzig to Gera, just across the Saxon border, and was published until 1853.³⁹² During her short marriage to August Peters, which lasted from 1858 to 1864 and remained childless, the now named Otto-Peters published less than in previous years and also shifted towards less controversial stances in her journalism as well as in her literary texts.³⁹³ With the foundation of the ADF, a new serial publication was established which also served as the association's central organ of communication, the newspaper *Neue Bahnen* (1866-1920). Otto-Peters was made editor-in-chief and remained in that position until shortly before her death in 1895; then her co-founder of the ADF and colleague in the editor's office, Auguste Schmidt, took over the publication.³⁹⁴ Carol Diethe points out that the stance on women's role in society and their political participation in *Neue Bahnen* became much less radical than Otto-Peters' own stance in the preceding decades.³⁹⁵ While the newspaper recorded (but did not comment on) the foundation of the British *National Society for Women's Suffrage* in 1868, Otto-Peters thought it too early to start a similar campaign in Germany.³⁹⁶ As a result, as Richard J. Evans points out, Hedwig Dohm's demand for women's suffrage was, in 1873, not only the earliest such public demand, but also did not get support from the official organisation representing Germany's

³⁹⁰ Ute Gerhard, Elisabeth Hannover-Drück, and Romina Schmitter (eds.), »Dem Reich der Freiheit werb' ich Bürgerinnen«. *Die Frauen-Zeitung von Louise Otto* (Bodenheim: Athenaem, 1980), avail. online: <http://www.zeno.org/nid/20005456193> (permalink).

³⁹¹ See almost everyone, e.g. C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, p.218.

³⁹² Ludwig and Jorek (eds.), *Louise Otto-Peters: ihr literarisches und publizistisches Werk*, p. 61.

³⁹³ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, p. 74 and pp. 163-70.

³⁹⁴ See Carol Diethe, *The life and work of Germany's founding feminist, Louise Otto-Peters, 1819-1895* (Lewiston, N.Y. ; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press 2002), pp. 138-50.

³⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 139.

³⁹⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 142.

women's movement.³⁹⁷ Although Otto-Peters had radical ideas about women's role in society, closely linked to the improvement of women's education and admittance to the job market, she still held up marriage and motherhood as women's original and primary job. This stance situated her, in the overall perception of contemporary, as well as modern, society, on the moderate wing of the multi-faceted women's movement.

a. Political programme

Otto-Peters' most famous article from the period of the democratic revolution is *Adresse eines deutschen Mädchens*, which was printed in several German newspapers in 1848.³⁹⁸ In it, she appeals to the newly appointed, so-called 'Märzministerium' and to its 'workers' committee', which began work after Metternich's fall from power in March 1848.³⁹⁹ Otto-Peters reminded them that, while they were tasked to assess and improve the current state of organisation in the workplace, they should not forget working women while changing the conditions for working men. In this appellative, confident article, Otto-Peters addresses the new political powers directly with a repeated 'Meine Herren!' at the start of each new line of argument. She draws attention to the awful working conditions of women and their discrimination in terms of wages, directly linking substantially lower wages in comparison to those of men with the rise of prostitution among working class women. In a final paragraph, she shifts the focus of her appeal to the working class men themselves, reminding them of their duty to show solidarity with their working wives, sisters, and daughters, and shows herself to be appalled by the lack of solidarity evident in current events:

Stattdessen hat es in Berlin geschehen können, daß die Fabrikarbeiter, die eine

³⁹⁷ See Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933*, p. 30.

³⁹⁸ See Louise Otto-Peters, *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb: Blicke auf das Frauenleben der Gegenwart*, ed. by Astrid Franzke et. al. (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1997), p. 120.

³⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 112.

Verbesserung ihres Loses begehrten, darauf drangen, daß aus den Fabriken alle Frauen entlassen wurden! Das ist ein Mißbrauch des Rechts des Stärkeren! – Arbeiter! Ich bin überzeugt, die Mehrzahl von Ihnen ist von einem anderen Geist erfüllt!⁴⁰⁰

In this, Otto-Peters clearly disagreed with Ferdinand Lassalle's preferred method of campaigning for working men's rights, and in connecting lower or no wages with enforced, if not institutionalised, prostitution, Otto-Peters clearly positioned herself on the left wing of current political currents.

Her best known essay, however, was written and published in 1866, and not without controversy. Otto-Peters' *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb*⁴⁰¹ can be seen as her primary manifesto on women's role in society and politics and her analysis of the shortcomings of the status quo. Initially, Otto-Peters had entitled her essay simply *Das Recht der Frauen*; the publishers thought this title too universally applicable, and in order to distinguish this essay from any demands for suffrage or legal changes, they insisted on adding 'auf Erwerb', as Otto-Peters told her readership in 1892 in a reminiscence of the genesis and publication of this essay.⁴⁰² Written one year after the foundation of the ADF, in the middle of the reactionary period leading up to the promulgation of the so-called 'Sozialistengesetz' of 1878, the essay presents both conservative images of women's intrinsic roles as housewives and mothers, and progressive arguments for the improvement of women's participation in society, the work force, and also politics. Otto-Peters criticises, as many of her contemporaries did, the lack of proper education for girls which led them to believe in the overly romanticised, unrealistic image of bourgeois marriage, which only set them up for disappointments, failures, and frustrations once they were married. In contrast to other female authors, Otto-Peters did not explicitly demand a better education for women for their own sake. As Diethelm remarks: 'Louise Otto-Peters had never laid stress on a woman's

⁴⁰⁰ See *Adresse eines deutschen Mädchens*, in: *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² See *ibid.*, preface by the ed., p. 7, and pp. 9-16.

Persönlichkeit (personality in terms of culture) [...]’.⁴⁰³ Rather, she maintained a balance between an individualistic position, in which education was the key for women’s discovery of their individual talents and personalities, and the conservative position that only educated women could be good mothers. For Otto-Peters, a thorough education was the best way to ensure that a woman would be able to stand alone; one large part of her essay is dedicated to the topic of ‘Selbständigkeit’,⁴⁰⁴ with which she did not mean self-employment, but the ability to move in society as a matter of course, without the need of a male guardian or attendant at all times. This stance, which for Otto-Peters appears to be a matter of course, is likely the result of her own upbringing. C. Otto and Marion Freund remark that Otto-Peters’s father, as she recounts herself, encouraged all of his daughters to make great efforts in their education so that they would not have to rely on a marriage of convenience for their living, but would be able to learn a profession and provide for themselves.⁴⁰⁵ Clearly, Otto-Peters regarded her father’s down-to-earth approach to her future as worth emulating and passing on to other women, for she took this stance as the basis of her own political demands. Only when a woman is conscious of and secure in her own self-worth, which can be achieved through good, affirmative education, will she be able to contribute fully to a better society, runs Otto-Peters’ argument. She connects her analysis of the status quo with a criticism of society’s double standards regarding women’s virtue in this section of the essay when she exclaims:

Solche Verurteilungen und Beargwöhnungen, die namentlich in Deutschland zur Tagesordnung gehören, zeigen nur, was es mit den schönen Redensarten von den Männern als den natürlichen „Beschützern“ des weiblichen Geschlechts, der reinen Jungfräulichkeit, die ihre sicherste Waffe in sich selbst hat, der inneren Würde der Frauen denn eigentlich für eine Bewandtnis hat! All dem entgegen sagen solche

⁴⁰³ Diethel, *The life and work of Germany's founding feminist, Louise Otto-Peters, 1819-1895*, p. 138.

⁴⁰⁴ See Otto-Peters, *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb: Blicke auf das Frauenleben der Gegenwart*, pp. 59-75.

⁴⁰⁵ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*“, p. 32 and Freund, *Mag der Thron in Flammen glühn!*“p. 131.

Beargwöhnungen, die meist zu den niedrigsten Verleumdungen wachsen: Die Männer sind nicht die Beschützer der Frauen, sie sind ihre Verfolger, und gerade *gegen sie* ist Schutz vonnöten – [...]die Würde der Frauen ist keine innere, die überall sich gleich bleibt, sie ist nur eine äußere, an die niemand mehr glaubt, sobald der für ihre Aufrechterhaltung nötige Apparat, häuslicher Herd, Familie und Geschlechtsgenossinnen, einmal nicht mehr an ihrer Seite ist!⁴⁰⁶

Otto-Peters was very conscious of the fact that women who worked outside the home, almost regardless of their social class, were considered to be morally dubious, and she spends a good portion of her essay assuring fellow women that this is a standard imposed upon them by custom alone. In order to dismantle, and do away with this attitude, not least among women themselves, the second largest section of the essay is dedicated to the topic of ‘Selbsthilfe’.⁴⁰⁷ Here, Otto-Peters appeals to her fellow women to become active in their own salvation, so to speak, and draws upon current developments that show how women can indeed help themselves in improving their education and their working lives. She mentions training courses in Hamburg and Leipzig through which young women can become governesses or certified child carers in the modern Kindergärten.⁴⁰⁸ She even advocates that all young women, once finished with school, should attend such a course, not only so that they could support themselves, but also so that they would be better able to educate and raise their own children once married. From this appeal to start helping themselves, Otto-Peters moves on to demand solidarity among women. This means, on the one hand, the critical questioning of society’s prejudices towards different groups of women, and that women themselves should take care not to repeat society’s double standards in raising their daughters or judging other women on an arbitrary basis. On the other hand, it also means the start of both charitable work and campaigning within the framework provided by the ADF, Otto-Peters thereby explains and promotes the core tasks

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-99.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

of the one-year-old association. C. Otto remarks that charity work is, in Otto-Peters' view, a predominantly female field, and women are therefore almost predestined to help their sisters in need, regardless of social class.⁴⁰⁹

Otto-Peters had a very clear concept of what women's emancipation should look like, and, like many of her contemporaries, she was at pains to point out that she did not intend to negate the 'natural' differences between men and women. Nor did she deny the assumed superiority of men over women, but she advocated the inclusion of women in politics and public proceedings precisely because of those differences:

Denn noch einmal sei es wiederholt: Wir stellen nicht etwa die Forderung an das Weib, daß es von der angeborenen Eigentümlichkeit seines Wesens etwas ablege, sondern daß es nur Raum und Freiheit gewinne, dieselbe ganz zu entfalten, daß es nicht um jeden Zollbreit Raum zur eigenen Entwicklung, um jeden Leben bringenden Odemzug in freier Luft erst mit dem stärkeren Geschlecht zu kämpfen habe. Dies Recht, das jedem Geschöpfe von dem Schöpfer zugeteilt worden, nimmt auch das Weib für sich in Anspruch und muß es tun, will es nicht anders den Zweck des Schöpfers verfehlen. Bleibe es immerhin dem männlichen Geschlecht unbenommen, durch körperliche Kraft und Stärke wie durch die Schärfe seines Verstandes und die strengere Logik seines Denkens die Welt zu regieren – aber es lasse das weibliche Geschlecht gerade um seines Gemütslebens, seiner Empfänglichkeit für alles Große und Schöne, seiner erregbaren Phantasie und seiner emporstrebenden idealen Richtung willen zur Mitregentschaft zu.⁴¹⁰

It is debatable how much of this argumentation is due to the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, in which it was easier to affirm 'natural' gender roles and stereotypes and demand change because of those differences, than to question the naturalistic argument and risk ostracism even before one's own arguments could be heard. However, both C. Otto and Diethelme show that Otto-Peters had a rather narrow view of the 'correct' manner of emancipation.⁴¹¹ She

⁴⁰⁹ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, pp. 255-56.

⁴¹⁰ Otto-Peters, *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb : Blicke auf das Frauenleben der Gegenwart*, p. 71.

⁴¹¹ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, pp.215-16, Diethelme, *The life and work of*

categorically excluded any notions of Saint-Simonism from her concept of emancipation, correctly identifying that only the male acolytes of this emancipation of the flesh benefited from any of its advantages, and also deeming it unworthy of, if not damaging to, a woman's inherent virtue and sense of self-worth. With this stance, she became one of the most vehement critics of Louise Aston and her claim for emancipation through free love. Hans Adler shows that in this matter, not only did Otto-Peters' social and political sense of righteousness clash with Aston's atheism and public self-representation, but so did her inherent religious sense.⁴¹² Although Otto-Peters was highly critical of dogmatic religion, specifically Jesuitism, which is a topic in several of her novels and a minor theme in others, she was dedicated to German Catholicism which also influenced her political agenda as well as her literary oeuvre.⁴¹³ Dieth points out that Otto-Peters regarded women who followed the example of George Sand in wearing trousers, smoking cigars, and drinking beer in public as 'wrongly emancipated', though she admired the writer's genius, and thought that they were only interested in the effects and benefits for themselves that such a presentation held.⁴¹⁴ As such, she did not hold back with criticism of Aston and her poetry in the *Frauen-Zeitung*. She laid down her own notion of femininity in an essay in 1851 entitled *Das Ewig-Weibliche*, and expanded on the topic in her 'Genius Trilogy' (1869-70), which Dieth analyses in some detail.⁴¹⁵ In these three tracts – *Der Genius des Hauses* (1869), *Der Genius der Menschheit im Dienste der Humanität* (1870), *Der Genius der Natur* (1870) – Dieth states that Otto-Peters describes her ideal notion of women's domestic role, and summarises 'that woman is the saving grace of humankind'.⁴¹⁶ Despite Otto-Peters' early radicalism in her support for working class women and demands for

Germany's founding feminist, Louise Otto-Peters, 1819-1895, pp. 119-29.

⁴¹² See Hans Adler, 'On a feminist controversy. Louise Otto vs. Louise Aston', in Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes (eds.), *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. A Social and Literary History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁴¹³ See *ibid.*; also C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, pp. 266-93.

⁴¹⁴ See Dieth, *The life and work of Germany's founding feminist, Louise Otto-Peters, 1819-1895*, pp. 127-39.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-29.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

women's participation in the democratic process, it was later stances like these that, on the one hand, appealed to a large group of bourgeois and petit bourgeois women who engaged with her concept of self-help and involved themselves with the ADF or local sub-groups, but on the other hand, earned her a lot of criticism from later socialist campaigners like Clara Zetkin and Anita Augspurg. They saw in the moderate section of the women's movement one of the biggest factors hindering their own political programmes.

b. Literary Oeuvre

Otto-Peters' self-image as a journalist had implications for her literary work as well. In C. Otto's detailed study of her literary oeuvre, it becomes clear that she had no qualms about her texts being associated with a political tendency, the much maligned *Tendenz* that put her novels in close proximity to popular literature. Otto-Peters situated herself in the literary genre of ideological novels ('Tendenzroman') as a matter of fact, if not pride, and with no further poetic programme than rendering ideological points of view in convincing literary narrations in order to influence her readership, and possibly sway them towards her own political convictions.⁴¹⁷ C. Otto's study convincingly maps the similarities and differences between Otto-Peters' novels and popular, Vormärz, and realistic novels. While Otto-Peters drew on features of all of those genres and was heavily influenced by Vormärz poetics, it is clear that she regarded these narrative techniques as tools and was not interested in experimenting with literary forms and conventions in order, as other female authors did, to develop a critique of established literature. Her oeuvre consists of twenty-seven novels, various novellas and stories, poems, political and social essays about women's role in state and society, historical and art theory essays, and even three opera

⁴¹⁷ See Ludwig and Jorek (eds.), *Louise Otto-Peters: ihr literarisches und publizistisches Werk*, pp. 70-74.

libretti.⁴¹⁸ Even before Richard Wagner, Otto-Peters had a vision of a German national opera and a new operatic version of the *Nibelungen*. Her version from 1852 was set to music by the Danish composer Nils W. Gade, but only up to the first act and it was never performed, although it did appear in print.⁴¹⁹ Her second libretto, *Theodor Körner* (1867), was set to music by Wendelin Weißheimer and premiered, without much success, in Munich in 1872.⁴²⁰ A last opera, titled *Constantin der Große*, remained a manuscript and unset.⁴²¹

Of Otto-Peters' literary works, her poetry and the novel *Schloss und Fabrik* (1846) have received most scholarly attention to date. Although her first two novels – *Ludwig der Kellner* (1843) and *Kathinka* (1844) – featured, unusually, working class protagonists, it was her fourth novel with its topic of class uprising and crass criticism of bourgeois capitalists, as well as of Jesuitism, that brought her to the attention of the censors. Johanna Ludwig has restored the novel to its original state and has marked the passages which had to be removed in order to pass the censor, but has unfortunately not included the passages which Otto-Peters wrote to substitute for these censored parts.⁴²² Hans Adler has given the most detailed, semiotic analysis of the novel in his study of the social novel in the Vormärz, alongside an argument as to what constitutes the genre of the social novel in opposition to realist poetics.⁴²³ His study also details the historical and political background of the novel. In her study, Helen G. Morris-Keitel analyses the images of working class women in the socially-engaged prose of the Vormärz period, for which she also uses *Schloss und Fabrik* as the only example of Otto-Peters' novels.⁴²⁴ Interestingly,

⁴¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 126-31.

⁴¹⁹ See Thomas Schinköth, 'Einmischung ins Musikleben', in Johanna Ludwig and Rita Jorek (eds.), *Louise Otto-Peters: ihr literarisches und publizistisches Werk*, pp. 88-90.

⁴²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴²¹ See Ludwig and Jorek (eds.), *Louise Otto-Peters: ihr literarisches und publizistisches Werk*, p. 127.

⁴²² Louise Otto-Peters, *Schloss und Fabrik: Roman*, herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Johanna Ludwig (erste vollständige Ausgabe des 1846 zensierten Romans; Leipzig: LKG, 1996).

⁴²³ Hans Adler, *Soziale Romane im Vormärz. Literatursemiotische Studie* (München: Fink, 1980).

⁴²⁴ See Helen G. Morris-Keitel, *Identity in transition: the images of working-class women in social prose of*

she gives a detailed analysis of the relationship between the two protagonists, the bourgeois Pauline and the noble Elisabeth, to each other as well as to their respective families and immediate social framework, while Otto-Peters' actual depiction of working class women, in the minor characters Liese and Martha, only gets a secondary consideration in their relation to the protagonists. Diethel and Otto analyse a larger selection of Otto-Peters' novels, and include plot summaries and notes of their reading impressions for the lesser-known titles. All the scholars mentioned here conclude that, while *Schloss und Fabrik* is the most radical novel regarding the depiction of the working class's living conditions and class struggles, it is not Otto-Peters' strongest one in terms of alternative literary images of women. C. Otto points out how Otto-Peters developed her depiction of the emancipated woman according to her idea of emancipation and, in her early works – which C. Otto defines as including all works until 1852 – did so through elevation of the emancipating features to an idealistic level.⁴²⁵ Only in the later stage of her novel-writing, seen by C. Otto as encompassing the years 1864-1873, did Otto-Peters approach a more realist depiction and narration of the lives of emancipated women, whereas her notion of what constituted 'wrongly emancipated women' did not significantly change over the years.⁴²⁶ The novel's complex, interwoven themes of class struggle, class barriers, critique of both capitalism and communism, pauperism, divorce laws, and social uprising, situated in the volatile Vormärz years, as well as its historical genesis through censorship, have been investigated in detail by several scholars, not least by the editor of many of Otto-Peters' texts, Johanna Ludwig, and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres.⁴²⁷

the Vormärz (1840-1848) (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

⁴²⁵ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, pp. 138-62.

⁴²⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 170-82.

⁴²⁷ See closing remarks by Johanna Ludwig in Otto-Peters, *Schloss und Fabrik: Roman*. Also Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres (ed.), *Die Anfänge der deutschen Frauenbewegung. Louise Otto-Peters* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983); Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 'Frauenfrage und Belletristik. Zu Positionen deutscher sozialkritischer Schriftstellerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert', in: *Gesundheit und Umwelt Rheinland-Pfalz*, Ministerium für Soziales (ed.), issue title *Frauen sehen ihre Zeit* (Mainz, 1984).

c. *Schloss und Fabrik* (1846)

Otto-Peters' depiction of women's political participation, let alone activism, is rather sparse in this early novel. Indeed, the two female protagonists Pauline and Elisabeth display the tried and tested constellation of a young bourgeois woman and a young aristocrat, who befriend each other in finishing school and struggle to make a difference in their respective social spheres. Otto-Peters' idea of *caritas* is already present in this early novel, for both Pauline and Elisabeth practise it towards their respective inferiors, factory workers and peasantry, as more or less the only means at their disposal to improve their lot. The main political debate lies with the male protagonists, the writer and factory worker Franz Thalmann and the noble, yet progressive, Count Jaromir. The technique of 'Ideenschmuggel'⁴²⁸ which Boetcher Joeres identified in Otto-Peters' strategy to incorporate more radical tendencies into her novels through, among other things, a greater number of female characters who are more nuanced in their depiction, can be extended to the men's political debate in this novel. Through Franz Thalheim, the reader gets to read an incendiary, communist tract which has been sent to him anonymously, 'over his shoulder'. Thalheim reads the tract together with his friend Wilhelm, whose reaction to its rhetoric is confused but also agitated. They try to make sense of it and to fathom the consequences of what they read: Thalheim is shocked by the thinly-veiled call for violence and vigilantism, and disapproves of the central communist ideas, whereas Wilhelm argues in favour of this position and subsequently becomes radicalised.⁴²⁹ This passage was removed by the censors, and unfortunately the editor has not supplied the alternative passage for this scene, or mentioned whether it was cut without substitute. Knowledge of the censored parts means that it is easy to assume that Otto-Peters, while maintaining her overall critique of communism and incendiary methods in general, nonetheless attempted to provide the

⁴²⁸ See Boetcher Joeres, 'Frauenfrage und Belletristik. Zu Positionen deutscher sozialkritischer Schriftstellerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert', p. 24.

⁴²⁹ Otto-Peters, *Schloss und Fabrik*, pp. 160-68.

background to contemporary political debate which led, necessarily, an underground existence. Another instance in which this form of ‘Ideenschmuggel’ worked without the censors noticing arises later in the novel – this time, it is Wilhelm who has obtained a political pamphlet and reads out a passage to Franz:

[...] Man will uns sagen: das Bestehende dürfe nicht umgestürzt werden! Aber wodurch ist das Bestehende gut und unverletzlich gemacht? Es ist schlecht, soll man das Schlechte beibehalten? Ändern hieße die Ordnung stören, sagt man. Aber der jetzige Zustand ist kein geordneter, er ist Unterordnung, da dem einen mehr Recht gegeben ist als dem anderen. [...] Die Not wird größer und größer, es handelt sich um Sein und Nichtsein des größten Teils der Menschheit, wir müssen siegen oder sterben! [...]⁴³⁰

Ludwig explains in her endnotes that this passage is, in fact, an excerpt from a censored article from the *Rheinische Jahrbücher*.⁴³¹ While the historical origin of the passage undoubtedly connects this to (male) working class rights, it can be effortlessly transposed to the argumentation for women’s rights as well. However, to conclude that Otto-Peters already saw these parallels in this early stage of her work, or even attempted to imply them, is speculative, the context in which this passage appears in the novel makes this seem unlikely. In another narrative strategy, Otto-Peters reveals the influence Vormärz poetics and the symbolism of allegorical nature descriptions had on her. In one passage, Franz Thalmann witnesses a thunderstorm in the Alps, and the subsequent description, with only thinly veiled allegories of political reality, is seemingly made through his eyes, with all its political implications:

Wie hohe Könige, so ragten die ewigen Alpen empor, wie auf festen Thronen von weißem Marmor, Stahl und Silber, so glänzten die Gletscher; [...] wie auf solchen Thronen saßen die großen Könige, die weiten Mäntel von schneeigem Hermelin umhängen, die das Abendrot zugleich zu schönem Purpur färbte, goldene

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

⁴³¹ See *ibid.*, p. 326.

Strahlenkronen auf den ernsten Häuptern [...]. [...] Aber mit einem Mal, gleichsam wie aus der Tiefe aufgestiegen, krochen schwarze Wolken schattend und unheimlich zu den Füßen dieser Throne heran, lagerten trotzig vor ihren Füßen sich nieder; wuchsen endlich immer höher auf, übereinander sich zu dicken Knäueln ballend und verdichtend; [...] immer höher, immer weiter, bis nur noch die goldenen Königskronen wie mit unvernichtbarer und unerreichbarer strahlender Herrlichkeit in stolzer Ruhe über sie hinwegglänzten.

Aber da begann ein Murmeln, Grollen und Rollen in den finstern Wolken, dann wurde es lauter, wilder, heftiger, endlich riß eine gelbe Blitzesschlange nach allen Seiten hinzüngelnd die dichteste Wolkenschicht auseinander, und furchtbar krachend wettete zugleich ein dröhnender Donnerschlag wie erderschütternd vom Himmel nieder. Mit eins brach die Blitzschlange von ihrem geheimnisvollen Lager auf und hervor, mit eins fand der Donner seine furchtbar dröhnenden Posauntöne, mit denen er aus der Höhe herniederrief wie der Engel des Weltgerichts, und mit eins sanken plötzlich die goldnen Kronen von den blassen Stirnen und silberweißen Locken der Könige. Nun begann ein tobender Kampf der Elemente, es war, als hätten alle die Waffen ergriffen, eines wider das andere, und schleuderten jetzt ihre unheilbringenden, lärmenden Geschosse.

Und mitten in diesem Aufruhr stand Thalheim und bot seine Locken dem Sturm.⁴³²

In this scene, more or less in the middle of the three-volume novel, Otto-Peters not only foreshadows Thalmann's fate, but also foresees real political struggles and conflicts, two years before the democratic revolution attempted to topple crowns.

While it is primarily the men in the novel who are implicated in political controversy and agitation, the women share some part of this at least. As Morris-Keitel points out, the two working class women who are most closely described, Lise and Martha, rather assume the position of victims of the political and social order, with Lise as the extreme example and Martha the 'woman next door' who gets by thanks to the good fortune of being healthy and able to work.⁴³³ These two express criticism and the need for

⁴³² Ibid., p. 198.

⁴³³ See Morris-Keitel, *Identity in transition*, pp. 90-91.

change, and it is implied that they participate in the day-to-day discussions around this topic in the factory workers' community. In the case of the noble Elisabeth, however, her developing interest in politics and her expression of her own political opinions earn her a reprimand from her mother when she tries to elicit a confession of love for a suitor from her daughter:

Nach einer kleinen Pause begann die Mutter wieder: „Ich meinte, es gebe für Frauen nur ein Gefühl, welches die Charaktere verwandeln, die Herzen aufregen und erheben könne, ich dachte, diese Zeit sei jetzt für dich gekommen, aber dein unweiblich Benehmen machte mich wieder irre, nun sah und seh' ich oft, wie unweiblich du an männlichen Dingen Interesse findest, und nun weiß ich nicht, was ich denken soll!“⁴³⁴

Otto-Peters presents the prevalent point of view that women who take an interest in politics are either unfeminine or morally dubious rather in the margins of this early novel, but her critique of this opinion is clear, as Elisabeth's characterisation and conduct throughout the novel can leave no doubt as to her inherent virtue and femininity. With this early counter-example to the dominant image of the Bluestocking, Otto-Peters attempts to dispel prejudices and remove social barriers from women's interest in, if not involvement with, politics. Another point Otto-Peters makes in the novel is how difficult it is for women to become active in political matters. Morris-Keitel points out that Pauline has an inbuilt difficulty in communicating with her father and brother, since both simply discount everything she says as irrelevant or a woman's fancy.⁴³⁵ Pauline also has to suffer her father's reprimands each time she tries to talk to him about the welfare of the factory workers. On the eve of the workers' uprising in the factory, when she tries one last time to convince her father to treat his workers more humanely, he rebukes her with a similar appeal to her apparent lack of virtue and femininity:

⁴³⁴ Otto-Peters, *Schloss und Fabrik*, p. 256.

⁴³⁵ See Morris-Keitel, *Identity in transition*, p. 96 and p. 171.

Der Fabrikherr, wie er das hörte, stieß sein Mädchen [Pauline] mit dem Fuße zurück und machte sich los: „Für diese freche Bande kann ein sittsames Mädchen bitten? Mußt du nicht bei ihren schlechten Liedern erröten? – Draußen führen sie eine wahnsinnige Posse auf [the beginnings of the uprising], und du willst deinem Vater auch Komödie spielen, geh und besinne dich! Ich hätte dir mehr weibliches Zartgefühl zugetraut.“⁴³⁶

Similarly to Elisabeth, Pauline’s characterisation and relation to the factory workers can leave the reader in no doubt as to her impeccable character, and constitutes therefore another counter-example to the prevailing prejudices towards socially and politically involved women. In this early novel, Otto-Peters did not so much present a ‘realistic’, liveable alternative for a political woman, but did her best to dispel the most common misconceptions of, and hindrances for, women with political interests and opinions.

d. *Neue Bahnen* (1864)⁴³⁷

In this later novel, published according to C. Otto during Otto-Peters’ phase of describing emancipated women realistically, the reader encounters several quite nuanced female characters who are involved in politics to a greater or lesser degree. C. Otto remarks that in this novel, the development of the female protagonists from ‘überhöht-emanzipiert’ to ‘realistisch emanzipiert’ finds its culmination in the elaborately-depicted protagonist Felicitas Ahlhorn.⁴³⁸ Although representatives from both nobility and bourgeoisie form the cornerstones of the plot in *Neue Bahnen*, it is the bourgeois Felicitas who is the main focus and central point of the novel. Her male counterpart is the musician Sigismund Ambach, son of a village school teacher, who is able to study theology with the financial support of the local count. When he breaks off his studies in order to become a

⁴³⁶ Otto-Peters, *Schloss und Fabrik*, p. 302.

⁴³⁷ Louise Otto-Peters, *Neue Bahnen* (Wien: Markgraf, 1864). Available online at <http://www.zvdd.de/> (Zentrales Verzeichnis Digitalisierter Drucke).

⁴³⁸ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*“, p. 172.

professional violin player, he falls from grace with the count's family and becomes the laughing stock of the rest of the village. On the side of the nobility, the focal point equivalent to Felicitas is Wilfried von Störmthal, who is an ambitious municipality at court, aiming at a ministerial office. Although he is from an old noble family, his political standpoint is liberal and he is willing to compromise: since change in society cannot be prevented, he attempts to harness and steer the progressive (democratic) forces in order to preserve the most fundamental privileges of the nobility. Editha von Friedleben complements the quartet of protagonists. She and Sigismund are childhood friends, and she supports him morally against all mockery. For part of the novel, she is also engaged to Wilfried, but towards the end the engagement is called off, since both of them realise that they are not suited to each other. Between these four characters, Otto-Peters weaves a surprisingly tantalising tale of political intrigue, love and class barriers in which she expresses her own political agenda. Felicitas is the catalyst of the novel, so to speak, who eventually connects all main characters like a node in a network, and brings about plot developments. As an orphan and a single woman, she lives with the family of her older brother, but ongoing conflicts with her sister-in-law prompt her to leave his house and find a job in order to support herself. She soon finds employment as an assistant to a female photographer, Frau Reichmann, who has her own studio and only takes on unmarried women. This does not go down well with her brother who fears for his reputation:

Der Gerichtsrath [Felicitas's brother] war über diesen Entschluß entrüstet; er hielt dessen Ausführung gar nicht für möglich. Die Schwester eines Gerichtsrathes, *seine* Schwester, die Tochter des angesehenen Geheimerathes Ahlhorn die Gehülfin einer Photographin – eine Stellung so zu sagen im Dienst des Publicums, in einem öffentlichen Geschäft und in derselben Stadt mit ihm – was würden die Leute dazu sagen! Es war eine Schmach, die seiner Familie nicht angetan werden durfte.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Otto-Peters, *Neue Bahnen*, p. 60.

Otto-Peters lets her protagonists go through all the consequences and difficulties which arise from choices and behaviours which go against society's sense of common proprieties. The brother's worry gets rephrased in other parts of the novel even more bluntly, when Otto-Peters records the general attitude of her time towards working middle-class women. Not only that Felicitas's sister-in-law calls her 'emancipationssüchtig'⁴⁴⁰ behind her back, she also becomes socially isolated since most of her former friends do not want to be associated with someone who works in a shop. The prejudices which were prevalent in Otto-Peters' time and which placed women working in shops precariously close to prostitutes are incorporated into the novel as well, for example through one of Störmthal's acquaintances who tells him the latest gossip:

Doch auch hierbei [in shop advertisement] ruft man noch andere Anziehungskräfte zu Hülfe – und ganz so wie man in gewissen Etablissements von zweifelhafter Moralität unter die Anzeige mit deutsch-französischer Quodlibet setzt: Bedienung *par dames* – so sind hier auch neue Photographieanstalten entstanden, die ebenfalls bald, um mehr anzulocken bei der großen Concurrenz, unter ihre Anzeigen setzen werden: Bedienung *par dames!* – Hübsche Mädchen, die durch ihre Physiognomien gern noch ein Geschäft machen möchten, werden jetzt Photographinnen.⁴⁴¹

Despite all prejudices and exclusions, Felicitas perseveres. She cherishes her newly won freedom, though she does not deny the hardships and the isolation she feels through her ostracism from society, and what remains of her family. Only her younger brother Richard, a democratic journalist, supports her morally and expresses his respect for her decision to make her own way. Through her work, she also meets Störmthal, who is both curious about this new fashion of working women and slightly puzzled by Felicitas's professional behaviour towards him. Clearly, he does not quite know how to treat her or in which categories to place her behaviour towards him. Otto-Peters displays quite some humour

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 112.

when she describes several awkward scenes of bumpy communication between the two, in which Störmthal in particular is at a loss as to how to encounter a young, unmarried woman in a new social role and setting. Nevertheless, in the course of the novel Felicitas becomes an underground messenger for Störmthal's political missives, in which he slips confidential information about matters of state and proceedings of government to Richard's democratic newspaper. Through their frequent discussions of politics, in which she becomes first Störmthal's disciple and later his confidante, Felicitas' political awareness sharpens, and she takes pride in the fact that such a politically important man not only confides in her, but also treats her with respect and friendship. The fact that this behaviour comes from an aristocrat contrasts starkly with the narrow-minded prejudices she encounters in her own family and among her former friends. Felicitas becomes so astute in matters of politics that she is able to protect both Störmthal and her brother when the newspaper's office is raided by the police. In order to protect Störmthal from discovery through his handwriting, the reader learns, she always copied the missives he had given her before passing them on to her brother. Now that Richard is being interrogated by the police, she draws attention towards herself by claiming that she is the writer of the missives. Before she can suffer the consequences of this heroic act though, the emperor dies, and subsequently Störmthal finds himself a minister, tasked with re-ordering the state. It is not only through Störmthal's political manoeuvres and Felicitas' function as a link between him and the democratic press, but also through the love story between Editha and Sigismund that the state, in the end, is led into 'neue Bahnen', as Otto-Peters stresses more than once in the novel.⁴⁴² While Felicitas und Störmthal work towards a more democratic state and society on the political side, Editha and Sigismund, on the side of society, manage to convince their parents of their love, and through their engagement (after trials and tribulations) overcome class barriers. Interestingly enough, it is the man who 'marries up'

⁴⁴² Ibid., e.g. vol.1, p. 92, p. 215, vol.2, p. 112, p. 38, p. 200, p. 11.

in this novel, enabled nonetheless by the fortune he was able to make as a solo artist – an inversion of the more common motif of the female singer or actress who is made respectable by marriage. Otto-Peters uses several such inversions of motifs: when Störmthal unwittingly declares deeper feelings for Felicitas in one of their meetings, she is not enthralled by the prospect of a possible catch, but disappointed to find herself in a ‘common’ situation:

Sie hatte bei seinen zärtlichen Worten und seiner unwillkürlichen Erklärung gedacht: wenn er so für mich empfindet oder so zu mir zu sprechen wagt, dann freilich hatten mein Bruder und Frau Reichmann recht mit ihren Warnungen, mit Allem, was sie in Bezug auf Störmthal sagten - dann freilich war sie selbst weiter nichts als ein leichtsinniges Mädchen, dann allerdings war ihr Verhältniß zu Störmthal, dem sie einen so idealen Nimbus, einen so würdigen Inhalt gegeben, ein ganz gewöhnliches, daß sie, anstatt sie wie bisher zu erheben, vor sich selbst und vor Andern nur herabsetzen konnte.⁴⁴³

But in the progress of the novel she recovers from this notion, not least because she tells him unmistakably that she does not wish to come between him and Editha, his fiancée at that time. A political friendship develops between them, and Felicitas revels in the respect and platonic friendship as completely new experiences:

Sie wollte ihm [Störmthal] zeigen, daß ihr die Freundschaft eines Mannes mehr werth sei als seine Liebe, und daß es ihr nichts koste, mit den gewöhnlichen Ansichten der Welt in Widerspruch zu gerathen, sobald sie nur vor ihrem eignen Gewissen sich rein und schuldlos fühle.⁴⁴⁴

In a more humorous inversion towards the end of the novel, Otto-Peters lets Felicitas tactfully leave the room, so Sigismund and Richard can talk in peace about the former’s love of Editha.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Ibid., pp. 102-3.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

Although Felicitas's interest in politics is at first motivated by her closeness to her brother Richard and his activities for the democratic newspaper, and then by her friendship with (and later love for) Störmthal, Otto-Peters makes clear that these connections are merely the starting points for Felicitas. Because of her rumoured affair with Störmthal, she has to give up her position with the photographer, who in the meantime has become the court photographer. In order to escape the even more vitriolic gossip, she finally leaves town and moves to the town where Richard lives to open her own photography studio. Otto-Peters does not idealise this situation, but tells the reader of the struggles which self-employment brings, of unprofitable seasons and the need to develop business acumen quickly, if one wants to stand out from the competitors.⁴⁴⁶ However, Felicitas manages all that, and also remains politically active. She takes up her correspondence with Störmthal again, and also very clearly follows in Otto-Peters' footsteps:

Es war immer noch Liebe zu ihm, wenn er ihr auch weh gethan, die sie in den politischen Interessen fortleben, und an Allem, was sich auf die Entwicklung des eignen Staatslebens bezog, die innigste Theilnahme zeigen ließ. Störmthal war darin ja gewissermaßen ihr Lehrer gewesen – und wenn sie früher nur als Abschreiberin seiner Artikel an der Zeitung ihres Bruders mitgearbeitet hatte, so geschah es jetzt selbständig. Wie sie durch ihr eigenes Handeln danach gestrebt hatte, sich selbst durch ihre Arbeit selbständig zu machen, so strebte sie jetzt nicht allein durch ihr Beispiel, sondern durch Darlegung der weiblichen Rechte und Pflichten auch andere Frauen auf diese Bahnen zu leiten und für sie von Seiten der Staatsverwaltung und Gesetzgebung die Möglichkeit zu fordern, sich selbst durch ihre Arbeit eine unabhängige Existenz erwerben zu können. Wußte sie doch, daß Störmthal diese Ansichten und dies Streben an ihr geehrt und durfte sie hoffen, daß es nur ihrer Erinnerung bedürfen würde, um ihn zu vermögen, bei vorkommenden Gelegenheiten auch diese weiblichen Interessen nicht zu vergessen.⁴⁴⁷

This passage incorporates the essence of Otto-Peters' programme for women's

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 157-58.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

emancipation: Felicitas has preserved her inherent feminine dignity in the face of hardship and social ostracism, has fought for and achieved her independence ('Selbständigkeit', the ability to stand alone, as set out in *Das Recht der Frauen auf Erwerb*), and is now able to reach out and help other women to achieve the same, while at the same time reminding the people in power of necessary reforms of state and legislation. Such a well-rounded character as Felicitas has become naturally deserves the love that society has withheld from her: after Editha and Sigismund announce their engagement, the new foreign minister Störmthal suddenly notices the beam in his own eye and proposes to Felicitas.

While Felicitas is clearly the main political character, who is at the heart of a political coming-of-age story for Otto-Peters' readership, there are politically active characters on the margins of the novel. One of them is the bad counter-example and representative of the social *ancien régime*, Felicitas' sister-in-law, Minette. She is one of the driving forces behind the estrangement between Felicitas and her older brother, spreading malicious rumours, badmouthing Felicitas as 'emancipated', meaning that she indulges in free love, and being very vocal about the impossibility that Störmthal is friends with her out of a shared political interest. Minette follows the 'traditional' way of influencing politics: through her husband. She hosts dinner parties for his political and judicial colleagues and superiors, forces her opinion on him and nags until he agrees with her. Minette supports her husband's career wholeheartedly, but mostly for the benefits she can claim through it, not for the greater well-being of the state or the population. Otto-Peters makes clear that this is a dead-end for women to emulate, since this indirect participation cannot effect structural change. Indeed, both Minette and her husband always repeat the same arguments regarding Felicitas' conduct and life plans, so that they quite literally appear as the stagnant representatives of an old social order which has outlived its time (even more so than the aristocracy, for Störmthal is willing to adapt the ways of the nobility to accommodate a new form of society). Another representative woman who is

depicted critically is the photographer Frau Reichmann: as C. Otto points out, this woman is not interested in forming a society in which both men and women collaborate.⁴⁴⁸ Even called a ‘Männerfeindin’,⁴⁴⁹ she also restricts other women’s life choices through refusing to employ them once they have met a man and are engaged. On a social rather than political level, Frau Reichmann fails to support other women to the best of her abilities by imposing (other) sanctions and restrictions on them. However, the most intriguing female character in the political spectrum is Frau von Lindenhof. She belongs to the court of the crown princess as her Oberhofmeisterin, and as such is in a key position with regard to insider information and political manoeuvring, but very explicitly does not engage in intrigue. She has declared herself Störmthal’s mentor at court at the start of his career, and through her he not only has access to information at the highest level, but has also learned how to establish secret networks of support, communication, and exchanges of influence and favours. However, Frau von Lindenhof is not exclusively a kind of maternal mentor, but is also described as using Störmthal quite purposefully for her own advantage for errands and commissions, probably in ways that he is not aware of himself.⁴⁵⁰ Although this character appears only now and then as a source of information or to deliver a subtle warning to Störmthal for his political proceedings, it is clear that she is as interested in Störmthal’s cause of a progressive reformation of the state as he is. In her, Otto-Peters depicts someone who uses the available possibilities, though they are granted to her by her position in the old, established order, thoughtfully, responsibly and to the fullest, without any false concerns about ‘female proprieties’ or supposed inabilities.

In *Neue Bahnen*, each main character truly starts to travel on new paths. Felicitas is the most striking example of the alternative path which many women dreaded or criticised in Otto-Peters’ time, but it is striking that in this novel, men and women are willing to

⁴⁴⁸ See C. Otto, *Variationen des poetischen Tendenzromans*, footnote 118 on p. 172.

⁴⁴⁹ Otto-Peters, *Neue Bahnen*, vol. 2, p. 84.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 144-47.

interact and engage with uncommon concepts or challenge seemingly unchangeable circumstances. In contrast to Louise Aston, for example, Otto-Peters depicts these potentially outrageous alternative life paths in a calm manner. Indeed, the prevailing sense in this later novel is that the humane nature of humanity is the basis, and the potential future, for a society in which equality between men and women is a matter of course, and not a cause for moral or ideological outrage.

Chapter 7

Hedwig Dohm – ‘Bin ich ein Mensch – nichts als ein Mensch’⁴⁵¹

Hedwig Dohm is probably the most accessible subject in this selection of authors. Her radicalism is modern, in the sense that her major essays about the ‘women question’, in style and argumentation, could have been written in the 1970s instead of the actual time of origin, the 1870s. In one of her earlier essays for example, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande* (1873), she refers to the custom of foot binding amongst Chinese women and uses this as analogy for the patriarchal mindset in Germany, more than a century before Julia Kristeva takes up the same image, for the same purpose, in her essay *About Chinese Women* (1977). Dohm did not hide her radical ideas behind a front of conventionalisms, or compromises with notions of propriety; on the contrary, she deconstructed these exact argumentative or narrative strategies as counterproductive, if not dishonest in her essays. A long time before deconstruction was formulated as a theory, and before Judith Butler argued that bodies perceived as ‘natural’ are in fact social constructs, Dohm unmasked the biologicistic arguments for specific gender characters of her time as being motivated by economic and social separatists’ interests. Dohm herself appears to have been aware of the untimeliness of her thoughts and theories, as she repeatedly remarked that she was born outside her time:

Zu früh oder zu spät war ich geboren. Zu spät für die Romantikerzeit, der ich mich wahlverwandt fühle, viel zu früh für die Zeit, in der jetzt meine Enkelinnen mein Leben leben, einer Entwicklung froh werden, die mir versagt blieb. [...] Nun weiß ich es längst, was ich damals unklar in grübelndem Geträum ahnend empfunden: Es ist das größte Unglück eines Menschen, in einer falschen Zeit geboren zu sein, in einer falschen Stadt, in einer falschen Familie.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Hedwig Dohm, ‘Wäre ich ein glühender Patriot’, in: Hedwig Dohm, *Ausgewählte Texte: ein Lesebuch zum Jubiläum ihres 175. Geburtstages mit Essays und Feuilletons, Novellen und Dialogen, Aphorismen und Briefen*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2006a).

⁴⁵² Hedwig Dohm, ‘Kindheitserinnerungen einer alten Berlinerin (1912)’, in Hedwig Dohm and Hedda Korsch (eds.), *Erinnerungen* (Zürich, 1980), p. 47.; p.55.

However, her ‘Unzeitgemäßheit’ means that her texts are accessible to a modern reader, who does not have to delve into historical and socio-political contexts in order to understand the potential progressiveness of the essays, as it is the case for a lot of her contemporaries. Furthermore, it is not surprising either that Dohm thus became something of a benchmark, if not an ideal, of radicalism for the second wave of the German Women’s Movement in the 1970s, and as such threatens to overshadow the more moderate, yet still progressive and sometimes radical approaches other authors of her time shared and fought for. In the modern reception, the feminist journalist Alice Schwarzer locates herself explicitly in a feminist tradition in succession to Dohm,⁴⁵³ and early essays about her in Schwarzer’s journal EMMA undoubtedly contributed to making her name known to a wider audience.⁴⁵⁴ In scholarship, early feminist literary critics such as Gaby Pailer, Gisela Brinkler-Gabler, and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres were the first to analyse Dohm’s essays as well as some of her literary texts.⁴⁵⁵ Nikola Müller’s annotated bibliography from 1990 lists all of Dohm’s published texts,⁴⁵⁶ and the continuously published ‘Edition Hedwig Dohm’, edited by Müller and Isabel Rohner, is making Dohm’s texts available again.⁴⁵⁷ It is Rohner in particular who, in her doctoral thesis, cleared up several misunderstandings and incorrect, yet constantly perpetuated information about Dohm’s biography, and the

⁴⁵³ See e.g. *Hedwig Dohm! Ein Film mit Alice Schwarzer, Marlies Hesse, Nikola Müller, Isabel Rohner und Gerd Buurmann* (2010) (Eine Kooperation der Universitätsbibliothek der FernUniversität Hagen, der Gleichstellungsbeauftragten der FernUniversität und des Archivs der deutschen Frauenbewegung in Kassel). Video available at http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ausstellung/hedwig_dohm/; quote at 5:06.

⁴⁵⁴ See e.g. Renate Bookhagen, 'Unsere Schwestern von gestern: Hedwig Dohm', *EMMA*, Nr. 3, 1977 p. 54 - 55. Available online at the archive of the FrauenMediaTurm: <http://www.frauenmediaturm.de/themen-portraits/feministische-pionierinnen/hedwig-dohm/auswahlbibliografie/unsere-schwestern-von-gestern/>, and more recently, Chantal Louis and Gundula Thors, 'Hedwig Dohm - Mehr Stolz, ihr Frauen!', *EMMA*, September/Oktober, 2006. Available online at the EMMA Online Archive: <http://www.emma.de/hefte/ausgaben-2006/septemberoktober-2006/hedwig-dohm-2006-5/>

⁴⁵⁵ See Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and deviance*, Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed.), *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, 2 vol. (München: C.H. Beck, 1988), Möhrmann, *Die andere Frau*, Gaby Pailer, *Schreibe, die du bist. Die Gestaltung weiblicher ‚Autorschaft‘ im erzählerischen Werk Hedwig Dohms* (Pfaffenweiler, 1994).

⁴⁵⁶ Nikola Müller, *Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919). Eine kommentierte Bibliografie* (Berlin, 2000).

⁴⁵⁷ See Dohm, *Ausgewählte Texte: ein Lesebuch zum Jubiläum ihres 175. Geburtstages*. Currently available are the novels *Schicksale einer Seele* (1899), *Sibilla Dalmar* (1896), *Christa Ruland* (1902), and an edition of letters, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*.

biographical information in this study is based on this book, Rohner's biography of Dohm, and on the appendix to the edition of Dohm's correspondence.⁴⁵⁸ As Rohner remarks, there is little reliable information about Dohm's early years, as the only existing, 'autobiographical' texts are fictionalised ones.⁴⁵⁹ In particular the novel *Schicksale einer Seele*⁴⁶⁰ and the novella *Werde, die Du bist!*⁴⁶¹ have been used to supplement the meagre facts about Dohm's life, most often wrongly or without any possibility of verification. The novel *Sibilla Dalmar*⁴⁶² was regarded by contemporary critics as a *roman à clef* relating to Munich's high society in which Dohm's eldest daughter, Hedwig Pringsheim-Dohm, was a well-known figure, and this notion was not critically questioned until recently.⁴⁶³

The facts that are known with certainty are that Dohm was born in 1831 as the third child and oldest daughter of eighteen children. Her parents were the tobacco manufacturer Gustav Adolph Schlesinger and Wilhelmine Henriette Jülich, who only married and legitimised their children in 1838. Dohm received the typical education for girls, which left her bemoaning her non- or half-education for the rest of her life.⁴⁶⁴ She attended a teachers' seminary for one year in Berlin in 1851/52 but it is unclear whether she graduated or left the course without a diploma.⁴⁶⁵ In 1853 she married Ernst Dohm, editor of the satirical journal *Kladderadatsch*, with whom she had five children, a son who died at the age of twelve from scarlet fever, and four daughters, of whom the eldest would become the

⁴⁵⁸ Hedwig Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2009), pp. 153-56, Isabel Rohner, *In Literis Veritas. Hedwig Dohm und die Problematik der fiktiven Biografie* (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2008), Isabel Rohner, *Spuren ins Jetzt. Hedwig Dohm - Eine Biographie* (Sulzbach/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2010).

⁴⁵⁹ See Rohner, *In Literis Veritas*, pp. 207ff.

⁴⁶⁰ Hedwig Dohm, *Schicksale einer Seele*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2007).

⁴⁶¹ Reprinted in: Dohm, *Ausgewählte Texte: ein Lesebuch zum Jubiläum ihres 175. Geburtstages*.

⁴⁶² Hedwig Dohm, *Sibilla Dalmar*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2006b).

⁴⁶³ See Müller's and Rohner's preface to the new edition of *ibid*.

⁴⁶⁴ See e.g. the letter to women's rights activist and journalist Anna Pappritz, ca. 1903: "Und wenn Sie meine Bücher auf's strengste beurtheilten, mein eigenes Urtheil würde härter ausfallen. Talent würde ich mir allenfalls zutrauen, kaum aber die Berechtigung, in Kulturfragen mitzusprechen, deren Lösung nur auf der Grundlage einer wissenschaftlichen Bildung versucht werden dürfte. Mit jedem Jahr habe ich meine Unwissenheit, meinen Dilettantismus schmerzlicher empfunden." In: Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, p. 85.

⁴⁶⁵ See Rohner, *In Literis Veritas*, p. 211.

mother of Katia Pringsheim, and therefore mother-in-law to Thomas Mann. Dohm's first major publication in 1867 was a study of Spanish national literature which her husband had been asked to write, but which she undertook and published after the death of her son.⁴⁶⁶ In 1869/70, the family household had to be dissolved due to financial debts, and Dohm went to live with her sister Anna Schleh in Rome for a year. With the aid of friends, the family was able to reunite in Berlin, and Ernst Dohm became a joint partner in the journal *Kladderadatsch*. In the years 1872 to 1879, Dohm published her radical political essays and became an influential name in intellectual circles in Berlin. In the essay *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande* of 1873 she demanded women's suffrage for the first time, and is thus the first female spokesperson for this in Germany.⁴⁶⁷ Through the professional and social connections of her husband and her salon respectively, she came into contact with figures such as Ferdinand Lassalle, Fanny Lewald and Adolf Stahr, the publisher Maximilian Harden, and several leading figures of the emerging women's movement. After the death of Ernst Dohm in 1883 she started to publish novels and novellas, and became more politically active in women's associations which campaigned for women's higher education (Hedwig Kettler's *Frauenverein Reform*, later *Frauenbildung – Frauenstudium*, founded in 1888) as well as protection for and de-stigmatising of single mothers and illegitimate children (the association *Frauenwohl*, founded by Minna Cauer in 1889).⁴⁶⁸ From 1885 onwards, Dohm increasingly published articles, reviews, and literary supplements in several newspapers. In the years 1896 to 1902 she published the trilogy of novels that are probably her best known literary texts today, and in the first decade of the twentieth century, she became even more active in political associations, for example becoming the honorary president of the newly founded *Verband für Frauenstimmrecht* in

⁴⁶⁶ See Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, p. 154.

⁴⁶⁷ Hedwig Dohm, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage* (Berlin: Wedekind & Schwieger, 1873).

⁴⁶⁸ Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, p. 155.

1904. Dohm spoke out against the rising nationalism of the years just before the outbreak of the First World War, and during the war remained one of the few German intellectuals who were explicitly pacifist and critical of the war effort. Her pessimistic anti-war stance is expressed most impressively in the essay *Der Mißbrauch des Todes* (1915; published in 1917).⁴⁶⁹ Dohm lived to see the end of the war and the introduction of women's suffrage in 1918, as well as the first official election with women's participation in January 1919, in which forty-one female delegates were elected to the National Assembly.⁴⁷⁰ Dohm died on 1 June of the same year, which makes her the only one of the authors discussed who actually saw the establishment of women's suffrage, and hence a generation-long struggle come to fruition.

a. Proto-feminist essays

Even in Dohm's earliest political essays, she offers an analysis of the whole state of women's rights, or the lack thereof, and does not content herself with focussing on only one area which needs to change. Just like the other five authors in this study, Dohm demands equal access to education and employment and reform of marriage laws. Unlike the other authors, however, she explicitly states that the more immediate aims of the by then established women's movement, such as grammar schools for girls or free access to the job market, have only little chance of becoming reality without there being women's suffrage first:

Die unmittelbaren, praktischen Folgen des Stimmrechts sind vielleicht nicht die wichtigsten. Die Hauptsache aber ist dies: die Gewährung des Stimmrechts ist der Schritt über den Rubikon. Erst mit dem Stimmrecht der Frauen beginnt die Agitation für jene großartigen Reformen, die das Ziel unserer Bestrebungen sind.

⁴⁶⁹ Reprinted in: Dohm, *Ausgewählte Texte: ein Lesebuch zum Jubiläum ihres 175. Geburtstages*.

⁴⁷⁰ See Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, p. 156.

Die Theilnahme am politischen Leben macht alle anderen Fragen zu offnen.⁴⁷¹

Rohner points out in her biography that Dohm was not a member of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, founded by Louise Otto-Peters in 1865; the reason for this, however, was not Dohm's shyness and unwillingness to speak in public, as several scholars have speculated, but the fact that most factions of the women's movement were far too moderate for Dohm.⁴⁷² As set out in the biographical details in this chapter, Dohm became a member of several quite radical women's associations, often taking up committee positions. The essay *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande*⁴⁷³ contains Dohm's earliest demand for suffrage. It is not only interesting because of her argumentative strategy but also because Dohm refers to discussions of women's suffrage in the British Parliament, which she obviously followed very closely. The arguments she takes from those discussions in order to dispute or prove them wrong are not specific to Britain and were used by German opponents of women's suffrage as well; however, Dohm stresses the fact that suffrage was actually being debated in parliament while at the same time ridiculing the low-brow, uncritical tone of the debate, unlike in Germany, where it remained a matter for the literary supplement or pseudo-scientific essays for a long time.

This also appears to be the reason for the structure of this early essay: in the first and longer part, Dohm does not mention suffrage or women's rights at all but viciously attacks the very German concept of the good housewife. This fogeyish concept of a frugal woman who has no interests beyond her own house and family is deconstructed as hurtful for everyone involved, in complete contrast to the established notion of the housewife being the heart and soul of her family. Dohm weaves into this dispute her stance on women's education and their barring from employment. According to Dohm, a truly good

⁴⁷¹ Hedwig Dohm, *Der Frauen Natur und Recht. Zur Frauenfrage zwei Abhandlungen über Eigenschaften und Stimmrecht der Frauen* (Berlin, 1876).

⁴⁷² See Rohner, *Spuren ins Jetzt*, p. 108.

⁴⁷³ Dohm, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage*.

housewife needs to be educated and given the chance to develop as a person before attempting to lead her household, including servants, since what today would be called ‘leadership skills’ cannot develop except through education. While the rhetorical, witty shredding of the notion of the stereotypical housewife is amusing as such, it is easy to see how Dohm’s contemporaries could take exception to its merciless mockery of the majority of German middle-class women. The essay then goes on to offer in its second part a detailed argument for the necessity of women’s political participation, for which suffrage is the first and vital step. Dohm proceeds with her customary technique of creating a dialogue between the texts of her ideological opponents, in which she first lays down their arguments one by one, in order to invalidate them with her own stance on the topic. Through this procedure she not only makes her point, but is also able to unmask double standards, illogical assumptions and explanations based on clichés or custom, and puts her finger on some uncomfortable truths as to why women have been excluded from politics. This method, which could be called deconstructionist, also has the advantage that it provides the modern reader with an insight, albeit somewhat exaggerated, of the contemporary mindset and counter arguments, hence a highlighting of culturally constructed ideas and concepts with regard to gender roles and norms of behaviour. In this spirit, Dohm begins the appendix, as she calls it, to her treatise about the housewife with a radical attack on the status quo of the political and legal system:

Für mich liegt der Anfang alles wahrhaften Fortschritts auf dem Gebiet der Frauenfrage im *Stimmrecht der Frauen*. Die Gesetze, bei denen sie am meisten interessiert sind, sind *gegen* sie, weil *ohne* sie. Despotisch nennt man diejenige Regierung, die sich eine unbeschränkte Autorität über die Bevölkerung gegen Wunsch und Willen derselben anmaßt. Fast alle Gesetzgeber der letzten Jahrhunderte betonen, daß Niemand durch irgend ein Gesetz gebunden sein sollte, bei dessen Abfassung er nicht mitgewirkt habe.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

Here, she echoes John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), though she explains in a letter to the Hungarian women's rights activist Rosika Schwimmer that, at the time she wrote this essay, she had not yet read any text by him:

Zu meinen Emancipationsschriften bin ich ohne jede Anregung von außen gekommen. Schmerzlicher Seelennot haben sie sich entrungen. Zwar war Mill's Hörigkeit der Frau schon erschienen. Aber ich kannte das Buch nicht.⁴⁷⁵

In later essays, however, she quotes from *On Liberty* as well as from Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) to support her arguments, and refers explicitly to his political philosophy.

Dohm's essays are particularly interesting for the focus of this study because they provide a direct contrast to the widespread image of a political woman in nineteenth-century Germany, far more explicitly than the essays of the other five authors, thus delivering an idea of what images and conceptions the female authors had to work against in their own texts. First, Dohm tackles the issue of the political woman entering the much maligned public space, and the double standards she observes in this act:

Jede Frau, die öffentlich auftritt, bezaubert die Männer, so lange sie es versteht, dieselben zu amüsieren. Tritt die Frau aber öffentlich auf, um ihnen Concurrenz zu machen, oder gar sie zu belehren, so wird sie zur Unnatur, zum Mannweib. Mit anderen Worten: sobald der Zweck ihres öffentlichen Auftretens nicht der Mann ist und sein Vergnügen, sondern ein idealer oder persönlicher Zweck an seine Stelle tritt, wird die Öffentlichkeit verworfen. [...] Eine Kunstreiterin mit ihren riesigsten Sprüngen entzückt sie – als Weib (obgleich notorisch ihre Muskeln ausgebildeter sein müssen, als die der meisten Männer). Eine Frau aber, die etwa vor einer politischen Versammlung reden wollte (sie mag die Grazie in Person sein), ist unweiblich, weil sie in ihnen ein Gefühl der Unlust erregt – verletzte Eitelkeit.⁴⁷⁶

Dohm does not hesitate to point out the baser motives behind the supposedly honourable

⁴⁷⁵ See letter to Rosika Schwimmer, 08.06.1907, in Dohm, *Briefe aus dem Krähwinkel*, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁷⁶ Dohm, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage*, p. 181.

concerns the men in power utter in order to prevent women's political participation when she labels the stated reasons as hurt vanity, fear of competition, or fear of losing the sense of superiority. In this, too, she is far more radical and aggressive than any other author of the time, inasmuch as she does not try to appease her opponents, but calls a spade a spade and thus risks being denounced and marginalised from the onset. Her rhetorical weapon against this marginalisation or non-observance is her indisputable logic, which she applies and demonstrates to great polemical effect. Thus she counters a common argument that women should not sink so low as to concern themselves with the nasty day-to-day business of politics:

Der Schmutz des politischen Treibens! Wenn die Männer im politischen Leben, da, wo sie als Gleichberechtigte, die höchsten Interessen der Menschheit berathend, zusammenkommen, schon so schrecklich sind, ach Gott, sollten sie da nicht vielleicht im eigenen Hause, wo sie jeglicher Controle [sic!] der öffentlichen Meinung überhoben, unter vier Augen mit ihren sanften Gattinnen verkehren, noch schrecklicher sein! Politische Thätigkeit eine Befleckung und Verunreinigung des Geschlechts. Welchen Zweck hat die politische Thätigkeit für die Männer? Sie durch die Theilnahme am Staatsleben auf eine höhere Stufe der Civilisation zu erheben, mit einem Wort: die Veredelung. Der sehr Ehrenwerthe nimmt also an, daß politische Thätigkeit auf Frauen nicht nur anders wirke, als auf Männer, sondern geradezu entgegengesetzt.⁴⁷⁷

Another common argument against women's political participation was the notion that women, as a group, would risk losing their femininity when involved with political debate or other public procedures. What appears laughable to a modern reader nevertheless caused hot disputes and, as counter-arguments in other essays by men and women alike want to make us believe, aroused concern and even anxiety amongst legislators. Dohm deconstructs these notions with ease as purely rhetorical window dressing:

Ein Honorable fürchtet übrigens, wie aus seinen weiteren Ausführungen erhellt,

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

nicht sowohl eine Änderung des weiblichen Charakters als vielmehr eine *Verwischung* respektive *Austilgung der Geschlechtsunterschiede*. Er fürchtet, daß das ganze weibliche Geschlecht auf dem ungewöhnlichen Wege des Stimmrechts abhanden kommen möchte. [...] Wie sind nicht von den urältesten Zeiten her alle regierenden Herrscherinnen, trotz ihrer unweiblichen Beschäftigung, trotz Lasterhaftigkeit und gelegentlichen Blutdurstes geliebt, ja angebetet worden. Nun, meine Herren, wenn Gift, Dolch, Mordlust, rabenschwarze Charakterschwärze der Weiblichkeit in Ihren Augen keinen Abbruch thun, so wird das bischen [sic!] Stimmrecht das Geschlecht wohl auch nicht umbringen.⁴⁷⁸

However, Dohm was very much aware how threatening the prospect of women's political emancipation was to the established structure of society, even though she usually depicted the nay-sayers more as caricatures than actual opponents when she engaged them in dispute. Again, in contrast to other authors, she did not deny that the radical reforms she demanded would result in a dramatically changed society (not merely a less unjust one, as the moderate women's movement liked to stress), and she acknowledged the resulting anxieties as something normal, yet as something to be overcome for the benefit of society as a whole:

Es heißt: Durch die Bewilligung des Stimmrechts werden alle Grundlagen der menschlichen Gesellschaft untergraben, Gebäudeeinsturz – Untergang – Chaos – Posaunen – jüngstes Gericht. [...] Indessen will ich zugeben, daß diesmal der englische Pessimist nicht ganz Unrecht hat. Es handelt sich in der That bei der Frauenfrage um eine sociale Revolution, eine gewaltige und wunderbare, wie die Welt keine zweite gesehen, eine Revolution, in der einzig und allein mit geistigen Waffen gekämpft wird. Ja, es ist wahr, wir leugnen es nicht, diese Revolution bezweckt die Auflösung der heutigen socialen Zustände, den Sturz der Anarchie der Conservativen, deren sociales Staatsgebäude auf morschen Lügen ruht.⁴⁷⁹

Dohm saw in the establishment of women's suffrage 'das geeignete Kampfesmittel, um die

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 189-92.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

Sitten in legaler Weise zu ändern',⁴⁸⁰ thereby tempering her classification of the women's movement as a revolutionary force. Like many of her modern thoughts, she again seems to foreshadow a school of thought from the twentieth century, when she – like Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*⁴⁸¹ - links power of office, the notion of entitlement to this power, and the consequent shaping of society as well as its legal system according to this notion, to the gender of the wielders of power. To underline her point about the importance, and radical potential, of women's suffrage and emancipation, she uses a striking comparison which must have sounded preposterous to her bourgeois contemporaries:

Nicht freiwillig werden die Männer ihre Geschlechtsherrschaft fahren lassen, die sie für ein legitimes Recht halten, und die doch nur ein uraltes Privilegium ist, das im Laufe der Jahrhunderte ihr Rechtsbewußtsein corrumpirt hat. Was das Interesse der herrschenden Klasse verletzt, hat von jeher Revolutionen hervorgerufen, und der Kampf wird um so erbitterter sein, je größer und mächtiger die angegriffene Partei ist (in diesem Falle die Hälfte des Menschengeschlechts). Aber es sind schon größere Vorurtheile, als das in der Frauenfrage mächtige, besiegt worden. Welch eine wahnsinnige Wuth erhob sich gegen Copernikus, der da behaupten wollte, daß die Sonne sich bewege. Heute kämpft nur noch ein einsamer Nachzügler für den sittigen Stillstand der Sonne.⁴⁸²

At the same time, Dohm's analysis also leads her to an optimistic expectation of the future when she argues, in accordance with contemporary historians and philosophers of her day, that a civilisation's development inevitably, if eventually, leads to a levelling of the field in terms of legal equality and personal freedom:⁴⁸³

Die Männer der strengsten Wissenschaft lehren uns, daß das Lebensprincip aller Geschichte nichts anderes sei als die Entwicklung zur Freiheit, und darum ist die

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁸¹ See Michel Foucault, *Sexualität und Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), esp. Part IV, 'Das Dispositiv der Sexualität'.

⁴⁸² Dohm, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage*, p. 225.

⁴⁸³ See e.g. discussion in Domenico Losurdo, *Zwischen Hegel und Bismarck. Die achtundvierziger Revolution und die Krise der deutschen Kultur* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993).

Sache der Frauen die Sache der gesammten Menschheit, und so wahr es einen Fortschritt giebt, so gewiß müssen wir siegen.⁴⁸⁴

Even though Dohm expresses her confidence in the eventual victory of the women's movement, she is quite critical of the efforts the moderate wing has made since the foundation of the General Women's Association in 1865. Suffrage was not on the agenda of the campaigners until the 1890s, and Dohm stresses again and again that any other focus will only serve to distract and delay the political efforts in all areas the women's movement wants to reform. It is therefore not surprising that Dohm finds harsh words for those parts of the movement which focus more on educational issues and charity (especially charity towards working class women), instead of concentrating their efforts on the establishment of suffrage. This, as has been shown, must be the first step, from Dohm's point of view, for truly democratic and beneficial reforms in other important areas such as education and employment. This stance is expressed even in her earliest essay *Was die Pastoren von den Frauen denken* (1872):

Nie sah die Welt eine ehrbarere, bescheidenere Bewegung als diese deutsche Frauenbewegung. Eine Menschenklasse, die sich bemüht, in demütigen Wendungen zu beweisen, dass eigentlich kein ausreichender Grund vorhanden sei, sie des Hungers sterben zu lassen! Eine Klasse, die um ihre Existenz wie um ein Almosen bettelt!⁴⁸⁵

In a later essay, *Der Frauen Natur und Recht* (1874), Dohm turns her attention towards the question of whether women should be given suffrage, and whether they are able to fulfil this office in the sense of their physical and mental abilities. In this essay she takes to task several opponents of women's suffrage by deconstructing their arguments as being based, not on natural law as they claim, but on arbitrary decrees about the nature and abilities of women in general. By showing how contemporary society and science laugh at old-

⁴⁸⁴ Dohm, *Der Jesuitismus im Hausstande. Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage*, p. 226.

⁴⁸⁵ Hedwig Dohm, *Was die Pastoren von den Frauen denken* (Berlin: Reinhold Schlingmann, 1872).

fashioned ideas about human nature, which are now proven to be incorrect, she presents contemporary notions about women's nature as the next thing to be laughed at by future generations. Additionally, she yet again deconstructs the biologicistic arguments often used to justify women's exclusion from politics, and highlights their absurdity as social constructs:

Man *hat* behauptet: die Frau, welche Zwillinge zur Welt bringt, ist des Ehebruchs schuldig. Man *behauptet*: die Frau, weil sie überhaupt Kinder zur Welt bringt, ist mit politischer Impotenz behaftet. Das Gedankenprincip in diesen beiden Vorstellungen ist dasselbe: einem physischen Vorgang wird willkürlich eine sittliche oder geistige Basis gegeben. Weil die Frauen Kinder gebären, darum sollen sie keine politischen Rechte haben. *Ich* behaupte: weil die Männer keine Kinder gebären, darum sollen sie keine politischen Rechte haben und ich finde die eine Behauptung mindestens ebenso tiefsinnig wie die andere.⁴⁸⁶

In addition to the pseudo-naturalistic discourse of her time, Dohm also throws down the gauntlet to political philosophers and statesmen on their own territory. With arguments similar to those in Mill's *On Liberty*, she explains – not justifies – why women's suffrage must be a logical consequence of any democratic endeavours, and thus stresses yet again the absurdity of excluding women from state affairs:

Die Frauen verlangen das Stimmrecht, weil jede Klasse, die am politischen Leben unbetheiligt ist, unterdrückt wird; die Betheiligung am politischen Leben dagegen nothwendig im Laufe der Zeit die Gleichheit vor dem Gesetze zur Folge haben muß. Die Klassen, die das Stimmrecht nicht üben dürfen, sind in der Gewalt der anderen Klassen, die es üben. Dieses Princip ist stets so einstimmig von allen Parteien anerkannt worden, daß die Verleugnung desselben, den Frauen gegenüber, schier unbegreiflich ist.⁴⁸⁷

While it might appear that Dohm argues mostly against male representatives of the

⁴⁸⁶ Dohm, *Der Frauen Natur und Recht. Zur Frauenfrage zwei Abhandlungen über Eigenschaften und Stimmrecht der Frauen.*

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

conservative social order, she is very explicit in taking the majority of women who are apathetic or antithetic to women's suffrage to task. This is exemplified in a later collection of essays entitled *Die Antifeministen* (1902), in which she disputes not only statements and essays written by men, but also by women who have spoken out against women's political participation, among them well-known names such as Lou Andreas-Salomé and Ellen Key. Dohm's main argument against a 'feminine' way of social reform without a political basis, however, is already present in the essay of 1874, in which she also warns the moderate part of the women's movement not to fall into the trap of focussing their energies solely on charitable work:

Ohne politische Rechte seid Ihr, Eure Seelen mögen von Mitleid, Güte und Edelsinn überfließen, den ungeheuersten Verbrechen gegenüber, die an Eurem Geschlecht begangen werden, machtlos.⁴⁸⁸

Dohm concludes the essay by returning to the philosophical discourse of individual freedom inside a political system, and highlights yet again the contradiction between state theory and political reality. The last step, the conclusion, she leaves for her readership to draw for themselves, namely that in order to present women as equal members of the state, in a state of free people – since freedom, as a human right, is applicable to the whole population - suffrage, and participation in matters of state, is the only valid method:

So sind auch die Frauen frei, weil in einem Staate freier Menschen es keine Unfreien geben kann. Die Menschenrechte haben kein Geschlecht.⁴⁸⁹

b. Literary representations – everything is political

The comment most often made about Dohm's oeuvre is the discrepancy between her political essays and literary texts.⁴⁹⁰ The reason for this, it is generally agreed, lies in

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ See Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, 'The Ambiguous World of Hedwig Dohm', in Marianne Burkhard (ed.),

the different functions Dohm ascribed to her texts: where the essays were designed to jolt her readership into thinking about the state of German society and to make them aware of persisting injustices and double standards, the novels and shorter fictional texts were to depict the *status quo* of women's place in society, or as Rohner puts it:

Trotzdem muss noch einmal betont werden, dass es Hedwig Dohm [...] nicht darum geht, eine zu ihrer Zeit utopische Frauenfigur zu schaffen, die es aus eigenem Antrieb schafft, sich von der Gesellschaft, die sie in ihrer Entwicklungsfreiheit eingeschränkt hat, loszusagen und ein neues, freies und aufgeklärtes Leben zu führen. [...] Gleichzeitig haben Dohms Texte aber natürlich auch eine politische Intention: Die Darstellung von Protagonistinnen, die [in] ihrem engen Rollenkorsett förmlich ersticken, ist zweifellos ein Aufruf zur Veränderung der herkömmlichen politischen, sozialen und ökonomischen Situation.⁴⁹¹

In this, Dohm differs most significantly from the other authors in this study. Far from constructing an idealised version of the emancipated woman, she shows how the current circumstances prevent women from developing into fully responsible, self-aware human beings, and she thus turns the whole text into a political statement, not only the role of the women therein. Her approach makes clear, far more pressingly than those of the other authors, that the legal emancipation of women is an issue that concerns all of society, not only the minority of bourgeois women. At the same time, Dohm heavily criticises those sections of the moderate women's movement which focus on charitable work, or on the reform of marriage laws alone. In contrast to the other authors discussed, who did their best to present socially acceptable or utopian women with political convictions, Dohm also criticises, if not parodies, the images of the inoffensive female 'politician' she encountered in other authors' fiction. Writing at the turn of the century, Dohm, as an author, appears to take on the role of the commentator of the preceding and current efforts of the women's

Gestaltet und Gestaltend. Frauen in der deutschen Literatur. (=Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik 98) (Amsterdam, 1980), pp. 255-76.

⁴⁹¹ Rohner, *In Literis Veritas*, p. 148.

movement in Germany. The politically minded women the reader encounters in her novels and novellas are, therefore, already contextualised and embedded in their historical and social framework, and with this background at her disposal, the narrator is able to comment on their respective opinions, actions, and failures.

The novel *Sibilla Dalmar* (1896) was published first, but thematically it is the second book in the generational trilogy, whereas *Schicksale einer Seele* (1899) is thematically the first, but chronologically the second book. For the purpose of coherence, in this study the thematic order of the trilogy will be followed. In *Schicksale einer Seele*, the protagonist Marlene narrates her life story to her good friend Arnold in a series of letters. Gaby Pailer has pointed out the structurally subversive strategy of using the genre of the epistolary novel, and how and to which ends Dohm flouts the defining characteristics of the genre in this novel.⁴⁹² Marlene recounts her political awakening and ties it to the date of 18 March 1848, the only explicit date mentioned in the novel.⁴⁹³ Significantly, it is the democratic cause she starts to invest in, not the (at that time) smaller party of the early women's rights movement. As already shown, most of the later women's rights campaigners defined themselves as democrats first, and women's rights activists second. In Marlene's account of that time, Dohm combines a depiction of the general mood with a subtle criticism of the unreflective excitement at political ideas:

Seit jener Stunde, wo ich den Adel im Volk geschaut, und wo zwei tote Augen mein Innerstes durchschauert, war ich – man nannte es damals Demokratin. Von der Sozialdemokratie war, soviel ich mich erinnere, noch gar nicht die Rede. Ja, ich wurde eine blutrote Revolutionärin. Ich schwärmte massenhaft – so ins Blaue hinein – für Freiheit und speziell für die Herwegh'sche Revolutionshymne: *Die Toten an die Lebenden*: „Reißt die Kreuze aus der Erden. Alle sollen Schwerter werden...“ Und ich gab mir alle Mühe, nach Tyrannenblut zu lechzen.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² See Pailer, *Schreibe, die du bist. Die Gestaltung weiblicher ‚Autorschaft‘ im erzählerischen Werk Hedwig Dohms*.

⁴⁹³ Dohm, *Schicksale einer Seele*, p. 78.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Rohner points out in her biography of Dohm that the short episodes in this novel are the only comments or statements about the 1848 revolution that we have from Dohm.⁴⁹⁵ Marlene's family, quite acidly described as *petit bourgeois* and uninterested in political ideas, does its best to prevent Marlene from mixing with the people sympathizing with the revolution in its immediate environment. Nevertheless, Marlene manages to sneak away a few times with a female friend and visit meetings of democratic clubs. There she listens to incendiary speeches, but the only thing of consequence that comes out of these meetings for her, before her parents prevent her from attending any more meetings, is that she falls in love with one of the speakers, who is the brother of her friend and whom she later marries. In a brilliant move, Dohm addresses the early democrats' double standards with regard to women's role in society: Marlene might have fallen in love with the democrat Walter, who holds fiery speeches on the emancipation of the citizen and democratic rights for everyone, but in his conduct towards her he is the embodiment of conservative attitudes towards women, and does not even question his own family arrangements after their marriage in which he is the unquestioned ruler of the family, and Marlene his uneducated little housewife with no interests of her own. Dohm gives an inkling of his character and his conservative attitude towards women in Marlene's description of their first encounter at a democrats' meeting:

Hinter allem, was er sagte, ahnte ich einen tiefen, verborgenen Sinn. Ich hing an seinem Mund, als er begeistert von den Kolbenstößen erzählte, die er als Gefangener auf dem Transport von Berlin nach Spandau erduldet. Gern wäre ich dem edlen Märtyrer der Freiheit um den Hals gefallen. Beim Abschied drückte er mir die Hand so recht herzlich stark und sagte: „Sie sind ein reizender kleiner...“ Er unterbrach sich: „eine bildhübsche kleine Freiheitsgöttin“. Heut weiß ich, er hatte sagen wollen: ein reizender kleiner Käfer!⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ Rohner, *Spuren ins Jetzt*, p. 23.

⁴⁹⁶ Dohm, *Schicksale einer Seele*, p. 83.

In the following, the explicitly political dimension vanishes from the novel, as Marlene recounts her life as preoccupied by her family and social obligations. Like a lot of the 1848ers, her husband Walter becomes disillusioned with the democratic cause and distances himself from his earlier convictions. Marlene appears to be too uneducated, too disoriented on the political stage, and therefore she cannot even do this. Her life remains within the customary bounds of marriage and social conventions, and it takes all her energy to seek her own identity and personal development in the course of her novel, so that an investment in political agitation is not even on the cards. In this, Dohm presents not only a part of her own coming of age with regard to personal and social questions, but also traces the inner development of many, later politically engaged women of the first women's movement. Marlene might not have the strength to move from personal development to public campaigning, but, as shown above, other women such as Malwida von Meysenbug did exactly that. Rather than presenting an exceptional woman-turned-role model, Dohm points towards all the other women who might have had similar thoughts and developments, but who had to rely on other women to carry their concerns into the public sphere in the form of novels, pamphlets, or the organised women's movement.

In the thematically second novel of the trilogy, *Sibilla Dalmar*, Dohm presents a mixed message about political women. The text is presented as a mixture of diary, in which the reader learns about Sibilla's childhood and school days, third person narrative, in which the reader sees Sibilla through the eyes of her loving mother, and letters which Sibilla writes to her mother once she is married and has moved from Berlin to Munich. The protagonist Sibilla does not appear much interested in political matters other than making superficial salon talk about them; while she seems to be somewhat disappointed not to be taken seriously in her political interests, she does not grieve about this, either:

Ich laufe hier keine Gefahr, wegen meines Radikalismus boykottiert zu werden.

Man lacht über meinen Amateur-Sozialismus, und da ich weder zum Malen, noch zur Musik, noch zum Spiritismus Talent habe, lässt man ihn als harmlosen Salon-Sport passieren. Höchstens beschuldigt man mich der Originalitätshascherei.⁴⁹⁷

The reason for this attitude, despite Sibilla's longing for a meaningful occupation in life, is expressed in the resigned acceptance of the boundaries that law and social norms place on her and women in general, even if she were able to attend university:

Ob sie etwa Lust habe, in Zürich zu studieren? Frau Dalmar fragte es etwas ängstlich [...]. Nein! Sibilla wollte nicht. Wozu? Bloß um zu lernen, um sich Kenntnisse zu erwerben? Dazu brauchte sie keine Universität; aus Büchern konnte sie ebenso gut und ebenso viel lernen. [...] Ja, wenn die Frauen die auf der Universität erworbenen Kenntnisse praktisch verwerten könnten, dann fiel wenigstens der Heiratszwang fort. Aber daran war ja in absehbarer Zeit gar nicht zu denken.⁴⁹⁸

In this novel Dohm presents several of Sibilla's female friends who are certainly aware of current political and social issues such as women's education and legal emancipation. They talk about these topics amongst themselves and also discuss them with the men of their social circle, although these conversations often take on more the character of banter than of realistic, available options. Dohm uses this set-up to criticise again the double standards she observed in social and political opinions on the one hand, and actual behaviour towards women on the other hand. After a particularly bad (and misogynistic) joke made by a member of Parliament at a social gathering, one of Sibilla's friends takes him up on it:

„Oho!“, rief Timäa erzürnt, „ziemen sich solche Dekadenzwitze für den konservativen Agrarier, der im Parlament seine Reden für die Heiligkeit der Familie, Ehe, Religion usw. mit Donnerkeilen und Pfuis würzt? Zweierlei Moral, mein Herr Graf?“

„Schöne und geistesgewaltige Timäa“, entgegnete Ferlani, „viele Dinge auf Erden und im Himmel sind Ihnen kund geworden, nur die Politik nicht. Staatsklugheit und

⁴⁹⁷ Dohm, *Sibilla Dalmar*, p. 86.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Weltweisheit ist eben zweierlei. Gerade weil ich Volksvertreter bin, rede ich im Parlament nicht, was mir, sondern was dem Volke frommt.“

„Gott, Sie Übermensch mit Ihrer schwächlichen Sophisterei“, spottete Timäa. „Das wird ein Spaß werden, wenn wir Frauen erst in den Reichs- und Landtagen sitzen und euch Blitzeschleuderer als komische Operetten-Jupiterleins entlarven werden. Wir haben die Sachkenntnis.“⁴⁹⁹

Despite gaining agreement from her fellow women, it is clear that Timäa's statements are not being taken seriously, and are regarded, since the threat of women entering Parliament is an impotent one, as a duel of wits rather than as an actual political statement. In a similar fashion, Sibilla also defends her social circle's habit of belittling political interests when voiced by women, as these are perceived as being simply pointless, and as such are a waste of energy, as well as being regarded with social disdain:

Brachliegende Felder produzieren Unkraut. Über den Höhen mit ihren Sternen ist für Frauen die Lokalsperre verhängt. [...] Ja, wenn sie Bismarcks werden könnten oder Helmholzes oder millionäre Bankiers oder etwas Ähnliches. Aber so! Keine Lorbeeren, kein Eichenlaub, nicht einmal Titel und Orden. Bloß Dornen? Da kränzen wir lieber das Haupt mit Rosen, mit roten Rosen.⁵⁰⁰

In a later passage, Sibilla is even more explicit and links her insufficient education with her lack of analytical as well as political understanding, as well as with society's general attitude towards women's ability to become competent in areas of political or intellectual endeavour:

Es ist auch dafür gesorgt, dass eine Frau nicht so leicht auf einen Lorbeerzweig kommt. Uns fehlen die Arbeitsmittel, die dem Manne zu Gebote stehen: Wissen, Kenntnisse, hauptsächlich die Kenntnisse irgendwelcher realen Lebensgebiete. [...] Von den weiten Gebieten der Politik, des wirtschaftlichen Lebens, der sozialen Zustände, von Arbeiter- und Künstlertum habe ich keinen Schimmer. Sollen wir wie die Seidenraupen alles immer aus uns selber spinnen? [...] Und spänne ich

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

selbst auf dem Gebiet des reinen Denkens köstliche Seidenfäden, Ideen werden diskreditiert, wenn Frauen sie aussprechen, ihr Blütenstaub wird zur Befruchtung nicht weiter getragen. Man schweigt sie tot, weil man gar nicht an ihre Echtheit glaubt. Aber die Frauen würden daran glauben? Ach, Mutti, die denken auch heimlich, der Mann macht's besser.⁵⁰¹

With this technique of contextualising contemporary attitudes and their political, even legal consequences, Dohm is able to politicise the proceedings and even most of the dialogues of the novel. Once the reader has been made aware of the double standards and attitudes described in the novel, it is impossible not to think about this framework and see the novel through this specific lens.

In addition to the political and philosophical ruminations of the protagonist, Dohm introduces an explicitly political figure, although her depiction borders from time to time on parody. A minor character, the baroness Jolante (a name which is typically associated with an old mare) represents the social and charitable wing of the moderate women's movement. Sibilla describes her in letters to her mother as a 'Gegengift' to the usual, superficial amusements of high society.⁵⁰² Jolante is always enraged about some social injustice or other, or about the deplorable state of the working class. She hands out political pamphlets to Sibilla and her circle of friends, and on one occasion Sibilla accompanies one of Jolante's friends, also a member of a charitable association, on a visit to the home of a working class woman to whom she gives financial aid. In her first description of Jolante, Sibilla exemplifies her character as belonging to all kinds of singular associations and good causes:

Meine Jolante! Eine Engelnatur. Aber ein Engel mit dem feurigen Schwerte, das dreinhaut. Alle Konterbande der Gesinnung spürt sie auf und schleppt sie auf die Anklagebank. Sie pflegt meist wie eine Bombe in unsere Kreise hineinzuplatzen, mit irgendeiner gedruckten Trophäe, die sie einem Täschchen von Rehleder

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 162-63.

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 126.

entnimmt, das sie unentwegt am Arme trägt. Sie ist immer begeistert oder empört, immer bringt sie Kunde von irgendetwas Herrlichem oder Schrecklichem, das geschehen. Sie hasst den Krieg, die Todesstrafe, den Antisemitismus. Was „Mensch“ heißt, ist ihrer Sympathie würdig. Sie ist Vegetarierin, Mitglied des Tierschutz- Jugendschutz-, des ethischen und vieler anderer Vereine.⁵⁰³

Dohm parodies the slightly overzealous, undirected way in which political involvement can lose itself in details and social concerns, and lose sight, in Dohm's opinion, of the most pressing concern of suffrage, which would entail the eventual solution of all forthcoming social questions. Although Jolante acts quite aggressively as an activist, she is stuck in an institutionalised mind-set of bourgeois notions of propriety and the idea of helping the poor through charity, not legal empowerment. This becomes clear when Sibilla visits her when Jolante is ill, and meets another woman from the charitable association Jolante belongs to. Sibilla accompanies Jolante's colleague to a working class woman who has been abandoned by her husband, and now has to provide for herself and her children on her own. Her situation is so desperate that she has turned to prostitution, and has borne another child as a result. When Jolante's colleague discovers this, all her humanitarian notions go out of the window, she berates the poor woman for her lax morals and announces the withdrawal of the financial support the charitable organisation has provided so far:

Plötzlich vernahmen wir vom Bett her einen leisen, wimmernden Ton. Eine dunkle Röte ergoss sich über das Gesicht der jungen Frau. Die Dame trat schnell an das Bett heran und schob die Kissen beiseite. Ein Kindchen, kaum vierzehn Tage alt, kam zum Vorschein, ein hübsches Kind mit rosigen Bäckchen und blauen Augen. Mit einem ironischen „Ach so“ wendete sich meine Begleiterin zu der zitternden Frau. Dass sie selbstverständlich jetzt auf keine Unterstützung mehr rechnen könnte, dürfte ihr bekannt sein. Einen unmoralischen Lebenswandel noch förmlich zu belohnen, sei gegen die Statuten. Auch würde sie dafür Sorge tragen, dass man die älteste Tochter dem schlechten Einfluss der Mutter entzöge und sie in einem

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p.96.

Waisenhaus unterbringe. Die arme Frau bezähmte mühsam ihre Wut und zischte zwischen den Zähnen: sie könne sich und ihre Kinder nicht allein ernähren, darum habe sie es getan, darum – er gäbe doch etwas zum Leben zu. Ich drückte ihr, als wir gingen, heimlich zehn Mark in die Hand – „gegen die Statuten“. Privatwohlthätigkeit wird nicht gern gesehen. Man soll das Geld den Vereinen geben. [...] Nein, diese Form der Wohlthätigkeit ist gewiss nicht die richtige. Almosen, das die Empfänger erniedrigt und verheuchelt und den Gebenden ein böses Gewissen macht.⁵⁰⁴

Dohm denounces the bourgeois notion of charity as degrading and removed from reality, as it is coupled with the rigid norms of virtue and propriety of the middle class. She also implies that this form of social activism only contributes to the status quo of the strictly class and gender based partitioning of society. Again, the unspoken conclusion in this situation is that only political and legal equality provides an adequate tool to bring about social change, and to enable women of all classes to provide for themselves adequately without having to resort to ‘impure’ means. In the course of the novel, Jolante falls in love with a democratically minded journalist, and when he is threatened with imprisonment for his radical articles, her attention shifts more and more to his wellbeing and away from the structural injustices that led to his eventual arrest. In this development Dohm criticises again the general inconsistency of the moderate women’s movement, inasmuch as she shows, through the example of Jolante, that personal experiences and situation have more influence on the political demands of this particular part of the women’s movement, and that there seems to be a general short-sightedness with regard to the methods with which to reach the goal of political and social emancipation.

In the third volume of the trilogy, *Christa Ruland* (1901), Dohm portrays the generation of her own grandchildren, and their opportunities to find a different course for their lives. The novel is a third person narrative, supplemented with letters from Christa to

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 145-46.

her sister Anne Marie, and a few pages from Anne Marie's diary. Right from the beginning the reader is introduced to Christa as a character in opposition to her mother. While the mother is a typical representative of worldly salon-society, with her mind focussed only on the opportunity to make a good match for her daughters, Christa rejects the concept of marriage as the ideal profession for a woman and has therefore little common ground with her mother. As Rohner points out, Dohm remains more interested in her characters' failures and the reasons for them, than in portraying a utopian role-model in her fictions, and thus the various female characters in this last novel are still battling with social norms.⁵⁰⁵ Amongst the protagonist's friends are different types of 'new women', or at least women who attempt to tread new paths, for example an aspiring writer, an artist, a chemist, a medical doctor and a dedicated sportswoman who only appears in conjunction with short trousers and her bicycle. These characters are political in their own right, though there is no actively campaigning woman amongst them. The closest the novel gets to depicting an activist is in the scene probably most often quoted, in which the chemist, Maria Hull, reads out a pamphlet to her friends in which she defines several types of 'new woman'. The writing and reading out of the pamphlet can be seen as political involvement with the contemporary socio-political discourse; however, the pamphlet makes no mention of political rights or the emancipation of women, but relates to social (and literary) images of women, and how they have to be defined anew.⁵⁰⁶ In the context of this pamphlet, however, the political campaigners are one of the newly defined categories of 'new woman':

Eine andere bedeutsame Kategorie bilden die mit Energie, Tatkraft, Wirklichkeitssinn Ausgestatteten, die erkannt haben, dass die Macht der Weg ist, der zum Ziel führt. Das sind die Agitatorinnen, das sind die Rednerinnen auf den

⁵⁰⁵ Rohner, *Spuren ins Jetzt*, p. 122.

⁵⁰⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this passage and its significance for literary representations of women see e.g. Pailer, *Schreibe, die du bist. Die Gestaltung weiblicher ‚Autorschaft‘ im erzählerischen Werk Hedwig Dohms* and Birgit Mikus, "Sprechmaschine Du": Sprachkritik in ausgewählten Romanen Hedwig Dohms', *German Life and Letters*, 62/2 (2009), 115-39.

Tribünen, in Vereinen, Volksversammlungen. Es sind die Ruferinnen im Streit. Heute Kämpferinnen, werden sie morgen Siegerinnen sein.⁵⁰⁷

Dohm pays tribute to the fact that political agitation, with its inevitable publicity and potential for public harassment, is not an arena for everyone, and cannot be independent of the desire for social change. She portrays the politically organised and active women as the pioneers they were, stressing the fact that they are one group amongst several, and her unwavering optimism for the future – the statement that their demands and struggles will inevitably see victory – ties all these factors together into a positive image of political women in general, and the campaigners in particular. This also reinforces Dohm's position of demanding political emancipation before social or even legal equality: the pamphlet specifically describes these women as the ones who have understood that 'Macht', power, is the way to achieve their goal. This short passage echoes one of Dohm's earlier essays, and also points towards the potential future for which women have to work and fight themselves:

Wir leben in einer Zeit des Übergangs. Nur eine geringe Zahl von Frauen hat bis jetzt die Bahn der Emancipation beschritten (das Contingent, das Deutschland gestellt hat, ist verschwindend klein). Ein Theil dieser Frauen sind muthige Vorkämpferinnen, Pioniere, die in einen Riß springen, die eine Kluft füllen, auf daß folgende Generationen bequem darüber fortschreiten können.⁵⁰⁸

In comparison, the other categories described in Maria's pamphlet stand for the currently observable developments in women's social and employment life, but do not demonstrate an awareness of the wider political and legal implications. In this short piece, Dohm couches her personal political programme which she otherwise keeps in the background, or does not exemplify at all on the level of plot or characters. As in *Sibilla Dalmar*, there is

⁵⁰⁷ Hedwig Dohm, *Christa Ruland*, eds Nikola Müller and Isabel Rohner (Berlin: trafo Verlag, 2008), pp. 125-26.

⁵⁰⁸ Hedwig Dohm, *Die wissenschaftliche Emancipation der Frau* (Berlin: Wedekind & Schwieger, 1874).

also some biting criticism of the moderate, prominently bourgeois parts of the women's movement. In her letters to her sister Anne-Marie, Christa tells not without glee about their mother's recent discovery of fashionable charity work:

Du glaubst gar nicht, Anne-Marie, wie das Volk jetzt Mode ist. [...] Wie sehr das Volk jetzt Mode ist, siehst Du an Mama, die mittut. Wenigstens an einem Zipfel ihres Tailor-made-Kleides ist sie von der Zeitströmung erfasst. Sie hat mit einigen anderen Damen – Frau Thalheim ist auch dabei – in Berlin O. in einer hässlichen Fabrikgegend einen Laden eröffnet, eine Art Konditorei oder Restaurant, wo für einen Minimalpreis eine Tasse Kakao, Tee, Milch, Haferbrei oder Kaffee mit Schrippe verabreicht wird, um dem [sic!] Alkoholgenuss der Arbeiter zu steuern. Die Damen selbst übernehmen abwechselnd die Bedienung, den Einkauf, Buchführung usw. Du solltest sehen, wie seelenvergnügt die Mama in den Taxameter steigt, mit einem dunklen Wollrock und einer bescheidenen Bluse angetan. Die umfangreiche Schürze, die dazu gehört, trägt sie – nicht etwa verschämt eingewickelt – nein, offen über dem Arm. Die Damen kommen sich wie verkleidet vor. So was macht Spaß, und die Fünfpfennig-Schokolade – mit Schrippe – brauchen sie nicht zu trinken.⁵⁰⁹

While Christa is amused at her mother's sudden interest in social work, not out of personal concern but because it is high society's Thing To Do and an amusing pastime, she also comments that there is always the potential that out of this kind of social work there might grow a wider political awareness:

Gewiss, vielfach äußerliches Getue, aber doch kein unfruchtbares. Ich meine, was der Mensch tut, aus welchen Motiven auch immer, es wirkt schließlich auf seine Gesinnung zurück.⁵¹⁰

Christa attenuates her earlier ridicule of the newly discovered pastime of helping the poor, and subtly positions herself on the side of the more politically minded, even though she does not have it in her to become politically – or charitably – active herself. As Pailer and

⁵⁰⁹ Dohm, *Christa Ruland*, pp. 132-33.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Cornelia Pechota Vuilleumier have shown, Christa falls victim to her own indecisiveness and ingrained inferiority complex.⁵¹¹ In her difficult and constraining marriage with Adrian, she struggles to retain a sense of herself, and feels her willpower sapped by disparaging comments or even looks from her husband. As a result, she only dabbles in the various possibilities which are now open to her, for example university lectures or professional drawing lessons, and does not dare to commit fully to any of the options she has in theory. When one of her more politically minded (male) friends makes her more aware of her own assumptions and habits of thinking, she ventures out to witness political proceedings, but finds herself deterred from the less-than-genteel atmosphere in parliament:

Ich war neulich im Reichstag. Eine stürmische Sitzung. Wie redeten denn diese vom Volk Auserlesenen! Sie redeten mit Fäusten. Sie spien Gift und Galle gegeneinander, und ihre gegenseitigen Beschimpfungen fanden nur an der Glocke des Präsidenten eine Schranke. Ist das Volk wirklich so wahnsinnig gewesen, solche Interessenspolitiker, solche Verräter, Schufte usw. zu wählen? Und sind sie es nicht, warum taxieren sie sich gegenseitig so? [...] Und die frommsten Parteien, sie sind nicht die faulsten im Schimpfen.⁵¹²

Christa proceeds to tell her sister how she would attempt to improve the politicians' conduct, were she in a position to change the general proceedings of the meetings. The seemingly naïve measures Christa lists - starting each meeting with a reading from the bible, substituting the president's bell with an electric apparatus which would illuminate the walls with flaming words of Christian wisdom – end, nonetheless, in a very valid question that brings into focus the general pretence of democracy and Christianity when it boils down to equal rights for all of society:

⁵¹¹ See Gaby Pailer, 'Ein Philosoph für alle und keine: Weibliche Figurationen Zarathustras im fiktionalen Werk Hedwig Dohms', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 40/2 (2004), pp. 135-50 and Cornelia Pechota Vuilleumier, „*Oh Vater, laß uns ziehn!*“ *Literarische Vater-Töchter um 1900* (Hildesheim, 2005).

⁵¹² Dohm, *Christa Ruland*, p. 148.

Zum Präsidenten aber wäre der Weiseste und Beste der Parlamentarier zu wählen, einer, der Ethiker ist vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle. Sollte sich unter den 396 Abgeordneten nicht ein einziger wahrer Christ befinden?

Ach – ich wäre es nicht. Im Gegenteil, wie oft, oft müsste auch einer für mich die Strippe ziehen und mir leuchtende Menetekel an die Wand malen.⁵¹³

The reader is left wondering what exactly Christa would fight for in parliament that would warrant a remonstrance under her newly imposed proceedings. At the end of the novel, Christa is able to obtain a divorce from her estranged husband, but is nevertheless left wondering what to do with her life. The prospect of founding an orphanage and working with children is stated as one possibility, perhaps the most likely one, for permanently indecisive Christa – while this is not an explicitly political act, the potential for further political awakening seems to be there, if the reader keeps in mind that Christa stated herself that social work might lead to a change of ethos for the activist. Dohm releases her readership, together with the protagonist, into an insecure, questioning future. Is this meant as an appeal to take control of one's own life, and not to hover, wavering, on the border between private and political life?

Of the six authors discussed in this study, Dohm is in the unique position of being able to comment on a vast section of the history of the women's movement by the time she writes her novels. Her own political position is radically progressive, and different, from those held by the other five authors. As is Dohm's custom, she attacks the antifeminist stance of society as a whole and of public figures alike, and she does not spare her female colleagues, either. As such, her criticism is reflected in the trilogy: the political framework provides the backdrop, sometimes barely perceptible, to the plot and the character development, just as is the case in real life. The political activism that does not have suffrage as its main goal is shown as ineffective, stuck in the conservative mindset and

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 148.

ideology of the bourgeoisie, and at times comical in its self-importance. Dohm's protagonists suffer from all of this, and do not have the strength to position themselves outside of this political as well as social reality. The political woman, Dohm seems to say, is the one who is aware of the conditions that hinder her, actively tries to change the root of the problems, and does not become side-tracked or intimidated by social norms, or fashionable charitable work which only affirms the social hierarchies. The political woman might be a nineteenth-century reader who realises where Dohm's protagonists went wrong, and starts to observe and question her own attitudes and behaviours, and who comes to the same conclusions as Dohm, namely that without political representation and power, none of the barriers that hindered the protagonists will fall.

Conclusion

The authors in this study chose surprisingly varied ways of depicting political women in their novels. They are united, however, in the assumption that the political woman is predominantly bourgeois. This is explained by the authors' own social background, but also by the fact that political involvement was mainly an activity of the educated middle class. Education is another factor which explains the bourgeois political woman, since few working class women would have had the necessary schooling and knowledge to make convincing female politicians. With the bourgeois background, most of the authors analysed shared certain social values which resonate in their respective designs of the literary image of a politically engaged woman. The areas of marriage and family are important elements for most of the authors, not only to avoid an affront to their readership, as Louise Aston dared to do (with harsh personal consequences for herself), but out of their very own blueprints for a democratic state. The authors' respective constructs of political women are directly influenced by their political stance, and this, in turn, is heavily dependent on the authors' personal experiences in their upbringing, family background, marriage and in the opportunities for education or independent work that they had, that is, whether they had the possibility of doing something apart from making a good match and having their own families. The moderate author Lewald, in particular, cannot conceive of the political woman without embedding her in a 'proper' marriage, from whose 'safety' she might expand her social and political involvement. Von Meysenbug clearly saw the political woman, in general, as being more like herself: single, not amenable to carnal desires, and therefore able to invest her strength into whichever project she might choose. Otto-Peters's political women grow into their involvement due to their personal strengths and their ability to stand alone. While some of them might seem rather conventional to a modern reader, the depiction of single, bourgeois women earning their own money and reaching out to support other women, even if they marry eventually (but do not stop their

support for others!) is a strong deviation from the established literary images of femininity. All three authors intended their political women to be role models for their fellow (bourgeois) women. They composed their protagonists with the purpose of showing alternative paths of action, if not of life, and appealed to their readership's sense of social justice, as well as self-reflection and courage, in order to convince more women of the benefits of their political programmes, and to encourage women to emulate the – moderately – different ways of living presented in their protagonists. In contrast to the role model approach, Anneke and Aston preferred to show utopian political women. Aston's Baronin Alice clearly overshot the boundaries of what German society was willing to tolerate in this respect. Nevertheless, Aston makes her point in imagining the possible scope of action for – future – emancipated women. Anneke's utopian vision, in comparison, is apparently more moderate, but also more honest – her depiction of utopian women, tasked with raising a truly democratic, egalitarian state both in present time and in the future through coming generations, remains on the brink of being a realistic point of departure and a hoped-for future development. Both authors saw their protagonists not as role models for their contemporaries, but as sign posts of what had to be achieved by way of women's emancipation: the way in which this could be achieved differed profoundly in the mind of the two authors. Dohm's depictions of political women are warnings and pleas at the same time. As the youngest author of the six, she was able to observe and analyse the actions of her colleagues, the path they had trodden since the Vormärz period, and where they went wrong at the time of the 1848 revolution and in the ensuing reactionary years. Her caricatures of the charitable social worker, who gets bogged down in minutiae and side-tracked with discussions of ideology, are a double-sided sword. They emphasise her point that all women's associations should have suffrage as their main priority, but they also have the capacity to discourage politically interested, and already active, women among her readership. Rather than role models or utopian constructs, Dohm shows the

actual, not very encouraging political situation of women in her time. Her demand for women's suffrage as the foremost goal of any emancipation movement is powerfully supported by her depictions of women with political interests who are prevented from even discussing them in a serious manner; however, since this demand is not voiced explicitly, rather providing the background to all her plot developments, it is in danger of not being recognised.

In this study, the focus is predominantly on bourgeois authors – after all, the revolution of 1848, with which the beginning of the German women's movement is inextricably connected, is often treated by historians as a revolution of the 'Bürgertum' as its actual political force, despite the struggles and uprisings of the working class. These uprisings led a lot of authors, men and women, to place a careful distance between their own political demands and everything that sounded too much like communism, even though they campaigned for equal democratic rights for the working class as well, and additionally sought to support and ease the lives of factory workers and domestic servants. Except in very specific settings, e.g. Otto-Peters's novel *Schloss und Fabrik* or Aston's *Revolution und Contrerevolution*, the working class does not really feature as an actively campaigning or fighting force. A study about political women in working-class authors' texts, as well as a comparison of the depiction of political women in texts by male authors, suggests itself. Additionally, some of the individual authors and their texts need further study and research: Lewald's oeuvre, for example, is so extensive that a detailed study of how the changes in her political stance affected her late work has not yet been undertaken. On the other side of the world, the German immigrants' community in Milwaukee, in which Anneke lived for the second half of her life, has also not been studied with regard to its journalistic endeavours or in relation to immigrants' literature, let alone women's writing, political or otherwise.

As shown in this study, Boetcher Joeres' claim of the marginality of radical

opinions in nineteenth-century women's writing turns out not to be true. At least the generation of the 1848ers was far more explicit about their political ideas and how they transported them in their literary texts than she claims. They did employ narrative strategies to smooth over some of the radicalism of their political protagonists in order to mollify their readership, or to smuggle in progressive opinions, especially in the years directly succeeding the failed democratic revolution and during the reactionary 1850s and 1860s. For the most part, however, their sketches of politically involved women were explicit and central to a large part of their literary oeuvre. The characteristic features of the political woman in the novels which have been analysed show her as belonging to the bourgeoisie, as a supporter of democracy, as aware of social and legal injustices towards women, and as possessing both the interest in political matters and the willingness (and courage) to live a life different from the common bourgeois notion of a woman's 'natural' role in society. In detail, the figure of the political woman is as multifaceted as the different wings and sections of the German women's movement itself, from the radicalism of her political demands down to her domestic and work situation. While these variations offer vivid images, different political and social alternative life paths, and several opportunities for self-identification to the nineteenth-century readership, the question remains whether this variety hindered the moulding of a literary female type with an influence and force to equal that of the images of the *femme fatale* and *femme fragile*; or whether it was the long-lasting absence of real female politicians alone, due to the lack of suffrage, which undermined the authors' ambitions to present a positive image of the political woman.

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