

Transgressive Femininity

Gender in the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough

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I, Kristina Sjögren, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This PhD thesis deals with how new discourses on femininity and gender developed in Scandinavian literature during the Modern Breakthrough, 1880-1909. Political, economic and demographic changes in the Scandinavian societies put pressures on the existing, conventional gender roles, which literature reflects; however, literature also created and introduced new discourses on gender.

The main focus has been on transgressive female characters in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian novels, which I have seen as indicators of emerging new forms of femininity. The study shows how the transgression of gender boundaries is used in the novels, when presenting their views on what femininity is, should be or could be. In addition to analysing the textual strategies in the representation of these ‘deviant’ literary characters, I have examined how the relevant texts were received by critics and reviewers at the time, as reviews are in themselves discursive constructs.

The theoretical basis of this study has mainly been Michel Foucault’s discourse theory, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity and Yvonne Hirdman’s theory of gender binarism. I have also used concepts from several (mainly Anglo-American and Scandinavian) literary gender theorists and historians in the analyses.

The four novels analysed in this study are as follows: 1) Danish author Herman Bang’s early decadence novel *Haabløse Slægter* (1880), where I use a queer theory perspective. 2) Norwegian author Ragnhild Jølsen’s *Rikka Gan* (1904), where the strong elements of pre-psychoanalysis are analysed. 3) Swedish author August Strindberg’s *Le Plaidoyer d’un fou* (1887-88), where I make a narratological examination of the narrative voice from a gender perspective. 4) Swedish author Annie Quiding’s *Fru Fanny* (1904), analysed as an example of ‘negative’ New Woman literature.

The thesis shows how literature of the time represented and introduced new forms of femininity, often in the form of ambiguous female characters, and often to the disapproval of the critics. It also shows that gender discourses were much alike within Scandinavia. Furthermore, my study lays bare the skeleton of normative Breakthrough femininity, what can be called the dominant discourse on femininity at the time: a non-existing sexual desire, feminine immobility/containment in the home and an imperative, self-sacrificing motherliness.

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Sjuhalla, Karlskrona, Sweden in August 2009

General comments

Translations:

Unless a specific English-language source is given, all translations are mine.

The indented Scandinavian quotes have not been translated because of lack of space. Instead, an appendix with rough translations will be presented separately.

Italics:

Italics in quotations are always in the original unless I state otherwise.

Bibliography:

A few works that have been an inspiration to my thinking, and that I find relevant to this study, have been included in the bibliography in spite of the fact that they are not directly quoted. I have marked these in grey.

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[W]e must ask: what is a woman? ‘*Tota mulier in utero*’, says one, ‘woman is a womb’. But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. [...] It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*¹

Do we *truly* need a *true* sex?

Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin*²

1. Introduction

The main focus of this thesis is gender discourse in Scandinavian literature from the Modern Breakthrough, here defined as 1880-1905. Ever since my MA thesis about literary female heroes some years ago, I have been interested in the construction and use of literary characters from a gender perspective.³ It felt logical to expand my field by devoting my PhD thesis to examining evil female literary characters, villainesses, and how they were textually produced to represent discourses on gender. As I spent time looking for and analysing texts, I found that the term ‘villainess’ was too one-dimensional. The behaviour of ‘my’ female characters may have been seen as horrendous by reviewers and readers at the time, but the characters themselves are certainly not one-dimensional. Their vileness can also be seen as instances of modernity, in the sense that their femininity was ahead of their time.

Caught in the normative net of the Modern Breakthrough, these female characters take liberties that would not be granted Scandinavian women until decades later, if at all. They obstruct, bend and cross traditional gender boundaries, creating new conceptual space for the term ‘woman’. Their ‘wickedness’ is mainly the transgression

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. H.M. Parshley (London: David Campbell [Everyman’s Library], 1993), p. xli.

² Michel Foucault, ‘Introduction’ in *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, transl. by Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. vii.

³ Kristina Sjögren, *Kvinnliga hjältar i litteraturen* (MA thesis [CD-uppsats] at Lund University, Dept. of Literature, 2005 [unpublished]).

of restricted femininity into masculine territory, an indicator of emergent new forms of femininity. In addition to examining the gender discourses constructed and reflected in the works and analysing the textual strategies in the representation of their ‘deviant’ literary characters, I have examined how the relevant texts were received by critics and reviewers at the time. As reviews are discursive constructs too, this gives a picture of how the discourses expressed, constructed and contested in the works were received and disputed at the time of publishing.

This is an interdisciplinary study, ranging across the fields of literary and gender studies, and cultural and social history. I have therefore found it proper to use different methods to bear on the subject matter. Apart from giving a general historical background to the living conditions of Scandinavian middle-class women, my study provides in-depth studies of four fascinating novels about female characters who did not conform and the gender discourses that ruled most people’s lives. These four novels have been chosen because they contain ambiguous characters who dodge the gender definitions with regard to both gender discourses and living conditions of the time, and who struggle with gender identities that do not fit into prevailing normativity. In the analysis of each novel I use a slightly different theoretical method.

After a short presentation of the analysed novels in section 1.1, sections 1.2 – 1.5 give a historical background to the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough. In sections 1.6 – 1.10 I give an overview of the theoretical theory I have used in the analyses.

1.1 The Analysed Novels

To investigate literary gender transgression, I have chosen four Scandinavian Breakthrough novels, published between 1880 and 1904, which I analyse in the four subsequent chapters. All four novels are interesting examples of texts where gender discourses of the time battle with each other, and they provoked more or less strong reactions from critics at the time. Each of these novels is a site of gender crisis, contradiction and challenge. In each one, different narrative and literary techniques are used to resolve tensions in representations of gender, and those will be analysed here along with the discourses represented.

The novels are written in a realist style, with realist characters, though *Rikka Gan* contains ‘dream sequences’. I have chosen to isolate the gender transgressive traits in some of the characters in order to analyse them, which may, if one has not read the

novel in question, give the impression of archaised evil characters. This, however, is never the case in the novels, where each character forms part of a realistic fictional universe and is both varied and ambiguous.

1.1.1 Herman Bang's *Haabløse Slægter*

In Chapter 2, in the analysis of Herman Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* (1880), I have chosen to use queer theory in combination with Judith Butler's theory of performativity in order to uncover the non-heterosexual discourses. As this is an early decadence novel, even from a European perspective, decadence style representations of the feminine and of feminine sexuality in the text are also discussed in this chapter.

Bang worked as a journalist in Copenhagen, and had already published a collection of essays and a collection of short stories. *Haabløse Slægter* was his first novel, published when he was twenty-three years old. It has been seen as autobiographical far into the twentieth century. The book was a *succès de scandale*, received badly by the critics and banned by the legal authorities. Although Bang went on to become a productive and prominent author of many novels, of which *Stuk* (1887), *Tine* (1889) and *Ludvigsbakke* (1896) are among the best known, he never wrote another novel as explicitly queer as *Haabløse Slægter*.⁴ Herman Bang published about thirty-five works in total, mostly novels and collections of short stories.

Today Herman Bang is included in the literary canon. Much research has been done on his works, two of the standard studies (written from a traditional biographical perspective) being Harry Jacobsen's four-volume biography⁵ and Torbjörn Nilsson's *Impressionisten Herman Bang* (1965)⁶. Dag Heede has written extensively about Bang, often from a queer theory perspective, for example in his excellent, thematically organised study *Herman Bang: Mærkværdige læsninger* (2003).⁷

In my reading of *Haabløse Slægter*, I have found a fascinating non-acceptance of the gender Breakthrough boundaries. Instead of, as traditionally, reading the wicked female character as a woman, or like Heede, reading her as a man, I read *Haabløse*

⁴ The word 'queer' here means treating non-heteronormative issues and using non-heteronormative characters.

⁵ Harry Jacobsen, *Den unge Herman Bang: mennesket, digteren, journalisten og hans by* (1954), *Herman Bang : resignationens digter* (1957), *Aarene der gik tabt : den miskendte Herman Bang* (1961) and *Den tragiske Herman Bang* (1966).

⁶ Torbjörn Nilsson, *Impressionisten Herman Bang: Studier i Herman Bangs författarskap till och med Tine* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1965).

⁷ Dag Heede, *Herman Bang: Mærkværdige læsninger* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2003).

Slægter's femme fatale as both a female and male character, demonstrating how Bang radically refuses the gender binaries of his time.

1.1.2 Ragnhild Jølsen's *Rikka Gan*

Ragnhild Jølsen's *Rikka Gan* (1904), analysed in Chapter 3, contains a positive view (which was unusual at the time) of feminine sexual desire, and displays interesting narrative techniques when representing it. *Rikka Gan* is here analysed as 'speaking back' against male decadence style, which is generally misogynist, through appropriating it for representing the feminine in positive terms instead. *Rikka Gan* subverts and contests the negative and misogynist decadence representation of the feminine, and instead radically represents women as natural beings with strong erotic desire, as more 'original' human beings than men, natural but oppressed by patriarchal society. The strong pre-psychoanalytical elements in this novel are also discussed.

Rikka Gan was Jølsen's second novel. She published her first novel, *Ves mor* (1903) at the age of twenty-eight and died shortly before her thirty-third birthday, having published five books: *Rikka Gan* (1904), *Fernanda Mona* (1905), *Hollases krønike* (1906) and *Brukshistorier* (1907). *Fernanda Mona* is a sequel to *Rikka Gan*, although written in different style with burlesque elements. Both *Ves mor* and *Rikka Gan* are quite extraordinary novels for their time, representing female sexuality and desire and their conditions.

Antonie Tiberg wrote the first biography on Ragnhild Jølsen, *Ragnhild Jølsen i liv og diktning* (1909)⁸, and it has since been complemented by Kari Christensen's *Portrett på mørk treplate* (1989), which also contains psychoanalytical literary analyses of Jølsen's works⁹. Another biography, *La meg bli som leoparden* by Arnhild Skre (2009) was published after the submission of this thesis and unfortunately cannot be taken into account here. Ragnhild Jølsen and her works are often mentioned in literary histories, but there are few analyses of *Rikka Gan*. Apart from Christensen, Janet Garton treats it in *Norwegian Women's Writing 1850-1990* (1993) and Astrid Lorenz compares Jølsen's literary style with *Art Nouveau* in *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (1996).¹⁰

⁸ Antonie Tiberg, *Ragnhild Jølsen i liv og diktning* (Kristiania; Aschehoug, 1909).

⁹ Kari Christensen, *Portrett på mørk treplate: Ragnhild Jølsens liv og forfatterskab* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1989).

¹⁰ Astrid Lorenz, 'Lär mig att ge saknaden röst: Om Ragnhild Jølsen', in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. III*, ed. by Møller Jensen and others, pp. 126-132.

1.1.3 August Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*

Chapter 4 deals with August Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (written in French in 1887-88), which has been analysed many times. Strindberg is, along with Ibsen, probably the most internationally well-known Scandinavian author of the period. *Le Plaidoyer* was written when Strindberg was thirty-eight, living in France with his first wife and children. He was very productive through his lifetime, having published twenty-three novels, sixty-one dramas and many essays and poems.

In the 1880s Strindberg wrote much about gender. Generally he took a rather conservative stance, criticising Ibsen for promoting female emancipation. In 1884 Strindberg's short story collection *Giftas I (Getting Married)* was published and prosecuted, although not for 'indecent' as commonly believed, but for sacrilege. *Le Plaidoyer*, in its turn, would be prosecuted for 'indecent' in Germany. In 1887 and 1888 Strindberg published two of his more well-known dramas, *Fadren (The Father)* and *Fröken Julie (Miss Julie)*, of which particularly the latter is still played on stages all over the world. Together with *Giftas* and *Le Plaidoyer* these two dramas form the core of Strindberg's gender discussion, as I see it.

Apart from analysing the gender discourses in the novel, I read it mainly from a gender-narratological point of view, examining its dominant and self-assertive male narrative voice, Axel, with the help of Susan S. Lanser's narrative theory. I demonstrate how the narrative voice can be read as both a revelation of discourse and as a literary technique; as both form and content. The narrative voice will be read as a representation of contemporary gender discourses, as a built-in denotation.

As far as I am aware I am the first to examine the narrator in *Le Plaidoyer* from a narratological perspective, not to mention one combining narratology and gender.

Such vast amounts have been written about Strindberg and his works that I here limit myself to mentioning a couple of the most prominent modern standard works: Ulf Boëthius's *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan till och med Giftas I* (1969)¹¹ and Ulf Olsson's *Levande död: Studier i Strindbergs prosa* (1996).¹² *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* has traditionally been read in autobiographical terms.¹³ When it comes to analysing the

¹¹ Ulf Boëthius, *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan till och med Giftas I* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1969).

¹² Ulf Olsson, *Levande död: Studier i Strindbergs prosa* (Stockholm: B. Östlings bokförlag Symposion, 1996), pp. 161-174.

¹³ A couple of the classic standard works with a biographical angle are: Martin Lamm's *August Strindberg* (1940-42), published in English in 1971 as a translation by Harry G. Carlson, Gunnar Brandell's *Strindberg – ett författarliv* in four volumes (1983-1989) and Olof Lagercrantz's *August Strindberg* (1979), published in English in 1984 in a translation by Anselm Hollo. For a discussion about *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* and genre, see for example Michael Robinson (ed.), *Strindberg and Genre*

novel from a gender perspective, Maria Bergom-Larsson makes a traditionally sociological but pertinent gender analysis in her contribution to *Författarnas litteraturhistoria* (1978), 'En dåres försvarstal och mansmedvetandets kris'.¹⁴

Margareta Fahlgren adds some psychoanalytical aspects in *Kvinnans ekvation* (1994).¹⁵ In *Making Space* (2004), Anna Westerståhl Stenport analyses the novel in terms of gender and space and Ann-Sofi Lönngren reads it as a homoerotic story in *Att röra en värld* (2007).¹⁶

It is the deep ambiguity in Strindberg's works that make them so interesting from a feminist point of view. The marriages in them are generally unhappy, the female characters often transgressive, resisting the patriarchal values endorsed by the author himself. There is never a final solution to the gender problems in Strindberg's works.

1.1.4 Annie Quiding's *Fru Fanny*

In Chapter 5, I have chosen to analyse Annie Quiding's *Fru Fanny* (1904). This is an interesting, ambiguous example of New Woman literature, where discourses about what a married woman at the time might permit herself struggle against discourses on women's right to self-fulfilment and individual development. Textually, there are also internal contradictions within the novel, where the narrator seems to struggle with the protagonist. As a theoretical base I have used a discussion about New Woman literature in general, as well as contemporary real life facts and discourses around suffragists.

Annie Quiding (married Åkerhielm) was a Swedish popular fiction author, and *Fru Fanny* was a bestseller upon its publication. Quiding worked as a journalist and had quite a high national profile in conservative politics. Today the novel and its author are largely unknown. *Fru Fanny* was Quiding's fourth novel, published when she was thirty-five. She had also published some poetry. The year after *Fru Fanny*, a rather bleak follow-up titled *Fru Fannys son* was published. In total, Quiding published about fifty works, mostly novels.

(Norwich: Norvik Press, 1991) and especially Kerstin Dahlbäck, 'Strindberg's Autobiographical Space' in this volume, pp. 82-94.

¹⁴ Maria Bergom-Larsson, 'En dåres försvarstal och mansmedvetandets kris', in *Författarnas litteraturhistoria*, ed. by Lars Ardelius & Gunnar Rydström (Stockholm: Författarförlaget, 1978), pp. 84-97.

¹⁵ Margareta Fahlgren, *Kvinnans ekvation: Kön, makt och rationalitet i Strindbergs författarskap* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1994).

¹⁶ Anna Westerståhl Stenport, *Making Space: Stockholm, Paris and the Urban Prose of Strindberg and His Contemporaries*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2004).

A handful of articles deal with Quiding-Åkerhielm's political views, such as Claes Ahlund's 'Krig och kultur i konservativ och radikal belysning' (2005)¹⁷, and Sif Bokholm's 'Svenska kanonkvinnor' (2005)¹⁸. Sif Bokholm has also published an historical study, *I otakt med tiden* (2008), including an extensive discussion about Annie Åkerhielm's conservatism and contributions to public debate in the press.¹⁹ In *Fru Fanny*, conservative values and evolutionary theories are used to endorse women's return to the traditional female role. The only analyses I have found on this novel are short passages in Bertil Björkenlid's *Kvinnokrav i manssamhälle* (1982)²⁰ and Bibi Jonsson's article 'Annie Åkerhielm: Nazist och feminist?'.²¹ I believe I am the first scholar to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the novel. My analysis concentrates on the gender discourses in the novel concerning the New Woman: women working professionally, participating in politics and entering public space. The novel was badly received in spite of its commercial success, and the main character judged as irresponsible by reviewers because of her engagement in suffragist politics as opposed to spending all her time and energy on her family.

As a whole, my study is about feminine transgression in Scandinavian Breakthrough literature. First wave feminism rolled in over a more or less resistant society and culture and left its mark in its novels in the form of female characters resisting conventional norms of femininity and overstepping the boundaries into masculine territories. *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny* do not only fight back against the New Woman, but in representing her unwittingly offer her a cultural and imaginary space in literature and modernity. *Haabløse Slægter* simply refuses the gender binaries, presenting gender as disconnected from biological sex. *Rikka Gan* undermines the masculine subversion of women's advance in society. These novels contain gender discourses that desperately

¹⁷ Claes Ahlund, 'Krig och kultur i konservativ och radikal belysning: Annie Åkerhielm och Frida Stéenhoff från sekelskiftet till första världskriget', *Samlaren*, 126 (2005), 97-150.

¹⁸ Sif Bokholm, 'Svenska "kanonkvinnor": Fragment ur försvarsdebatten före första världskriget', *Kvinnor och våld: En mångtydig kulturhistoria*, ed. by Eva Österberg & Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2005) pp. 162-184. See also Barbro Sollbe's 'Annie Åkerhielm: Med kulturkonservatism och bitterhet som drivkraft' in *Presshistorisk årsbok 2009* (Stockholm: Föreningen Pressarkivets vänner, 2009), pp. 7-25.

¹⁹ Sif Bokholm, *I otakt med tiden: Om rösträttsmotstånd, antipacifism och nazism bland svenska kvinnor* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2008).

²⁰ Bertil Björkenlid, *Kvinnokrav i manssamhälle: Rösträttskvinnorna och deras metoder som opinionsbildare och påtryckargrupp i Sverige 1902-21* (Uppsala: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi, 1982).

²¹ Bibi Jonsson's 'Annie Åkerhielm: Nazist och feminist?' in *I ordets smedja: Festskrift till Per Rydén*, ed. by Karl Erik Gustafsson (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2002), pp. 228-240.

struggle, wriggle and squirm for the power to define what women and men really were, what they could be and what their place should be in modernity.

I have chosen the time period because of the major changes with regard to both gender discourses and in the living conditions for women it entailed. The debates about gender that these changes gave rise to have left their mark in literature of the time, both reflecting and constructing new representations of gender. The Modern Breakthrough has attracted much interest from gender scholars because of the important demographic, social, technological and economic changes taking place at the time, bringing with them instability in the conventional gender system, and the emergence of first-wave feminism. Many fascinating studies, generally focused on an individual author, a literary current or the situation in one of the Scandinavian countries have been the result. There have not been many pan-Scandinavian studies giving a broader picture of gender and literature across Denmark, Norway and Sweden, to which area this study contributes, although Elias Bredsdorff's *Den store nordiske krig om seksualmoralen* (1973) gives a comprehensive account of the sexual morality debate of the 1880s and its participants, including many of the works mentioned in this thesis.²²

I have tried to avoid the traditional biographical strategy in my analysis, only concentrating on what can be found in the texts. This is not because I find authors' biographies unimportant: on the contrary, they can give very fruitful analyses in connection with their texts. In this study, however, my objective is to find and analyse some of the discourses in the texts, examining how they construct meanings concerning gender. I view the texts both as receptacles for and producers of the discourses of the time, and wish to reveal some of the mechanisms of the cultural imaginary, that is, what was generally thought and was 'possible' to think and not.

How then, can a novel be read when one wants to study its discourses? In this aspect, Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* has been a great help.²³ Weedon states that '[f]eminist poststructuralist insistence on the autonomy of the meaning of texts as regards authorship and on texts as constructions rather than reflections of meaning' focuses contradictions to socialisation processes, political implications and historical context (p. 162). In poststructuralist theory it is not the study of the author that provides meaning, it is the text itself, although the author's historical

²² Elias Bredsdorff, *Den store nordiske krig om seksualmoralen : En dokumentarisk fremstilling af sædelighedsdebatten i nordisk litteratur i 1880'erne*, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1973).

²³ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 2nd edn (Oxford & Cambridge [Mass.]: Blackwell, 1997).

context will provide the discourses of the text, and a wider detailed historical analysis of the period is often necessary (Weedon, pp. 149-51). Weedon points out that as we cannot know the intimate details of an author's consciousness, the study of the author is not helpful when reaching for the meaning of a text. Besides, a text is always open to plural readings that are the products of specific discursive contexts too. This does not mean that there is no place for a study of authors in feminist poststructuralist study, as long as one recognizes that accounts of authors are themselves discursive constructs and not a key to meaning (Weedon, pp. 155, 158). It is the text itself, how it is constructed and what it says, in combination with its historical context, that we must analyse. The author's life, opinions and letters may of course be interesting, but must be seen as the discursive constructions they are. They provide no 'truths' about the text. Neither does the text itself, of course. Part of the poststructuralist project is to reject all notions of 'truth'. But what can be extracted from a text using this perspective, and with its historical context as a background, are meanings and discourses constructed in the text. The discourses can be both explicitly stated and hidden in textual contradictions, silences and gaps.

1.2 The Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough

1.2.1 Short Historical Background

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Scandinavia remained one of the most backward and least developed areas in Europe from a cultural, political and industrial point of view.²⁴ Mainland Denmark, Norway and Sweden, with their vast spaces, had a population of circa 6.4 million inhabitants in 1850, while Britain had 20.8 million. Cities were few in numbers and small. Copenhagen, Kristiania²⁵ and Stockholm together had about 250.000 inhabitants, while London had 2.6 million. The economy was based on agriculture with very little industry. Eighty-five per cent or more of Scandinavians lived in rural areas and made their living from agriculture. Women's social standing was defined by that of their male relatives, and Scandinavia was patriarchal and male-dominated compared with other Western European countries. Byron J. Nordstrom writes:

²⁴ Sources for this section: Garton, *Norwegian Women's Writing 1850-1990*, Forsås-Scott, *Swedish Women's Writing 1850-1990*, Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500*.

²⁵ Now Oslo.

[W]omen were not considered the equals of men, were rarely protected by legal guarantees, and had no direct influence. They were almost always under the domination of a male, whether father, husband, or legal guardian. Women never reached an age of legal independence. Their inheritance shares were smaller than men's; their rights to own property were restricted. Their incomes, material possessions, and children belonged to men.²⁶

Gradually, however, because of new philosophical ideas and influences, a changing economy and the need of a mobile workforce due to industrialisation, laws giving women certain legal rights hesitantly started appearing from around the mid-nineteenth century. The Scandinavian feminist organisations began in the 1880s, but it would take decades until they had won universal suffrage.

Denmark was the first of the Scandinavian countries to be launched on the path of becoming a modern industrial society in the 1860-1870s. Economic changes gave rise to an expanded middle-class and an industrial working class. Sweden and Norway would follow in the 1880s, with the 1890s seen as the main breakthrough in industrialism. Especially Sweden displayed a string of talented inventors of new technology, while Carl Frederik Tietgen had an important impact on Denmark's introduction to modern banking and capitalism. The industrial development meant demographic changes, with people moving from the countryside to towns. In 1900, the population of the three mainland Scandinavian capital cities together had risen from 250,000 in 1850 to 920,000 inhabitants. Generally, the population of towns and cities doubled between 1870 and 1900. Large-scale emigration took many people abroad, mostly men, but also a large number of single women, many of them mothers.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Norway had been a protectorate under Denmark for over four hundred years. In 1814 Sweden took advantage of Denmark's vulnerability in their conflict with Prussia and threatened the Danish king into ceding Norway to Sweden, seeing it as a compensation for Finland, which it had lost to Russia in 1809. But the union would be uneasy. Janet Garton writes:

The union with Sweden, which was to last until 1905, was [...] very different from the utter dependency of the relationship to Denmark. National feeling had been growing in Norway

²⁶ Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia Since 1500* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 195-96.

since the late eighteenth century, and the years of isolation from Denmark gave it further impetus.²⁷

However, Nordstrom argues that the majority of the Norwegian people accepted the union and probably had no strong feelings about it. The reasons for the dissolution, pushed through by ‘noisy political advocates of change’, were ‘differences in economic orientation, foreign-policy concerns and sentiments, political developments, and the highly charged nationalistic environment that developed throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century’ (Nordstrom, p. 196). While the dissolution of the union gave rise to optimistic nationalism and certain reforms for basic democratic rights in Norway, it reinforced conservatism in Sweden, where the dissolution was viewed with a sense of disappointment. The period 1884-1905 can be seen as a long crisis between the two countries, leading to Norwegian independence.

In 1864 Denmark had lost almost two fifths of its territory and a third of its population (Slesvig-Holstein and a large part of Jutland) to Prussia as spoils of war. Two hundred thousand Danish-speakers came under German rule. This was a hard blow to the Danes, who suffered from a sense of disillusionment for decades afterwards. After a referendum in 1920, the northern part of Slesvig became part of Denmark again, but not the rest of Slesvig/Holstein.

The populations of the Scandinavian countries tripled between 1800 and 1914. The exceptional increase in population had several causes. One was Scandinavia avoiding Europe’s conflicts before 1914²⁸, with the result that young men were not lost from the reproductive-age population. Others were modest advances in medical and health-related practices and agricultural improvements.²⁹

Through mostly peaceful transitions, political democracies had slowly been established in the Scandinavian countries by about 1920, meaning that democratic constitutional monarchies had replaced crown-dominated oligarchies. Nordstrom comments that the Scandinavian countries’ democracy came, more or less, into line with Britain’s (p. 226). In Norway, a Liberal (*Venstre*) Party was founded in 1869, and Norway got its first parliamentary government in 1884. The outcome preceded similar

²⁷ Janet Garton, *Norwegian Women’s Writing 1850-1990* (London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 6.

²⁸ With the exception of the two Slesvig-Holstein wars around mid-century.

²⁹ In most areas the population growth was not because of rising birth-rates; those remained constant or even fell. Instead, women had longer reproductive periods and bore healthier babies. It is the drop in death rates that explains population growth (Nordstrom, p. 229).

developments in Sweden and Denmark by about twenty years and laid the base for a multiparty parliamentary system. On the way to a more representative political system, Denmark had a constitutional assembly elected and a new constitution in 1849, and the working class gained a political voice in 1876 through the founding of a Social Democratic Party. Sweden had its first elections for a new parliament in 1866, but this new *Riksdag*, Nordstrom points out, was in ways more conservative than the former four-estates parliament (Nordstrom, p. 225). The Social Democratic Party was founded in 1889 as the first modern political party.

For Scandinavian women, much changed between the middle of the nineteenth century, when they had practically no legal or civil rights, and 1919, when Swedish women gained the vote as the last in the Nordic countries. The economic, intellectual and political developments of this period brought important changes in the status, educational and career opportunities and legal and political rights of women, but also in their roles and behavioural norms.

1.3 The Legal Situation of Scandinavian Women during the Modern Breakthrough

During the first half of the nineteenth century Scandinavian women lacked legal independence and had practically no legal status in their own right.³⁰ Their finances were handled by their husbands, who were under no obligation to render accounts. Women could not plead their own case in court, had no guardianship over their children, and no right to their children in case of divorce. Expected to stay in their homes, they were invisible in public life and politics, and middle-class women were only respectable as members of a family. Unless widowed, they could not carry on a trade, and no women had access to higher education.³¹

Little by little the *pater familias* lost his legal and financial power over his wife and children during the nineteenth century, due to economic and societal changes. Not only did new scientific and philosophical discourses make religious discourses on the necessity of women's subjugation void, the industrial revolution required a legally

³⁰ However, Swedish single women above the age of 25 were granted legal independence from 1858, providing they made an application to a court of law. In 1863 they were automatically made independent at 25, while the age for men was 21. Danish single women became independent automatically at 25 from 1857 (Berg, Frost & Olsen, p. 234), Norwegian single women in 1863 and married Norwegian women in 1898 (Blom & Sogner, p. 189).

³¹ Source: Garton, *Norwegian Women's Writing*.

independent and mobile workforce of both sexes. Great economic structural changes with industrialisation, urbanisation and emigration led to changed family structures. Marriage rates went down at the same time as birth-rates went up.³² At this time there were considerable numbers of unmarried women in the Scandinavian cities.³³

Copenhagen and Kristiania show slightly lower figures than Stockholm, where forty per cent of the adult women remained unmarried during the period 1870-1920, but also for Norway and Denmark the amount of unmarried women reached an all time high. The low marriage rates were largely due to the fact that there were significantly more women than men all over Scandinavian cities. In Stockholm in 1860 there were 118 women for every 100 men, in Copenhagen it was 109 women for every 100 men and in Kristiania 105. In 1870 there were 125 women for every 100 men in Stockholm, in 1875 116 women for every 100 men in Norwegian Trondheim and 111 women for every 100 men in Kristiania.³⁴ Many women were widowed, and so had to support themselves and maybe their children.

The number of children born outside marriage increased sharply, and many single mothers and unmarried women desperately needed to support themselves and their families. Until the old guilds were dissolved around the mid-1800s, there was little chance for them to do so. Finally, in Norway all single women were given permission to practise a trade in 1842 (Garton, *Norwegian...*, p. 6), in Sweden 1846³⁵, and in Denmark in 1857³⁶, which made it easier for women of the working and artisan classes to support themselves.

Emigration siphoned off surplus population that could not be absorbed by the existing economy, but as mentioned it mainly involved men of the poor rural classes.

³² The emigration to America was mostly by men, and contributed to the large amount of unmarried women in Scandinavia at the time. Between 1800 and 1914 over 3 million Scandinavians found new homes abroad (Nordstrom, p. 228). Norway had the largest emigration in comparison to its population.

³³ In Stockholm, for example, only 27 per cent of the women between 25 and 30 were married in 1870 (Matović, *Stockholmsäktenskap*). While the total population in Sweden increased by 42 per cent between 1870 and 1920, the number of grown unmarried women increased by 58 per cent. A consequence of this was that the number of unmarried mothers quickly increased too (Qvist, *Konsten...*, p. 102).

Traditionally, among the rural classes especially in Norway and Sweden, sexual activity began as soon as the man had proposed and been accepted. It was the engagement ceremony, *trolovning*, that was important. Therefore, the general rule was that the brides were pregnant at the marriage ceremony. With a larger mobility among the population and lesser social control, it became possible for men to break a promise of marriage and leave a pregnant fiancée – something very rare before industrialism (Blom & Sogner, p. 152).

³⁴ Ida Blom & Sølvi Sogner (eds.), *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: Fra vikingatid till 2000-årsskiftet* (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk forlag, 1999), p. 148.

³⁵ Helena Forsås-Scott, *Swedish Women's Writing 1850-1995* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 13.

³⁶ Anne Margrete Berg, Lis Frost, & Anne Olsen, (eds.), *Kvindfolk: En danmarkshistorie fra 1600-1900* vol. 1, 3rd edn. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1986), p. 234.

For the middle classes, it was the changing economy and the industrial expansion, with more competition in the labour market and followed by lower wages, which led to difficulties for many middle-class men in marrying and supporting a family. Middle-class women could no longer rely on marriage as a means of support, and poverty and prostitution were spreading 'upwards' into the middle classes. Middle-class women had traditionally been 'angels in the house',³⁷ either married or, if unmarried, living with their relatives. The shrinking marriage market was even further diminished by the stagnation in official salaries. Around 1850 the debate about how these single middle-class women were going to be able to support themselves started, as they were becoming an economic burden.³⁸ For this they required an education, the right to salaried work and the right to make decisions about their life and income. Legal changes were necessary.

Some scholars argue that the laws giving women greater financial and legal independence did not originate in a new respect for women and their needs.³⁹ The new laws were an answer to a patriarchal society's need not to be burdened with the support of large groups of single middle-class women, and the need to eliminate obstacles and to create opportunities for the development of the quickly growing middle classes. According to this view, feminist organisations and ideas of equality had very little to do with the reforms. This may have been true before the Breakthrough, as Scandinavian women had then not yet organised themselves in national feminist organisations, promoting legal and civil rights for women. Around and after the 1880s the feminist organisations became important lobbying groups for women's emancipation and moral issues. Even before the Breakthrough, there were a few feminist celebrities who most probably had some influence on debate and lawmaking.⁴⁰ I will briefly mention some of the most important improvements in the legal standing of women here.

³⁷ The expression 'the angel in the house' originally comes from Coventry Patmore's long poem (1854-56) with the same title. Virginia Woolf playfully converted the title into a Victorian social type: the oppressed, sequestered middle- or lower middle class housewife in her bourgeois prison (house).

³⁸ Inger-Lise Hjordt -Vetlesen, 'Modernitetens kvinnliga text: Det moderna genombrottet i Norden' in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. II*, ed. by Elisabeth Møller Jensen and others (Höganäs: Förlags AB Viken, 1993), pp. 330-353 (pp. 331-32).

³⁹ Gunnar Qvist: *Fredrika Bremer och kvinnans emancipation: Opinionshistoriska studier* (Göteborg: Akademiförlaget, 1969), pp. 251-54, *Konsten att blifva...*, pp. 207-08, *Kvinnofrågan*, pp. 267-68, 272. Karin Widerberg, *Kvinnor, klasser och lagar 1750-1980* (Stockholm: Liber, 1980), pp. 52, 70.

⁴⁰ See for example Greta Wieselgren about Fredrika Bremer in *Fredrika Bremer och verkligheten: Romanen Herthas tillblivelse* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1978). Janet Garton mentions Camilla Colett in Norway in *Norwegian Women's Writing*, and Blom & Sogner protest against Qvist's view of reforms as mainly men's doing (Blom & Sogner, p. 189, 200).

From 1857 Danish single women became legally independent automatically at twenty-five. Providing they made an application to a court of law, Swedish single women above the age of twenty-five were granted legal independence from 1858. In 1863 they were automatically made independent at twenty-five, while the age for men was twenty-one. Norwegian single women gained automatic independence in 1863, also at the age of twenty-five.

In 1874 married Swedish women got the right to dispose of their own income. (They would, however, need their husband's consent to work professionally until the 1920s.) At the same time it became possible to make a prenuptial agreement, provided it was applied for in court. Sweden was the first European country to implement a prenuptial law. It was rare, however, that a woman obtained a prenuptial agreement as this was seen as an insult by husbands, and a woman would have been viewed with a certain suspicion by her surroundings if she had one.⁴¹ Danish and Norwegian women were allowed to manage their own salaries in 1880, and in 1889 the right of Danish husbands to dispose of money their wives had brought with them in marriage was restricted.

The middle classes sent their daughters to girls' schools if the families were willing to go to the expense of giving them an education above the elementary level. Education for boys after elementary school was free, while girls had to pay.⁴² The education of girls was considered a private matter, and the families incurred substantial costs for their education. This was the case in Denmark until 1903 (Scocozza & Jensen, p. 266), and not until 1927 were the *läroverk* (secondary schools) opened to girls in Sweden on the same terms as for boys.⁴³ In Norway, however, the girls' schools were closed already in 1896, when boys and girls started to get the same education (Blom & Sogner, p. 188).

Swedish women were allowed to sit the *studentexamen* (sixth form college exams) in 1870 and to study for most university degrees in 1873.⁴⁴ However, there were few

⁴¹ Anita Göransson, 'Från släkt till marknad: Ägande, arbete och äktenskap på 1800-talet' in Yvonne Hirdman (ed.) *Kvinnohistoria: Om kvinnors villkor från antiken till våra dagar* (Stockholm: Utbildningsradion, 1992) pp. 104-121 (p. 111).

⁴² Benito Scocozza & Grethe Jensen, *Politikens etbinds Danmarkshistorie*, 3rd edn. (Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 2004) pp. 265-267 (266) and Gunhild Kyle, 'Genrebilder av kvinnor: En studie i sekelskiftets borgerliga familjehierarkier' *Historisk tidskrift*, 1 (1987), 35-58 (p. 39).

⁴³ Kerstin Skog-Östlin, *Att inte nå ända fram: En studie av kvinnors väg till läroverkslärartjänster kring 1900* (Örebro University, Pedagogical Dept: Paper presented at 2nd Nordic pedagogic-historian conference, Stockholm, 25-27 September 2003), Qvist, *Konsten att blifva...*, p. 103.

⁴⁴ Historian Ellen Fries was the first woman to win a doctor's degree in Sweden in 1883, in Denmark Anna Hude would follow in 1893 and in Norway Clara Holst in 1903. (Birgitta Holm, 'Det tredje könet'

women who could use this opportunity at the time, as they were not yet allowed into the *läroverk*, and there were very few private girls' schools that could offer sufficient education to prepare for university.⁴⁵ Besides, an academic degree was not of much use to women in Sweden until in 1923, when they finally received the right to apply for public-service posts (Widerberg, p. 65). In Denmark, women got the right to sit the *studentereksamen* in 1875 (Scocozza & Jensen, p. 266), and the first female student was admitted to Copenhagen University in 1877.⁴⁶ The first female student was not admitted to Kristiania (Oslo) University until 1882, but on the other hand Norwegian women were granted the right to be appointed to government and civil service posts as early as 1898 (Garton, *Norwegian...*, p. 18). Norwegian women were able to take a college degree from 1882 and gain admittance to teachers' college as of 1890 (Blom & Sogner, p. 189).

It was mainly unmarried women who supported themselves outside the home, but their new way of living, where they started taking on tasks which formerly only men had done, undermined the romantic view of the genders as essentially different, each with its own sphere of duties. The role of married women changed too. The new view that marriage should be based on love made the wife's position more uncertain, as divorce was now possible. This, in combination with fewer household tasks for middle-class women, as well as children's increased education outside the home and men's new economic and political possibilities, made many women feel confined in their home without education or money (Busk-Jensen, pp. 33-34, 157).

The many unmarried women together with the expansion of industry, the reduced financial circumstances of family men, and the demand from the women's movements for female independence, created the New Woman towards the end of the century: the self-supporting middle-class woman. The inspiration for the New Woman literary character came primarily from Britain, where New Woman fiction flourished, from the 1890s. Although there were Scandinavian New Woman novels published towards the end of the 1890s, they had their prime time around the *fin de siècle* and the first decade of the twentieth century.

in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. III*, ed. by Elisabeth Møller Jensen and others (Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1996), pp. 276-291 [p. 276]).

⁴⁵ Eva Heggstad, *Fången och fri: 1880-talets svenska kvinnliga författare om hemmet, yrkeslivet och konstnärskapet* (Uppsala: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi vid Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen, 1990), p. 24.

⁴⁶ Lise Busk-Jensen '1870-1920' in *Dansk litteraturs historie 1870-1920*, ed. by Klaus P. Mortensen & May Schack (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2009), pp. 15-74 (p. 34).

Literary representations of the New Woman are interesting from a gender point of view. Traditionally a woman had derived any status she had from her married relationship with a man. Unmarried, independent women with a profession did not fit into the pattern of complementary gender characteristics. How the New Woman could be represented in Scandinavian literature will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 5 about Annie Quiding's novel *Fru Fanny*.

Some Important Legal Gains for Women

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Equal inheritance	1857	1854	1845
End of guild privileges	1857	1842 ⁴⁷	1846
Single women's right to declare legal independence at 25			1858
Single women's automatic independence	1857	1869 ⁴⁸	1864 ⁴⁹
All women's automatic independence	1899	1888	1920
Right to apply for prenuptial agreement in court			1874
Admittance to the teaching profession	1867	1869	1853 ⁵⁰
Right to take university admissions exams	1875	1882	1870
Free secondary schools for girls	1903	1896	1927
Universal suffrage	1915	1913	1919
Equal right to public-service posts	1921	1898	1927

1.3.1 Organised Feminism

The first feminist organisations were mainly started and run by middle-class women, which is why they ideologically represented the middle classes. They were formally politically independent, but in reality closely allied to liberalism.⁵¹

⁴⁷ As early as 1839 unsupported women over forty were granted the right to qualify as master craftsmen. In 1842 widows, spinsters and wives separated from their husbands were allowed to engage in trade.

⁴⁸ At age twenty-one.

⁴⁹ At age twenty-five, then at age twenty-one in 1884.

⁵⁰ Elementary schools. Right to teach in secondary schools in 1859.

⁵¹ Björkenlid, p. 27 and Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and feminism at the fin de siècle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 36.

In Denmark middle-class women founded *Dansk Kvindesamfund* (Danish Women's Association) in 1871. Its principal issues were women's legal rights and right to education. Its low profile in several important issues later led to the founding of the more radical *Kvindelig Fremskridtsforening* (Women's Progress Association) in 1885, which was intended as a complement to *Dansk Kvindesamfund*. However, not radical enough in the suffragist question, *Dansk Kvindesamfund* was discontinued in 1888, and several of its members joined *Kvindelig Fremskridtsforening*, which had its own periodical, *Hvad vi vil*. Internal tensions led to a new women's organization in 1889: *Kvindevalgretsforeningen* (Women's Suffragism Association).⁵²

The year after Denmark, Swedish feminists started organising themselves. In 1873 *Föreningen för gift kvinnas eganderätt* (The Association for Married Women's Property Rights) was founded. This organisation fought against the fact that immediately after marriage the husband disposed of all his wife's financial assets. The arguments used were equality and justice, but those in favour of a new law also pointed to the misery of those families where the husband squandered all resources (Göransson, p. 111). *Fredrika Bremer-förbundet* (The Fredrika Bremer Association) was founded in 1884. The most important issues were women's education and admission to new posts demanding education, the property circumstances between the spouses and questions of child upbringing. The association's journal was initially *Tidskrift för hemmet*, founded in 1859, which was later replaced with *Dagny* in 1886-1913.⁵³ *Föreningen för gift kvinnas eganderätt* was incorporated into *Fredrika Bremer-förbundet* in 1894 (Widerberg, pp. 44, 60). In 1886 the more radical *Göteborgs kvinnoförening* (Gothenburg's Women's Association) was founded: its periodical was *Framåt*.

The Swedish suffragists had been slow in starting their campaign and lacked the radicalism of the other Scandinavian suffragist campaigns (Forsås-Scott, p. 28). The uneasy union with Norway (established in 1814 and dissolved in 1905) reinforced the conservatism of the Swedish establishment, as mentioned. In 1902, however, FKPR, *Föreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt* (Women's Suffragist Association) was founded to fight for women's universal suffrage in Sweden. The FKPR was comprised of local associations, and the national association LKPR, *Landsföreningen för kvinnans*

⁵² Source for this passage: Inger-Lise Hjordt-Vetlesen and Birgit Mortensen, 'Fördämningarna rämnar: Köpenhamn – en storstad på drift' in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. II*, ed. by Elisabeth Møller Jensen and others (Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1993), pp. 354-62.

⁵³ *Tidskrift för hemmet* is unique in that today, 140 years later, it is still published, yet under the name *Hertha*. Since 1884 it has been the journal of the *Fredrika Bremer Association*.

politiska rösträtt (National Assembly for Women's Suffrage), was established the following year.

The working class women's movement in Sweden was first organised through *Kvinnliga Arbetarförbundet* (Women Worker's Association), founded in 1888, and *Stockholms Allmänna Kvinnoklubb* (Stockholm's General Women's Association), founded in 1892. The working class women's movement worked with suffragism primarily within its own political party, while the bourgeois women's organisations tried to be politically independent.

In Sweden, the trade unions had their definite breakthrough during the first half of the 1880s. In the first attempts to organise the workers, women were excluded until the 1890s. The first trade union formed was the Trade Union of Printers in 1886, but already that year two women's trade unions were organised (midwives and glove makers). The Swedish Trade Union Confederation, *Landsorganisationen*, was established in 1898, but the resistance against the female workers and the men's difficulties in accepting them as equals would remain for much longer (Qvist, *Konsten...*, pp. 106, 201, Widerberg, p. 60).

In the 1880s Norwegian women became organised and the struggle for emancipation began in earnest. In 1884, *Norsk kvinnesaksforening* (Norwegian Women's Rights Association) was founded. Its goal was the legal and civil equality of women, but it was cautious in demanding a right to vote, and as a result *Norsk kvinnestemmerettsforening* (Norwegian Women's Suffragist Association) was founded in 1885 by a breakaway group. The movement's periodical was *Nylænde*. In 1896 yet another breakaway group formed *Landskvinnestemmerettsforeningen* (National Women's Suffrage Association), using different tactics to attain suffrage for women.

The 1890s in Norway were a breakthrough for both professional women's organisations and a socialist women's movement with trade unions in several professions dominated by women. In 1901 these merged into *Arbeiderpartiets Kvinneforbund* (the Labour Party's Women's Organisation). In Norway, unions had begun to form in the 1870s, but did not really get going until the late 1880s. The first women's union, The Women's Matchmakers' Union, was founded in 1890.

1.4 Literature and Debates

The literature of the Breakthrough period has been extensively dealt with by scholars, and I will present only a short overview. Gunnar Ahlström's *Det moderna genombrottet i Nordens litteratur* (1973)⁵⁴ would probably still be seen as the standard history work, and the conference proceedings of IASS in 1986, *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, contains much of interest.⁵⁵ *Signums svenska kulturhistoria: Det moderna genombrottet* (2008) is a collection of essays about certain cultural phenomena in Sweden during the Breakthrough, but does not provide a literary history.⁵⁶ *Dansk litteraturs historie* (2009) is a solid account of Danish literary history of the period.⁵⁷ Arne Toftegaard Pedersen's *Det marginaliserede gennembrud: Tre moderne svensksprogede romaner fra 1880ernes Finland* (2002) protests against the picture of Swedish-speaking Finnish Breakthrough literature as marginal.⁵⁸

Pil Dahlerup's *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (1983) gives an excellent overview of literary debuts by Danish women writers and a fascinating portrait of Georg Brandes and the power he exercised in the Scandinavian literary establishment.⁵⁹ Together with *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (1993-1998), Dahlerup gives the much-needed introduction to the women writers of the period that other literary histories leave out.⁶⁰

1.4.1 Periodisation and Limitations

The novels in this study were published between 1880 and 1904. The Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough has traditionally been periodised as ca. 1870-1905. The expression 'the Modern Breakthrough' can be seen as an umbrella term for several

⁵⁴ Gunnar Ahlström, *Det moderna genombrottet i Nordens litteratur* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1973).

⁵⁵ Bertil Nolin & Peter Forsgren, (eds.), *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905: Proceedings of the 16th Study Conference of the International Association for Scandinavian Studies, Held in Gothenburg August 4-8, 1986* (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1988).

⁵⁶ Jacob Christensson (ed.), *Signums svenska kulturhistoria: Det moderna genombrottet* (Stockholm: Signum, 2008).

⁵⁷ Klaus P. Mortensen & May Schack (eds.), *Dansk litteraturs historie 1870-1920*, Vol. III (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2009).

⁵⁸ Arne Toftegaard Pedersen, *Det marginaliserede gennembrud: Tre moderne svensksprogede romaner fra 1880ernes Finland* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 2002).

⁵⁹ Pil Dahlerup, *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1984).

⁶⁰ Elisabeth Møller Jensen and others (eds.), *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. II* (Höganäs: Viken, 1993) and *vol. III* (Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1996).

aesthetical –isms of the time.⁶¹ The period is often defined as beginning with Danish literary critic Georg Brandes's lecture series *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur* (Main Currents of Nineteenth-Century Literature) in November 1871, though sometimes his doctoral thesis about French aesthetics in 1870 is instead taken as a starting point.⁶² With *Hovedstrømninger* Brandes wanted to inform Danes about how advanced certain European intellectuals were in their thinking, about thoughts and philosophies that had not yet surfaced in Denmark or Scandinavia. But it is unlikely that Brandes was as influential in the treatment of literary topics and style as was claimed at the time. He can be seen as a catalyst for what was already happening, rather than presenting a new agenda. Dramatic economic, social and infrastructural changes in the Scandinavian societies made writers act and react, responding to new tendencies in society; tendencies already spotted by pioneers established before the Modern Breakthrough, such as Viktor Rydberg, Camilla Collett, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen (Nolin, 'Efterskrift', p. 345).

In *Litteraturens historia i Sverige*⁶³ Ingemar Algulin and Bernt Olsson define the Breakthrough period in Sweden as 1879-1909, starting with Strindberg's *Röda Rummet* (*The Red Room*) and ending with *Strindberg-fejden* (the Strindberg feud).⁶⁴ Algulin and Olsson admit that the end of the Modern Breakthrough is not as easy to define as the start, but point to both the universal male vote being passed in Sweden in 1909 and the class conflict resulting in the biggest strike ever (*storstrejken*) in 1909 as contributing to the end. Internationally, the years around 1910 produced the most important contributions within Modernist art and literature. In *Norges Litteratur*, Willy Dahl cautiously suggests that a modernisation of literary content and form can be discerned around the mid-1870s.⁶⁵ He seems to conclude that the Breakthrough ended some time in the 1910s, based on the fact that literary motifs changed from representing only the individual *per se* to depicting the individual as representing historical and class

⁶¹ For example critical realism, naturalism, symbolism, 'det unga Sverige', 'åttiotial' and 'nittiotial' (Bertil Nolin, 'Efterskrift' in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905* ed. by Nolin & Forsgren, pp. 345-347 [p. 347]).

⁶² Asbjørn Aarseth, 'Det moderne gjennombrudd: Et periodebegrep og dets ideologiske basis' in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, ed. by Nolin & Forsgren, pp. 123-130 (p. 124).

⁶³ Ingemar Algulin & Bernt Olsson (eds.), *Litteraturens Historia i Sverige* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1987), p. 289.

⁶⁴ *Strindberg-fejden* (the Strindberg-feud) was set off in April 1910 when Strindberg started up the most large-scale literary debate ever in Sweden. In seven months Strindberg wrote fifty-seven articles stating that he did not approve of the conservative values in Swedish society at the time. He attacked cultural and intellectual leaders, and the polemics did not stop until Strindberg fell ill with cancer in 1912. (<http://www.gleerups.se/texterochtankar/online/strindberg.htm>, 04.03.2009).

⁶⁵ Willy Dahl, *Norges Litteratur Vol. I: Tid og tekst 1814-1884* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1981), p. 259.

changes.⁶⁶ *Dansk litteraturs historie* does not explicitly define the Modern Breakthrough, but volume 3 is periodised 1870-1920. The period's exact limits are thus both complicated to define and chronologically extensive and most literary histories are reluctant to define them.

The concept 'Scandinavia' refers to Denmark, Norway and Sweden in this study. Although there are similarities between the Finnish and the mainland Scandinavian literary scene, there are also significant differences (Nolin, 'Efterskrift', p. 345). Turning to Iceland, there was a different development than in mainland Scandinavia during that period, with no literary Breakthrough in the common sense, but rather a period of realistic literary style parallel with neoromanticism (although inspired by Brandes).⁶⁷

For the study of gender aspects in Scandinavian literature the Modern Breakthrough is an interesting time period because of fast societal changes and reforms when gender roles were both transformed and debated, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. As mentioned, the Scandinavian societies went through profound and comprehensive changes with regard to urbanisation, industrialisation and politics. The context included new technology and expanding communications, which brought Scandinavians closer to the European metropolises and new ways of thinking.⁶⁸ This inspired the intellectuals of the time to launch a programme that can be called 'the modern project', debating a wide range of societal matters such as religion, the perception of human nature and gender relationships. If the social development accelerated towards the *fin de siècle*, the acceleration in literature was even stronger, with authors protesting against traditional institutions and authorities, as well as reactionary idyll and hypocrisy, demanding instead liberal values, humanistic belief in the future and social justice.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Willy Dahl, *Norges Litteratur Vol. II: Tid og tekst 1884-1935* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1984), p. 214.

⁶⁷ See Guðni Elísson, 'From Realism to Neoromanticism', in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Daisy Neijmann (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 308-356.

⁶⁸ Bertil Nolin, 'Det moderna genombrottet: En konturteckning', in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, ed. by Nolin & Forsgren, pp. 7-11 (p. 7).

⁶⁹ See Torben Kragh Grodal, 'Det moderne gennembruds fremstillingsformer i sosialhistorisk lys', in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, ed. by Nolin & Forsgren, pp. 43-51 (p. 51) and Irene Iversen, 'Vidlyftiga följdfrågor: Om kjønn, estetikk og modernitet i det norske moderne gjennombrudd', pp. 73-82 (p. 73).

1.4.2 A Change of Style and Topics

New writings and reports from the natural sciences and philosophy were imported from the continent during the second half of the nineteenth century. Scandinavian writers came into contact with the thinking of, for example, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Charles Darwin's *The Origins of Species* (1859) was known and discussed in Scandinavia already in the 1860s.⁷⁰ People started to question the superiority of humankind, the supremacy of the Church and the patriarchal institutions it sanctioned and make demands for greater individual freedom for both men and women.⁷¹ John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) was translated into Danish and Swedish in the same year as it was published in English, and gave rise to intense debates about the place of women in society.⁷² From the beginning, the 'woman question' was not an issue exclusively for feminists, as Ahlström points out: discussions about the position of women were part of the new demand for individual freedom in general (p. 187). In spite of this, the majority of male intellectuals opposed the kind of equality between the genders that John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor advocated.⁷³

The 1870s, and generally the 1880s, were a period of writing with a keen sense of socio-political purpose, when social issues were a main concern for many writers. Georg Brandes had in his lectures described how continental authors wrote in a realist way about contemporary society, raising issues that really mattered in people's daily lives, such as the views of the genders and their relationship to each other, public ethics and the role of impulses in humans. In Scandinavia too, the literary style started changing from romanticism to naturalism and critical realism, the Scandinavian writers inspired by continental authors, many of them from France.⁷⁴

During the 1880s there was an intensive cultural exchange in Scandinavia. Nordic writers often knew each other, and travelled between the Scandinavian cities to meet. Many of them also travelled abroad, to Berlin, Paris or Rome, where they met in what can be called Scandinavian artists' and writers' colonies (Ahlström, p. 156). Women

⁷⁰ Translated into Danish by writer J.P. Jacobsen in 1872.

⁷¹ 'The Church' in a Scandinavian context means the established Lutheran Church with a practically all-persuasive influence.

⁷² Translated into Danish by Georg Brandes.

⁷³ Hedwig Fraunhofer, 'Kön och sexuella normer i *Fordringsägare*' in *Det gäckande könet*, ed. by Cavallin & Westerståhl Stenport, pp. 125-149 (p. 134).

⁷⁴ There are examples of realism before the Breakthrough. In Sweden, for example, there were Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, who switched from romanticism to realism at the end of the 1830s, and Fredrika Bremer in the 1850s.

writers (and artists) took an active part in this cultural market as more and more women had started to write and were getting published. Letter exchanges stimulated and recorded cultural life and literary debates, and writers often contributed to the newspapers and periodicals of their neighbouring countries.

As part of the new interest in the rights of the individual, many writers chose to focus on the position of women. The ‘woman question’ debated in 1880s literature addressed questions of female independence and the relationship between the genders. The so-called chastity debate, *sedlighetsdebatten*, was one of these matters, questioning why it was accepted for men to have premarital relations and use prostitutes while women were not expected to have any sexual experiences at all before marriage. In connection with this issue prostitution was debated, and feminist organisations all over Scandinavia fought against its regulation. The question of forced marriages was treated by several prominent writers, as well as women’s right to a sexual identity.

Another part of the ‘woman question’ was women’s right to education. The steady increase in the number of unmarried women needing to support themselves added to the urgency of the issue. Also, married women of the middle classes needed to be educated, as they were expected to intellectually support their husbands’ work as well as educate their children, and needed to be educated to manage these tasks. Literary works often sparked off a lively public debate on such topics in the press.

In the 1890s a weakening interest in the ‘woman question’ can be discerned.⁷⁵ Writers became more interested in psychology and literary style and form. A movement away from realism and rationality and a hesitation to take up issues coloured many literary works with a sense of disillusionment. The last years of the 1880s and the following decade were a time of disappointment and despair for many once-radical authors. ‘The literary images of a radiant faith in the future and a sharp criticism of society had been read, created a scandal and, by and by, were put aside; concrete political and social progress thus far had been quite modest’, writes Claes Ahlund.⁷⁶ The intellectuals’ situation had changed: their traditional task of organising and

⁷⁵ In Denmark already in the mid-1880’s, according to Busk-Jensen (p. 48). But in Norway Christian Krohg, Hans Jæger and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson were still involved in and writing about the ‘woman question’ in the mid-1880s, Amalie Skram’s *Constance Ring* was published in 1885 and Arne Garborg’s *Mannfolk* in 1887.

⁷⁶ Claes Ahlund, *Medusas huvud: Dekadensens tematik i svensk sekelskiftesprosa* (Uppsala, S. Academiae Ubsaliensis, 1994), p. 208.

thematising the middle classes' processes of formation and self-consciousness was no more.⁷⁷

A wave of neoromanticism and nationalism in works especially by male writers, shifts the emphasis back to depicting woman as a sexual being instead of the brave, rational and tough heroine of the 1880s literature, writes Garton, and points out that the works by women from the 1890s do not show the same change of mood from the 1880s. 'Women were not tired of the ideas of equality, and did not feel that the subject of social injustice and oppression had been exhausted' (*Norwegian...*, p. 22). Decadence, with its sense of pessimism set in during the 1890s, and the male colleagues who had formerly supported the 'woman question' now became more defensive towards women; sometimes even negative (Hennel & Sjöblad, pp. 506-07.).⁷⁸ It seems that having supported their female colleagues to achieve some independence, they felt an increasing competition from them, resulting in a backlash.

Finally, what had been new and provocative during the 1880s and 1890s was becoming common knowledge around the turn of the century as democratisation progressed. It was no longer as shocking that women demanded more rights and independence, and a new type of woman, the educated, self-supporting New Woman became a popular motif in novels during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷⁹

Ahlström sees literature from the Modern Breakthrough as mirroring the struggle between the old and the new, as a proof of the writers' and artists' conflicts with official discourses at the time (p. 64), and claims that there was a certain animosity between the ambitions of the authors and the surrounding society. Writers often experienced their activities being seen as objectionable and offensive. Collisions with public opinion and the conservative establishment were common, and there were instances of personal victimization of authors (p. 257). Radical writers were punished through the denial of an income as civil servants and authors were sometimes prosecuted for their works, examples being Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* and Strindberg's *Plaidoyer d'un fou*.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Per Stounbjerg, 'Mødet med moderniteten: Oplevelseformer og æstetisk produktivitet hos Johannes Jørgensen og Johannes V. Jensen' in *Litteratur, Æstetik, Sprog. Skriftserie fra Nordisk Institut* (Aarhus; Aarhus Universitet, No. 14, 1191:2), pp. 7-46 (p. 52).

⁷⁸ Ingeborg Nordin Hennel and Christina Sjöblad, 'Lyckligare ungdom har aldrig funnits: Det moderna genombrottet i Sverige' in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. II*, ed. by Møller Jensen and others, pp. 495-507 (pp. 506f).

⁷⁹ Ebba Witt-Brattström, 'Det stora könskriget: Feminismdebatt i Europa' in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. III*, ed. by Elisabeth Møller Jensen and others (Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1996), pp. 55-59 (p. 56).

⁸⁰ Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* was prosecuted and confiscated for 'indecenty' at its publication in 1880. The first German translation of Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (*Beichte eines Thoren*) was

Still, a well known Scandinavian writer at the time had a cultural, and often even a political, impact. S/he was a celebrity, probably read by many amongst the middle classes. Some of the discourses developed in literary work at the time may have been marginal or before their time, but they created public debate and put certain issues on the societal agenda, as when Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's play *En hanske* (1883; *A Gauntlet*) triggered the chastity debate, or the debate following Christian Krohg's novel *Albertine* (1886) changed the legislation on prostitution in Norway. Willy Dahl writes that Breakthrough literature was produced by rather few people, and praised by a thin layer of critics in the liberal and radical press and periodicals, but it was read by many (Dahl, *Vol. I*, p. 259).

Important developments in the media made it possible to debate publicly more effectively than before: the emergence of the big newspapers and the popular press, the growing importance of the mass market and the major publishing houses all contributed to this (Nolin, 'Det moderna...', p. 7). The theatre was now, before the arrival of cinema, a key factor, and the Breakthrough writers frequently made use of this medium, which had a considerable impact on the middle classes. It was now possible to reach a larger audience than had previously been possible. Several important playwrights discussed gender in their works, such as the Swedes Ann Charlotte Leffler, Alfhild Agrell and August Strindberg. The true giant among playwrights, however, was the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen, and he had quite a few things to say about gender.

1.4.3. Ibsen's Influential Dramas

'Ibsen is the most important playwright writing after Shakespeare', Toril Moi states in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (2006), continuing that Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is the founder of modern theatre.⁸¹ He is also of special relevance to anyone interested in Breakthrough gender discourses. Moi claims out that Ibsen's greatest modernist achievement is his capacity to destroy idealist notions of femininity and to 'avoid falling into the opposite trap of demonizing women and sex' (*Henrik Ibsen...*, p. 4). Ibsen represented women and femininity in a way that went against the grain of dominating bourgeois discourses, causing scandal and littering the European press with

prosecuted for the same reason in Germany in 1893. One of the most well known Swedish cases is when Strindberg was sued for his short story collection *Giftas I* in 1884. Gustaf Fröding was prosecuted for his poem 'En morgondröm' in *Stänk och flikar* (1896). Norwegian works to be prosecuted and banned were Hans Jæger's novel *Fra Kristiania-Bohèmen* (1885) and Christian Krohg's novel *Albertine* (1886).

⁸¹ Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 17.

both hostile and appreciative reviews. He was very influential on his contemporary Scandinavian playwrights.

The most well-known of Ibsen's strong and complex female protagonists is probably Nora in *Ett dukkehjem* (1879; *A Doll's House*), who leaves her husband and three children to try and become 'first and foremost a human being'. The play gives a scathing critique of the traditional bourgeois marriage of the time and indicates that there are more important things in life than being a wife and mother. The sober and clear-sighted fru Alving in *Gengangere* (1881; *Ghosts*) has decided not to play along with the double standards of male sexuality any longer after the disastrous results of syphilis contamination in her own family. Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* (1890) is a magnificent villainess, but one who displays a strong integrity, preferring to take her own life rather than surrender to unauthorised power. Both Nora in *Ett dukkehjem* and fru Alving in *Gengangere* could be seen as early role models for transgressive females.

Due to my decision to use novels for the analyses in this thesis, I have not used any of Ibsen's dramas. They hover in the background, however, through the influence they had on other writers. Strindberg, for example, explicitly spoke back against Ibsen in his short story *Ett dockhem* (A doll's house) in his *Giftas I* (1884) collection, and spent several pages of his *Giftas* foreword criticising the play. In some of his works he more subtly spoke back against Ibsen, and in the novel *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*, to be analysed in Chapter 4, he mentions Ibsen as 'le célèbre bas-bleu male Norvégien' (the famous male Norwegian bluestocking) twice, and even weaves Ibsen's *Vildanden* into the story (pp. 455, 488).

Ibsen put forward ideas about gender that his contemporaries found shocking. Nolin notes that the Breakthrough writers' agenda and ideas were a threat to several of the cornerstones of the bourgeois society, such as the Church, religion and an existential outlook on life. Darwinism and positivism, which denied spirituality, threatened the Church and religion, and the new ideas about equality for women were seen as threatening towards the family institution, while private property was thought to be threatened by the expanding socialism (Nolin, 'Det moderna...', p. 8).

Both those who felt threatened and those who attacked mostly belonged to the bourgeoisie. The Breakthrough gender discourses examined here mainly belonged to the middle-class stratum of the Scandinavian societies.

1.5 The Scandinavian Middle Classes

The Modern Breakthrough with its different values, discourses, debates and literature was mainly a concern of the urban, educated middle classes. This is why I have chosen to concentrate on a discussion about some of the discourses and ways of life of these social classes. It was the well-educated upper middle and governing classes who wrote the literature, read it and took part in public Breakthrough debate, as writers, journalists, critics and publishers.⁸²

The middle classes are difficult to define, as pointed out by Frykman and Löfgren.⁸³ In order to simplify I need to generalise about bourgeois Scandinavian society, as I am forced to try to explain profound societal connections in a limited space. I use the terms ‘middle class’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ interchangeably, well aware that both terms cover both different subclasses within this social stratum and differences in behavioural codes between different geographic areas and times and groups. Therefore, the discourses described in this study will necessarily be generalisations too.

It is for several reasons I have chosen to study the middle classes. One is that the literary establishment at the time – writers, journalists, publishers and most of the readers – all belonged to the middle classes.⁸⁴ Another reason is that although the middle classes were just a small percentage of the total population, as a culturally dominant group they defined the concepts of ‘proper’ femininity and masculinity. Frykman and Löfgren describe the middle class as ‘having rather taken over the role of the dominant culture’ by the end of the nineteenth century (p. 8):⁸⁵

⁸² See for example the following essays in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. II*, ed. by Jensen and others: Inger-Lise Hjordt Vetlesen and Birgit Mortensen, ‘Fördämningarna rämnar: Köpenhamn: en storstad på drift’, pp. 354-361 (p. 355) and ‘Kvinnlig randexistens: Storstad och text’, pp. 391-418 (p. 406), Irene Iversen, ‘När driften hotar: En norsk kvinnlig offentlighet växer fram’, pp. 419-455 (pp. 423, 425, 433, 435) and Ingeborg Nordin Hennel and Christina Sjöblad, ‘Lyckligare ungdom har aldrig funnits: Det moderna genombrottet i Sverige’, pp. 495-507 (p. 504). See also Berg, Frost & Olsen (eds.), *Kvindfolk: En danmarkshistorie fra 1600-1900* vol. 1, p. 214.

⁸³ Jonas Frykman & Orvar Löfgren, *Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life*, foreword by John Gillis, transl. by Alan Crozier (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 7-8.

⁸⁴ Ian Watt points out that apart from the middle classes there were ‘two large and important groups of relatively poor people who probably did have time and opportunity to read – apprentices and household servants, especially the latter’ (in Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1995, p. 47). I am not sure that the apprentices and household servants had as much leisure and time to read in Scandinavia as in Britain, though.

⁸⁵ For a closer reading on how the middle classes swelled and grew during this period, see for example Sten Carlsson, *Den sociala omgrupperingen i Sverige efter 1866* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966). See also Ahlström, pp. 43-44.

[T]his change was the result of a social and cultural merger with the thin social layer that the old elite represented, but it also came from shifts in the political and economic structure of society. The middle class in actual holds an upper-class position in Swedish society. It is scarcely possible to talk of remnants of a traditional upper class in Sweden, as it is, for example, in Britain.⁸⁶

(Frykman & Löfgren, p. 8)

The middle classes set the moral standards, and their discourses about desirable gender behaviour became the dominant ones. That the situation was the same in Britain at this time is confirmed by Watt: ‘The movement for social reform [...] tended to be mainly supported by the middle class, who fortified their outlook as a group with the assumption that their social superiors were their moral inferiors’ (p. 166). Stefanie von Schnurbein comments that the bourgeois family model has dominated discussions about men, women and sexuality all through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has therefore shaped theoretical, literary and popular discourses about gender in general, and especially about masculinity.⁸⁷ Discourses on sexuality are, of course, some of the most interesting ones to examine when studying gender. Foucault, who has specifically studied discourses on sexuality in *The History of Sexuality 1-3*, comments that the most rigorous techniques for the control of sexuality were formed and applied first and most intensely in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes.⁸⁸ ‘Sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois’ he writes (*Sexuality 1*, p. 127).

Another reason why the middle class is interesting for my study of discourses about gender is the important and clean-cut role women had in this social stratum at the time – important because the middle classes were profiling themselves strongly against both the aristocracy and the working classes, taking a political, cultural and normative lead (Frykman & Löfgren, pp. 6, 27). The family was seen as extremely important in bourgeois society in the struggle against societal changes – it was the middle-class family that was the recruitment base for new men of power. In the family it was the mother/wife who was considered to be its ‘heart’ and centre, she was the manager of the home and its social profile, and she had almost complete responsibility for raising

⁸⁶ In Norway there cannot be said to have existed an upper class at all (Ahlström, p. 240, Blom & Sogner, pp. 212, 241).

⁸⁷ Stefanie von Schnurbein, ‘Maskulinitetens kris och *En dåres försvarstal*’ in *Det gäckande könet*, ed. by Cavallin & Stenport, 39- 67 (p. 42).

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will To Knowledge*, transl. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 120.

the children and for their education. An important pawn in society's game of power, the mother/wife was seen as responsible for both her husband's and the children's moral guidance and in the broader sense the country's future was seen as dependent on the quality of her influence in the home.⁸⁹ At the same time, women as a group were excluded from important political institutions because of their gender. Much has been written about the legal standing and living conditions of women during the 1800s⁹⁰, as there has been, and still is, a great interest in gender and women's position in the Modern Breakthrough.

1.6 Existing Gender Research about the Breakthrough

Some important works about female Breakthrough writers are Jette Lundbo Levy's *Dobbeltblikket* (1980) about ideology and aesthetics in Victoria Benedictsson's texts, Pil Dahlerup's *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (1983) about Danish women writers' debuts during the period and critic Georg Brandes, Eva Heggstad's *Fången och fri* (1990) about the living and working conditions for female artists and Birgitta Ney's *Bortom berättelserna* about author Stella Kleve – Mathilda Malling (1993)⁹¹. Karin Johannisson's *Den mörka kontinenten* deals with female sickness and so called hysteria of the period (1994)⁹² and in *Stjärnor utan stjärnbilder* (1997) Anna Williams studies the entrance of female writers into the literary establishment of the time⁹³.

⁸⁹ See for example Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, foreword by Francine du Plessix Gray (London, Souvenir Press, 1981), Frykman & Löfgren's, *Culture Builders* and Gunhild Kyle, 'Genrebilder av kvinnor: En studie i sekelskiftets borgerliga familjehierarkier' *Historisk tidskrift*, 1 (1987), 35-58.

⁹⁰ See for example Ulf Boëthius' *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan till och med Giftas I* (1969), Sten Carlsson's *Den sociala omgrupperingen i Sverige efter 1866* (1966), Margareta R. Matović's *Stockholmsäktenskap: Familjebildning och partnerval i Stockholm 1850-1890* (1984), Karin Widerberg's *Kvinnor, klasser och lagar 1750-1980* (1980), Bertil Björkenlid's *Kvinnokrav i manssamhälle: Rösträttskvinnorna och deras metoder som opinionsbildare och påtryckargrupp i Sverige 1902-21* (1982), and Gunnar Qvist's three studies *Kvinnofrågan i Sverige 1809-1846: Studier rörande kvinnans näringsfrihet inom de borgerliga yrkena* (1960), *Fredrika Bremer och kvinnans emancipation: Opinionshistoriska studier* (1969) and *Konsten att blifva en god flicka: Kvinnohistoriska uppsatser* (1978).

⁹¹ Birgitta Ney, *Bortom berättelserna: Stella Kleve – Mathilda Malling* (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposion Graduale, 1993).

⁹² Karin Johannisson, *Den mörka kontinenten: Kvinnan, medicinen och fin-de-siècle* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1994).

⁹³ Anna Williams, *Stjärnor utan stjärnbilder: Kvinnor och kanon i litteraturhistoriska översiktsverk under 1900-talet* (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 1997).

Some more recent studies are Anna Nordenstam's *Begynnelse*, dealing with pioneering women literary critics (2001)⁹⁴ and Claudia Lindén's study of Ellen Key's authorship and politics in *Om kärlek* (2002)⁹⁵. In *Litterære vaganter* (2003), Tone Selboe makes a study of the Scandinavian *flâneuse*.⁹⁶ Christina Florin discusses the suffragist movement in *Kvinnor får röst* (2006)⁹⁷ and Ann-Sofie Lönngren's *Att röra en värld* (2007) examines homosociality between men in six works by August Strindberg⁹⁸.

Although historical and conceptual changes relating to gender are discussed in these works, the present study is the first to focus on the transgression of femininity in a pan-Scandinavian context, its textual strategies and how the characters were perceived at the time.

1.7 Michel Foucault's Discourse Theory

How does one find out what gender transgressions consist of? Which are those rules of femininity that are being assaulted by some female characters? I have used Michel Foucault's discourse theory to examine the prevailing discourses about gender in Breakthrough Scandinavia. My hypothesis has been that it is when a literary character breaks the 'gender rules' and swerves away from the broad path of gender normativity that she is seen as monstrous and evil, that is, when she opposes dominating discourses of proper feminine behaviour and transgresses the feminine script. My strategy has been to examine in which ways the transgressive female characters refuse to conform to gender normativity, and how this is represented in textual terms.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) combined philosophy and history in a new way that resulted in an astonishing critique of modernity and things we take for granted. His studies show the historically random and haphazard nature of practices in modern culture, such as punishing and treating those seen as mad, locking up criminals in

⁹⁴ Anna Nordenstam, *Begynnelse: Litteraturforskningens pionjärkvinnor 1850-1930* (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2001).

⁹⁵ Claudia Lindén, *Om kärlek: litteratur, sexualitet och politik hos Ellen Key* (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2002).

⁹⁶ Tone Selboe, *Litterære vaganter: Byens betydning hos seks kvinnelige forfattere* (Oslo: Pax, 2003).

⁹⁷ Christina Florin, *Kvinnor får röst: Kön, känslor och politisk kultur i kvinnornas rösträttsrörelse* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2006).

⁹⁸ Ann-Sofie Lönngren, *Att röra en värld: En queerteoretisk analys av erotiska trianglar i sex verk av August Strindberg* (Lund: Ellerströms, 2007).

prison to try and reform them, or our views on sexuality.⁹⁹ The effect of Foucault's studies is estrangement; as readers we suddenly see aspects of our culture we have previously taken for granted as strange and contingent. History, he claims, 'serves to show us how that-which-is has not always been; i.e., that the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances'.¹⁰⁰

Johanna Oksala summarizes the Foucauldian view of the intellectual's role as that of exposing new ways of thinking: 'to make people see things around them in a different light, to disturb their mental habits and to invite them to demand and instigate change'.¹⁰¹ Foucault does not consider the intellectual to be the moral conscience of society, nor should s/he pass political judgements, but s/he should make alternative ways of thinking possible.

A recurring theme in Foucault's works is that historical circumstances play an important role in determining who we are, what we think and how we look upon ourselves. Tracing the history of our current practices is an efficient way to question their inevitability – 'that-which-is has not always been' – of states such as gender. The objects of Foucault's historicising (and practically all his books are historical studies) are always seemingly timeless and inevitable facts. His concepts of *discourse* and *power* are useful in the study of gender, as they might be generally applied to any field of 'knowledge'. Although he himself never chose to study the concept of gender, he historicised sexuality. In my opinion, it is an interesting thought experiment to exchange the word 'sexuality' for the word 'gender' in this passage from *The History of Sexuality I* below (my addition in brackets):

Sexuality [gender] must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a

⁹⁹ See Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961), transl. by Jonathan Murphy & Jean Khalifa (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), transl. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979) and *The History of Sexuality I*: (1976), 2 and 3 (both 1984).

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Critical Theory/Intellectual History', transl. Jeremy Harding, in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Lawrence Kritzman (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 17-47 (36-37).

¹⁰¹ Johanna Oksala, *How To Read Foucault* (London: Granta Books, 2007), p. 8.

few major strategies of knowledge and power.

(Foucault, *Sexuality I...*, pp. 105-106)

I argue that what Foucault says about sexuality here can also be applied to the concept of 'gender'. Gender is in this study seen as an historical construct, as grids of discursive power relations, as fields of knowledge, the kneading of bodies into certain shapes and the arrangement of brain content; all according to gender expectations.

In the genealogical phase of his work, from the 1970's, Foucault concentrates on the emergence of concepts and forms of knowledge through the practices of social and cultural institutions. His genealogical method does not look for the origin of values and ideas, but seeks to establish their emergence as functions of institutional power.¹⁰²

In Foucault's view, no 'real' or essential structure underpins historical events or materials, but neither does he accept a view where 'reality' is constructed out of human consciousness. There is no 'truth' and no linear development in the sense of the world or humanity developing into higher stages, no progressivist or continuist view of science. In *The History of Sexuality I* Foucault points out that the meaning of that study is not to discover anything about sex itself, for no such truth can be found about anything. The only thing one can do is:

[T]o account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all "discursive fact", the way in which sex is "put into discourse".

(Foucault, *Sexuality I*, p. 11)

Foucault sees theories and sciences as groups of views or ideas which *produce* the objects they claim to describe. The discourses will produce knowledge and power and shape subjects according to dominant values. My aim in this study is not to present a 'truth' about how gender was constructed in Scandinavian Breakthrough society or represented in its literature, but to present some of the dominant *discourses* on gender, and explore the vital role they played in the representation of gender in literature at the

¹⁰² The 'archaeological' method he had used earlier had been more concentrated on language and the function of statements in discursive formations. *Discipline and Punish* is the book where he uses genealogy in the most fully developed way.

time. At the same time, literature formed part of the ‘field of knowledge’ producing discourses about gender.

Today, it is difficult to know what a discourse really meant a hundred or even thirty years ago. I argue that there is no such thing as objective research or a neutral or objective scholar or scientist. As literary scholars, we are as ‘constructed’ and contingent as the texts we study. Our own era and its values, definitions and discourses speak through us as the Breakthrough era spoke through its writers. Ann-Sofie Lönnngren muses that the scholar may not be part of the discourse analysed, but s/he is always part of *some* discourse. This might make it difficult for the scholar to claim the right of interpretation: why would her/his discourse be more valid than the one studied? However, it is important to remember (as Foucault points out) that the role of the discourse analyst is not to find a ‘truth’ in the discourse – it is the discourse itself that is being studied (Lönnngren, p. 30).

1.7.1 Discourses

Foucault frequently uses the term *discourse* in *The History of Sexuality*. He thinks of discourses as bodies of knowledge. For him, the concept of discourse does not, as in some other discourse theory, refer to language or social interaction, but to areas of social knowledge. With Foucault’s discourse theory, one looks for what can be said, and what cannot. This means that in a given historical period one can talk (write/think) about, for example, sexuality or gender (or both, as they are intimately connected) only in certain specific ways, and not others. The discourse is then whatever constrains or enables talking/writing/thinking within those historical limits. Discourses include all the ways by which human values are communicated, naturalised and reproduced, such as language, images, unspoken beliefs and prejudices, laws and scientific concepts. The discourses (knowledges) are collected into disciplines such as the sciences. For example, medicine was much used during the Modern Breakthrough to legitimise traditional gender roles and the gender power balance, but science was also used in support of reforms for women. Foucault points out that

discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes

it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

(Foucault, *Sexuality I*, p. 101)

Discourse is thus a constant struggle in the arena of power, and discourse can be used as a means of resistance by groups or individuals in a subjugated position. As Foucault also wrote: ‘Where there is power, there is resistance’ (*Sexuality I*, p. 95). What we must ask ourselves is: how are the different kinds of discourse (for example on gender) made possible, and how were they used to support power relations (*Sexuality I*, p. 97)?

Particular experiences, such as physical illness, mental illness, sexuality and crime become the objects of particular types of discourses, such as medicine, psychiatry, sexology and criminology. The concept of discourse can be seen as a structuring principle of society. It structures societal institutions and modes of thought as well as individual subjectivity. Discourses represent political interests and are constantly struggling for power and status. The site of the power struggle is the individual’s subjectivity. According to Foucault, discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which are built into such knowledges and the relations between them. Where there is discourse there will be resistance, and resistance to the dominant within an individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge.

To use discourse for analysis in the Foucauldian way is to study how human subjects are formed, how institutions attempt to normalise persons on the margins of social life and how historical conditions of knowledge change over time. Foucault sees subjects as fluid and shaped by discourses, which constantly flow through and shape the individual. Some of these discourses are about gender, and it is through these that gender identity is constructed in the subject.

1.7.2 The Subject

Foucault rejected any notion of human nature or the conception of subjects as self-identical wholes. Instead he emphasised the historic and cultural determining factors of identity and experience. ‘The [Foucauldian] subject’, writes Oksala, ‘is not an autonomous and transparent source of knowledge, but is constructed in networks of social practices which always incorporate power relations and exclusions’ (p. 15). Foucault’s work exposes how subjects are constructed into different societal roles and positions through history, constructions that are often linked to political struggles.

Gender is but one example of such an historically determined construction, and although Foucault did not, as mentioned, specifically study gender as such, *The History of Sexuality* is full of interesting reflections on the historical construction of subjects such as the homosexual or the hysterical woman. Discourses thus produce social reality and subjects in ways that are complex and intertwined, creating both objects of knowledge (for example feminine hysterisation) and subjects (hysterical women) who behave according to that knowledge.

Foucauldian theory decentres the rational, self-present subject of humanism, and sees consciousness and subjectivity as produced in language and as sites of struggle and potential change. ‘Subjectivity is the site of consensual regulation of individuals, through the identification by the individual with particular positions within discourses’ writes Weedon, who also points out that the discursive constitution of subjectivity ‘is a constantly repeated process, which begins at birth and is repeated continually through life’ (pp. 108-09).

1.7.3 Power

The concept of power is intimately connected with the concept of discourse. Foucault defines power not as a thing or something executed by one or several persons, but a grid of relationships and of interactions among individuals. As William B. Turner comments: ‘very few relationships are entirely devoid of power differentials’.¹⁰³ Foucault sees power as a discursive *relation*, built consistently into the practices of everyday life instead of something being imposed on and exercised from above.

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect... [---] [P]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

(Foucault, *Sexuality I...*, pp. 92-93)

¹⁰³ William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p. 48.

Although there are always aims and objectives with power, we must not look for someone who has invented them. Power neither belongs to individuals nor to institutions. It is a matrix or network of intermingling knowledges and discourses which penetrates every subject. One is always ‘inside’ power, there is no escaping it. Power can be located outside conscious or intentional decision. Foucault never asks ‘Who is in power?’. He asks how power installs itself and produces real material effects. Power works from inside the subject.

Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace point out that while it is easy to be sceptical of science, it is difficult to pose, like Foucault does, the question of *why* sciences are held in such high esteem.¹⁰⁴ He does this by challenging not the status of the truths generated by sciences, but the *conditions* necessary for their production. The sciences Foucault examines imply immediate and solid connections to social relations: economics, medicine and the ‘human sciences’. Compared with mathematics or physics, the conditions required for the production of truth within these knowledges are much less stable and far more difficult to control. Yet, these knowledges are ‘most quick to pronounce truths about human nature, human potential, human endeavour, and the future of the human condition in general’.

Sciences such as medicine took on a very important role in the definition of gender during the Modern Breakthrough, defining and marginalising groups like women, lesbians and homosexuals. Science attempted to define ‘normal’ human behaviour, and so to influence the construction of subject and identity. Thus, power produces reality. Foucault has studied how power in modern times works with bodies, through the surveillance, discipline and internal training in institutions such as penitentiaries, schools, hospitals, military centres, psychiatric institutions, administrative apparatuses, bureaucratic agencies and police forces, where the subject of surveillance learns to discipline her- or himself.

1.7.4 Foucault and the Study of Gender

As mentioned, Foucault never studied or took into account the concept of gender as such, with all the power relations it involves. Especially in the case of sexuality, it seems striking that he could fail to include gender in his analysis, as it is manifestly

¹⁰⁴ Alec McHoul & Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 58.

significant in this context. Foucault's failure to deal with gender (or class) as important factors in the context of power has been criticised, and some feminist scholars writing after the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s have made clear the importance of gender for any genealogical understanding of order.¹⁰⁵ Feminist scholars would translate Foucault's useful approach to sexuality into an analysis of gender.

The disciplinary power that Foucault describes depends on distinct institutions that can be identified. Gender discipline, by contrast, pervades our culture at the level of daily interactions among individuals in practically every institution. It naturalises itself as biological rather than cultural difference and so gives an impression of determinism, difficult to resist. Foucault's argument implies that we adapt to gender and sexuality roles and become gendered and sexed subjects long before we develop any capacity for critical reflection on or resistance to those roles.

One of the many feminists putting Foucault's theories to use in the gender area is Judith Butler, who has taken the socialisation process of gender behaviour as her starting point for a theory which expresses gender as a life-long succession of more or less unconscious 'performances'.

1.8 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Even matters that we believe do not have a history are radically scrutinised by Foucault. One of those is the body, which is generally wrongly believed to be purely physical and uninfluenced by history. Our bodies are shaped by norms of for example gender, health and beauty. They are moulded by exercise, diet and medical interventions. They have a history. 'Genealogies are "histories of the body"', writes Oksala, 'they typically question all purely biological explanations of such complex areas of human behaviour as sexuality' (p. 52).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault historicises not only sexuality but also sex and the body. This idea has profoundly influenced feminist theory. The American philosopher Judith Butler develops Foucault's ideas into a theory of radical gender

¹⁰⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Blanch Wiesen Cook and Lilian Faderman had already begun writing accounts of the history of sexuality that resembled Foucault's, linking questions of sexuality to questions of gender and power. Although Foucault's analysis of power failed to deal with women's consistently lesser access to power, some feminist theorists realised they could use Foucault's ideas to sharpen their critiques of Western epistemologies and schemes of representation (Turner, pp. 86-87).

subversion in her classic *Gender Trouble* (1990).¹⁰⁶ She resists the idea that the biological body has anything *per se* to do with gender, and claims gender to be constructed through repetitious behaviour and performance. Butler appropriates Foucault's theories for the study of gender:

A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic identity [...]; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses [...].

(Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xxxi)

While gender-specific behaviour is generally believed to be the inevitable and natural consequence of a person's sex, Butler argues that it is a *performance* without any natural or foundational cause: '[W]hat we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (*Gender Trouble*, p. xv). The 'set of acts' that constitute gender behaviour is repeated again and again to style the body, and over time it congeals 'to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (*Gender Trouble*, p. 45). According to Butler, gender and sexual identity have always been a matter of performance, acquiescence to social norms and to mystifications about sexuality and gender derived from popular culture and the sciences such as philosophy, religion, psychology and medicine. *Performativity*, for example drag, upsets these norms, sometimes appropriating them in a transformed manner, sometimes parodying them in a way that makes them suddenly 'visible' and open to criticism. Thus, feminine behaviour is not 'the result of a true and foundational female sex, but the reverse is true: the idea of a true and foundational female sex is the result of feminine behaviour' (Oksala, p. 76). Butler sees the idea of a stable gender core as a fiction, upheld by a constant, repetitive performance. She states that gender is 'a kind of becoming or activity' which should not 'be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort' (*Gender Trouble*, p. 152).

Individuals have no identity except those identities available in culture. In order to speak as a coherent subject, the individual has to understand and present her/himself as

¹⁰⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 2006).

gendered. But as anatomically sexed bodies do not provide a permanent foundation for gender, this self-presentation and self-understanding must be constantly repeated. No origin of gendered identity exists.

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character.

(Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 192)

It is the daily repetition of genderised routines, socialisation and practices that result in the body's signification of gender. In *Bodies That Matter* Butler writes that this is not an individual choice, as no individual inhabits society without having already become gendered.¹⁰⁷ This gendering is not an act or expression, a wilful appropriation or, it must be underlined, the taking on of a mask. '[I]t is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition' ('Bodies...', p. 7).

As a result of Butler's view on gender, femininity does not necessarily belong to women; as little as masculinity belongs to men. She has much to say about gender binaries, which will be discussed in more in detail in Chapter 2. In short, she sees the construction of gender binaries and the split into two genders as done in the interests of heterosexuality and its regulation of the reproductive domain. Pointing to bisexual, gay, lesbian *and* heterosexual contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, desire or sexuality, she claims that anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance do not reflect one another and that two genders do not seem enough to cover and categorise existing gender identities.

I use Butler's theory explicitly in my analysis of Bang's *Haabløse Slægter*, where the notions of gender binarism and heteronormative sexuality are challenged. Exposing the constructedness of gender, Butler's theory helps in the understanding of the novel's deconstruction of these concepts. However, I also find Butler's theory helpful in my overall thinking of gender, how it is constructed and unconsciously learned. It may therefore have influenced my reasoning in the other chapters too.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.

1.9 Chris Weedon: A Strategy of Reading

Weedon bases many of her thoughts and ideas on Foucault's discourse theory and on poststructuralist theory. I have earlier in this chapter described her view on the significance of concentrating on the text itself and not relying on biographical facts about the author when analysing a work. To this Weedon adds aspects that are important from a feminist point of view, calling her method of reading a 'feminist poststructural approach', which she defines as 'a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change' (p. 40).

The poststructuralist theories of language are based on Ferdinand de Saussure's language theory, which can basically be described thus:¹⁰⁸

- a) The meanings we give to words are purely arbitrary, and these meanings are maintained by convention only. There is no inherent connection between a word and what it designates.
- b) The meanings of words are relational – no word can be defined in isolation from other words. The function of the sign depends exclusively on its relationship with, or more exactly its difference from, other signs.
- c) Language is not a reflection of the world and of experience, but a system which stands quite separate from it. Words articulate our experience of things, they do not just express or reflect it; they give form to what, without language and other sign-systems, would just be a chaotic and undifferentiated jumble of ideas. Instead of things determining the meaning of words, words determine the meaning of things. '[Language's] power comes from its claim to be natural, obvious and therefore true', writes Weedon. 'It is the medium through which already fixed "truths" about the world, society and individuals are expressed' (p. 73).

Poststructuralism, in effect, distrusts the possibilities of achieving *any* knowledge through language. In its view, the verbal sign is constantly floating free of the concept it is supposed to designate and the meanings of words can never be totally guaranteed. In biological theories, for instance in socio-biology and some radical, essentialist

¹⁰⁸ Source: Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 2nd ed. (Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 41ff.

feminism, the structure of subjectivity predates language, and their hegemonic conservative discourses deny the possibility of change in social relations through the idea of the essential fixity of human nature. The liberal-humanist assumption that the individual subject has an inherent knowledge of itself and the world, and that we are free to make choices, may also justify existing social relations (Weedon, pp. 80-81). Poststructuralism, on the other hand, sees the individual's 'access to subjectivity as governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society' (Weedon, p. 91). This viewpoint leaves space for change, as discourses are always open to resistance and challenge, and do change over time. Meanwhile, one must as a feminist realise that the social and historical context has important implications.

It is therefore important in feminist poststructuralism to avoid general theories of the feminine psyche or biologically based definitions of femininity to escape the trap of gender essentialism. Weedon sees women's experience as discursively produced within historical and social discourses (p. 162). Poststructuralist theory rejects all essentialist theory, which offers fixed forms of subjectivity that render the status quo natural, and sees attempts to change as unnatural. Instead, a precarious and contradictory subjectivity, always in process, is proposed, constantly reconstituted in discourse. Subjectivity is seen as a social, cultural and historical product, thus changing with shifts in the 'wide discursive fields that constitute them' (Weedon, p. 32). The individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. Feminist poststructuralism is concerned with power, and looks to the socially and historically discursive production of conflicting and competing meanings.

I have made great use of Weedon's ideas all through my readings and analyses, in trying to detach myself from both the fascinating biographies of the authors and the possible meanings of the intriguing gender discourses of the time. Instead, I have tried to concentrate on describing the discourses and their historical contexts.

1.10 Hirdman, Lanser, Badinter, Witt-Brattström and Florin

Following is a brief presentation of theoreticians and scholars whose ideas I have used in my analyses of individual novels.

1.10.1 Yvonne Hirdman: Feminine Subjugation through Binarism

The notion of gender polarity and complementarity is used to profile the genders against one another, and to legitimise different tasks, ways of life and even the fact that women are subjugated to men. The Swedish gender theoretician Yvonne Hirdman presents two basic strategies used to keep women subjugated: a) dichotomy, that the masculine and the feminine are kept apart and not allowed to mix, and b) hierarchy: men are the norm for humanity and for what is considered ‘normal’, making women the Others.¹⁰⁹ It is through the keeping apart of the genders that the masculine norm is legitimised, and the more differentiated a society becomes, the more subtle and complex the expression and consequences of keeping apart/segregation become (Hirdman, *Genussystemet*, p. 8).

Hirdman calls the intricate and sometimes invisible rules for how the genders are expected to behave ‘the gender contract’ (Hirdman, *Genussystemet*, p. 15). This contract, which changes culturally and historically with time, defines among other things the boundaries of each gender’s behaviour. During, for example, the nineteenth century, the contents of the gender contract were being questioned, both politically and by economic realities. The strong counter-reaction from the conservative establishment to bring the gender relationship back to order shows us that the gender system really was threatened. Hirdman points to three major strategies used in an effort to deal with the problem:

- a) A ‘nervous, rebuking chatter’, mainly within science (philosophy, biology, medicine and psychology) to persuade the masculine and the feminine to get back to order.
- b) Discussions and legal measures about women’s work. Within the new professions it was important to decide what was to be feminine and what masculine, and to divide the technical inventions between the genders (Who got the sewing machine? The camera? The typewriter?).
- c) Recommendations on an individual level – socialisation through the flora of advice books for young women at the time.

(Hirdman, *Genussystemet*, pp. 20-21.)

¹⁰⁹ Yvonne Hirdman, *Genussystemet: Teoretiska funderingar kring kvinnors sociala underordning* (Uppsala: Maktutredningen, 1988), p. 7.

According to Hirdman, the stronger the dichotomising between the genders, the less masculine superiority is questioned (*Genussystemet*, p. 27). This would, I suggest, explain the intense interest in conventional patriarchal middle-class nineteenth-century society in sustaining and reinforcing such a dichotomy. It would also explain the intensified efforts to maintain the dichotomy at the end of century, when women were struggling to emancipate themselves, testing the boundaries of the gender contract and opposing men's superiority.

Hirdman's ideas about the gender binaries are relevant to my work as a whole, but I make most use of her theory in Chapter 2.

1.10.2 Susan S. Lanser's Gender-based Narratology

In Chapter 4, where I deal mainly with narrative voice from a gender perspective, I have chosen to use Susan S. Lanser's narrative theory. Lanser insists that gender always must be included as an important factor in all narratological study. In her own work she has specifically examined female narrators. I use her work as a sounding board for analysing the male narrator in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*.

Lanser demonstrates how the structuring principles of a text's form, such as the narrative form, can be read as content too. Textual structures can be seen as 'content', because they organise and mix social and aesthetic materials into a new 'content' where form constitutes part of the organisation. Lanser shows how different the prerequisites for male and female narrative voices have been since the eighteenth century, and how this can be interpreted as part of the content. When ideological assumptions in the 'culture text' (here defined as 'the particular set of expectations, values, emotional conventions, norms, and assumptions dominant or at least acceptable within a given community' [*The Narrative Act*, p. 93]) are challenged or undermined, these conflicts are likely to be mirrored in the form.

Lanser also points out that silences and gaps in texts, especially texts about gender, must be taken into account, as silence is often a part of feminine expression.

1.10.3 Elisabeth Badinter and the Non-existence of Motherly Instinct

In a historical study of motherhood in French urbanity circa 1600-1900, *The Myth of Motherhood* (1980), Badinter establishes that motherly instinct, contrary to motherly love, cannot be said to exist, but that women's willingness to tend to their young children is dependent on historical causes, such as economics and demographics.

French women have historically displayed a very varied behaviour towards their children, and what we today would call maternal love and devotion is something rather recent, developed during the last two centuries.

I use Badinter's ideas as a 'neutraliser' in my examination of motherhood Breakthrough discourses, where instinct was seen as innate and essential.

1.10.4 Ebba Witt-Brattström and the Seamy Side of Male Decadence

The misogyny and anti-Semitism of decadence literary style has been much commented on by scholars. In *Dekadensens kön* (2007) Witt-Brattström examines how male decadence has parasitised on female aesthetics while at the same time it rejected 'real' women, femininity and the female body as 'disgusting'. Witt-Brattström demonstrates how it is probable that Sigmund Freud read and was inspired by Swedish decadence writer Ola Hansson, who was very popular in Germany at the time, when he constructed some of his psychoanalytic theories. Thus, the decadence conception of the feminine as negative and lack has been inherited by Freud and strongly influenced his texts and work.

Psychoanalytical concepts and currents were used in literature before Freud started using them, and I have drawn on Witt-Brattström's interesting information and suggestions for my analysis of *Rikka Gan*, where pre-psychoanalytical ideas and a resistance to male decadence is evident.

1.10.5 Christina Florin and Swedish Suffragism

Christina Florin has written an interesting study of Swedish suffragism and six prominent suffragists, *Kvinnor får röst* (2006). The study concerns the working methods and culture around Swedish suffragism, and the personal lives of the six top suffragists. It gives fascinating insights into the process of starting up and, above all, continuing the first proper women's mass movement and the personal cost for those involved. It also describes the thicket of discourses about femininity that the suffragists slowly but persistently had to work their way through on their way to political influence for all women.

In my chapter about Annie Quiding's *Fru Fanny*, a novel that treats the life and love of a suffragist, I use Florin's study as an historical background against which I compare discourses about suffragism of the time.

2. Border Beings

Subverting Gender Dichotomy in Herman Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* (1880)

Even by European standards Danish writer Herman Bang (1857-1912) was early in publishing his Decadence novel *Haabløse Slægter*¹¹⁰ in 1880.¹¹¹ While most other Scandinavian writers were busy discussing societal problems and women's rights in novels with a purpose, Bang subtly trod along almost non-existent paths of questioning gender identity itself.¹¹² Contrary to the works of, for example, Strindberg, *Haabløse Slægter* radically deconstructs the gender binaries, which formed the basis of dominant gender discourses at the time.

The novel is characterised by traditional decadence pessimism, where the young protagonist William Høg tries to find his way in life but is stricken with fatigue and metaphorically fades away after falling into the destructive hands of the *femme fatale* Eva Hatzfeldt. Struggling, but never succeeding, to make his way as an actor he meets and interacts with other queer¹¹³ characters that refuse normative gender behaviour, such as his lover Kamilla Falk and the dramatist Bernhard Hoff.

¹¹⁰ Herman Bang, *Haabløse Slægter* (1880) (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977).

¹¹¹ Per Thomas Andersen, *Dekadense i nordisk litteratur 1880-1900* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1992), p. 147.

¹¹² Generally, during the 1870s and 1880s, the literary search for 'truth' was the exposure of social and institutional lies. Around the *fin de siècle* it was rather a psychological examination of the most personal and private. However, apart from bringing a new style into Scandinavian literature, *Haabløse Slægter* exhibits many typical Breakthrough traits, such as Darwinism and the idea of heretic degeneration. At the same time, Bang did not seem interested in participating in the slogan of the Breakthrough: to 'sette problemet under debatt' (discuss societal problems) (Ahlström, pp. 278-79).

¹¹³ The word 'queer' used here relates to the meaning given it in queer studies: in principle all gender behaviour that is not heteronormative.

Grevinden (countess) Eva Hatzfeldt displays all the demonic qualities of the decadence *femme fatale*: she is a man-eater, vampire, paedophile and destroyer of masculinity. The Kamilla Falk character is her younger mirror version. Dag Heede, who has written extensively on Herman Bang's works using queer theory, reads Eva Hatzfeldt as a man and not a woman character, showing convincingly how Bang's whole authorship is really about homosexuality.¹¹⁴ *Haabløse Slægter*, claims Heede, was Bang's allegorical first novel where homosexuality was not sufficiently disguised.¹¹⁵

Although Herman Bang is one of the big names in the Danish literary canon and has been comprehensively studied, surprisingly few scholars have applied a gender/queer perspective to his works. Apart from Heede's thorough examination of *Haabløse Slægter* from a queer aspect, there is only an article by Pål Bjørby treating sexuality in the Bang context more generally.¹¹⁶ Otherwise, much has been written about Herman Bang and his authorship. A couple of the standard studies (written from a traditional biographical perspective) are Harry Jacobsen's four-volume biography¹¹⁷ and Torbjörn Nilsson's *Impressionisten Herman Bang* (1965). Jan Mogren published *Herman Bangs Haabløse Slægter* in 1957, and Per Thomas Andersen has a chapter on *Haabløse Slægter* in his decadence study *Dekadense i nordisk litteratur 1880-1900* (1992).¹¹⁸

Heede writes that '[o]ne of the very interesting aspects of [the Eva and Kamilla] characters is [...] that they can be read [...] as *both* allegories of homosexual men *and* demonized seductive mother figures' ('Queering...', p. 29).¹¹⁹ Read as a male

¹¹⁴ Dag Heede, *Herman Bang* (p. 14). According to Heede, we can read Bang's texts in such a way that when the protagonist is a woman, 'she' is really a homosexual man, when the protagonist is a man who desires women sexually, he is a homosexual, while the 'women' characters are men, possibly heterosexual men.

¹¹⁵ Dag Heede, 'Queering the Queer: Herman Bang and the Pleasures and Dangers of Allegorical Readings', *Scandinavica*, 40:1 (2001), 11-40, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ The only readings of Bang from a gender aspect I have found at all apart from Heede, are two articles by Paul Bjørby of which one is about the short story 'Franz Pander', another queer reading of 'Franz Pander' by Anne Scott Sørensen in *Litteraturens tilgange*, a queer reading of the novel *Stuk* in Øystein Ziegler's thesis *Homoseksualitet, homotekstualitet* and Annegret Heitmann has a chapter on Bang in her thesis *Noras Schwester*.

¹¹⁷ Harry Jacobsen, *Den unge Herman Bang : mennesket, digteren, journalisten og hans by* (1954), *Herman Bang : resignationens digter* (1957), *Aarene der gik tabt : den miskendte Herman Bang* (1961) and *Den tragiske Herman Bang* (1966).

¹¹⁸ Jan Mogren, *Herman Bangs Haabløse Slægter* (Lund: Gleerups, 1957).

¹¹⁹ Already in 1957, Bang's biographer Harry Jacobsen controversially put forward the idea that Eva's 'twin sister' character, Kamilla Falk, is a man (Harry Jacobsen, *Herman Bang: Resignationens digter* [Copenhagen: H. Hagerup, 1957] p. 22). As several scholars (for example Jan Mogren and Dag Heede) point out, there are many likenesses between the Kamilla and Eva characters. Both have, for example, sexual relationships with young boys and suspect pasts.

character, Eva Hatzfelt is the destructive older homosexual: seducing, devouring and devastating very young men. Read as a woman, she demonstrates how a demonic female character is created to explain and illustrate the decay of traditional masculinity in society and the weakness of a new generation of men at a time of social turbulence and changing gender roles.¹²⁰

In this analysis I read Eva as *both* woman and man, as oscillating between the gender binaries, or rather, as *refusing* them. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, I demonstrate how *Haabløse Slægter* undermines the notion of stable gender identity by representing characters that take on the traditional traits of either gender, transgressing the gender boundaries.

Eva is impossible to pin down as either a woman or a man; this character constantly challenges the boundaries between femininity and masculinity with her highly ambiguous behaviour, where cross-dressing, androgyny and seeing herself as a possible lover of both sexes makes her one of the most interesting and radical literary characters of the Modern Breakthrough. When the novel was published other Scandinavian writers were discussing women's rights and gender roles. Bang did not discuss these matters: he deconstructed the whole gender project through questioning, negotiating and redefining gender boundaries in a more sophisticated way than his contemporaries.

Haabløse Slægter was prosecuted for 'indecent' in 1880, its year of publication. Bang was convicted and the book was banned and confiscated. After the conviction, Bang rewrote the novel, and a second version was published in 1884 (and later a third in 1905). In the 1884 version, the 'indecent' passages were omitted and other abbreviations made. In the 1905 version some minor changes were made.¹²¹ The original 1880 version would not be reprinted again until 1965, eighty-five years later. It is this original version from 1880 which will be used here.

Before continuing with the analysis of the novel, I will introduce the dominant discourses about gender binaries and gender dichotomy during the Modern Breakthrough. The prevailing discourses of gender dichotomy at the time explain the strong reactions against *Haabløse Slægter* at its publication.

¹²⁰ The prototype of the Eva Hartzfeldt character is Juno in Bang's short story 'Fragment' in *Fortællinger: Tunge Melodier* (1880) (see Jacobsen, *Resignationens...*, p. 42).

¹²¹ Villy Sørensen, foreword in Herman Bang, *Haabløse Slægter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977), p. 20.

2.1 Gender Dichotomy in the Modern Breakthrough

‘Do we *truly* need a *true* sex?’ asks Foucault in *Herculine Barbin*. Using the example of the hermaphrodite, he demonstrates how profoundly the idea of a definite and naturally given sex is fixed in most people’s minds, including the idea that our sex causes both our behaviour and our observable gender characteristics. During the Modern Breakthrough these ideas were, if possible, even more dominant than today.

Gender theorist Yvonne Hirdman has studied how gender dichotomy is constructed, and how fundamental it is for gender oppression. She writes that the first law of masculinity is: to be a man is *not* to be a woman.¹²² Masculinity is what is not feminine. Without the other, none of the two concepts could exist. Masculinity is generally produced by demarcating itself from femininity in order to create a boundary between the two concepts. It defines itself and masculine identity by excluding femininity. A dichotomy on a gender scale, where ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are placed as opposing and excluding poles, is created.

Dichotomised thinking will necessarily create a hierarchy and rank one of the two poles higher, so that the ‘other’ one will be its suppressed, inferior and negative opponent, argues C. Lindén (p. 205). The notion of gender polarity and complementarity is used to profile the genders against one another, and to legitimise their different tasks, ways of life and even the fact that women are subjugated to men.

From about the turn of the eighteenth century, the middle classes started to apply an ideology where the genders were seen as having different traits, complementary to each other, almost as if men and women were two different species.¹²³ The genders were seen as polarised, opposed in a field of tension where love abolished the opposition between the masculine and the feminine. This image of dichotomy was strengthened during the nineteenth century, and is clearly echoed in the novels analysed in this study.

¹²² Yvonne Hirdman, *Genus: Om det stabila föränderliga former*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: Liber, 2004), p. 56.

¹²³ See for example Yvonne Hirdman, ‘Konstruktion och förändring: genus som vetenskap’, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 3-4 (1998), pp. 4-15.

A list by Karin Johannisson gives an example of qualities ascribed to each gender, based on conceptions from Greek Antiquity (p. 17):

<i>woman</i>	<i>man</i>
emotions	rationality
nature	culture
beauty and purity	industrial society
softness, warm intimacy	cold collectivism of public life
body, material	soul, intellect
passive, receiving	active, taking, giving

It is not difficult to conclude what roles and spaces these qualities assigned as ‘natural’ for women and men respectively. With their intuitive behaviour and impulsive emotionality, women were seen as closer to nature than men and passive in comparison. Unsuitable for intellectual, rational reasoning, but made for nurturing, women were assigned the enclosed space of the home. Seen as simple tools of nature, women were only given the emotional, nurturing and reproductive role. They were not seen as needing formal legal or political rights: women’s presumed influence over their husband and sons gave them *indirect* power in society, which ought to have been enough for them.

The dichotomy supported and confirmed a functional social and economic order within the middle classes. In the discussions from about 1850 onwards of social reforms for women, the argument of the separate ‘nature’ of the genders was often used by the opponents of reforms. People and groups feeling threatened by women entering public space and the labour market would use arguments based on women’s ‘natural’ functions to try to maintain the existing order. Common images of masculinity were used as a contrast, to prove that the genders had different functions in life and complemented each other, a fragile balance which had better not be disturbed by women demanding social reforms, which might throw the whole of society into chaos and destruction and dissolve the family as an institution. To maintain the *status quo*, it was important to persuade women to stay in their homes and accept the role of nurturing wife and mother.

After the mid-nineteenth century this polarity would develop into something of a struggle, writes Johannisson (pp. 18-19.). Science developed the image of complementarity into determinism. New emphasis was put on biological differences, and the differences became hierarchical in terms of subjugation and superiority.

Women were now seen as deviations from the norm represented by men, as humans controlled by their (weak) bodies. Evolutionary theories confirmed the existing division of the genders with regard to labour and ways of living. Men produced and women reproduced. Women were now seen as less perfect versions of men. Johannisson comments that science and ideology cooperated to prove women's physical and psychic inferiority, and dryly adds that not many physicians could resist the temptation to use biology in their resistance to women's emancipation (p. 48). The scientific reactions to the women's transgression of traditional gender boundaries are sarcastically explained by Dijkstra, referring to *The Female Offender* (1895) by Lombroso and Ferrero:

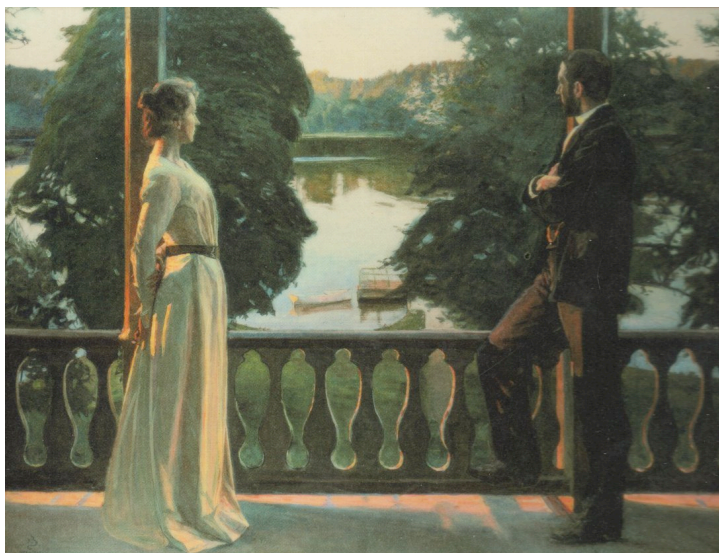
Since the human male had struggled out of a condition of sexual indeterminacy (those bisexual, hermaphroditic primal origins of the higher organisms) into true masculinity, it was clear that the roles of men and women were meant to be completely separate. It was therefore woman's role in evolution to become more and more feminine and not to take on masculine qualities. For a woman to take on such masculine qualities was actually a sign of reversion, a sinking back into the hermaphroditism of that indeterminate primal state – just as it was a clear sign of analogous degeneracy in the male to show himself to be effeminate.¹²⁴

This discourse is rather representative of scientific gender discourses at the end of the nineteenth century. This type of ideology, struggling to keep women in their place, escalated when women claimed social and political reforms and emancipation accelerated. The old, work-based spirit of community between the family members had disappeared. The family became a unit for consumption instead of production, the man taking on the role of breadwinner and the woman that of housewife. The difference was that women's work was no longer defined as work. Blom and Sogner write that women's traditional household work was re-defined from an economical point of view, even that which gave an income was defined as non-work (p. 225). In reality Scandinavian women generally had to work hard just as they always had, and their work was necessary for both family and society to function. In a market economy too, the family was an important economical unit where the wife's work was indispensable.

¹²⁴ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 212-13.

The wife (and the servants) were left to do the close, physical activities which are the essentials of life: handling food and dirt (cleaning) and transforming children into cultured beings – this included reproducing the gendered inequality of current cultured life. According to Frykman and Löfgren a lower status is attached to such tasks worldwide, and this has been used to explain the subordination of women all over the world (p. 247). Women have traditionally been responsible for transforming nature into culture, and ‘just as children were subordinate to adults, people closer to nature were subordinate to those who were more civilized, or cultured’ (Frykman & Löfgren, p. 173). Women, seen as closer to nature, were thus subordinated to men, who were seen as more civilised, and as builders of civilisation. Gender conceptions such as these, reaching their peak during the Modern Breakthrough, are both exploited and challenged in *Haabløse Slægter*, as will be shown. By representing characters that refuse to behave in a conventionally gendered way, the novel scandalised reviewers and censorial authorities.

It is, writes Hirdman, through the keeping apart of the genders that the masculine norm is legitimised, and the more differentiated a society becomes, the more subtle and complex the expression and consequences of gender segregation become (*Genussystemet*, p. 8). The more dichotomies between the genders, the less masculine superiority is questioned (*ibid.*, p. 27).



Richard Bergh (1858-1915), 'Nordisk sommarkväll' (1899-1900). The painting shows a couple, standing rigid, not communicating with each other. The man has his arms folded towards the woman, her chest like a defensive shield against him.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Judith Butler sees gender as something performed through constant repetition. She uses the concept of drag to prove that all expressions of gender are performative. In her analysis, even sex itself becomes a result

of performance, meaning there is reason to question the originality of both gender and sex, and hence of normative sexual behaviour. Drag can disturb its audience's conception of an 'original' gender behaviour or sexuality, and of a certain sexual desire/behaviour being 'naturally' connected with a certain gender. It exposes gendered and sexual behaviour as imitation and endless repetition of something for which no original exists:

Drag is not the putting on a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of expropriation or *appropriation* that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that 'masculine' belongs to 'male' and 'feminine' belongs to 'female'. There is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. Where that notion of the 'proper' operates, it is always and only *improperly* installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect. [...] [H]eterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself – and *failing*. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavours to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself.¹²⁵

As there is no inherent gender, no true sex, gender discourse must renew itself through endless repetitions of gender, through the disciplining and socialisation of the body into a gendered, heterosexual body. One learns to perform the gender act that is expected in accordance with one's biological body. Although Butler underlines that the act of gender performance and repetition is neither voluntary nor conscious, one could see gender performance as synonymous with wearing a mask. Butler suggests the genders are copies with no originals, imbued with a pathetic dependence on the opposite gender that puts them perpetually at risk.

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination' in *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 13-31 (p. 21).

The main characters in *Haabløse Slægter* expose the performative side of gender by (more or less involuntarily) playing with their gender masks. By changing in and out of gender identities they expose the extent to which gender is constructed and unconnected to the biological body, as will be discussed in greater detail in due course.

2.1.1 'En bestämd väsensolikhet'¹²⁶: Ellen Key and Gender Binaries

Ellen Key (1849-1926) was an influential Swedish feminist who was widely read around the turn of the century. For her, the notion of gender complementarity was central when it came to reproduction and work. Although strongly in favour of legal and political equality between the genders, she was convinced that the married women's place was in the home, raising children and not competing with men in the labour market. Men had intellect and women emotions. Those precious feminine emotions and the feminine culture, which Key highly appreciated, would be wasted if women were to become more like men.¹²⁷ There are parts in Key's texts indicating that she was aware that gender is a social and historical construction: she seemed to see the genders as having historically developed into their existing differences. At the same time she defined men and women as essentially different:

Jag utgår [...] från den åsikten, att en bestämd väsensolikhet finnes mellan mannens och kvinnans natur, en olikhet, som icke upphäves av det sakförhållandet, att kvinnor finnas med manligt skaplynne, liksom män med kvinnligt [...]¹²⁸

Key's texts seem to me a bizarre mix between advice books and radical Scandinavian feminism of the time.¹²⁹ Like the advice books she stated that women are essentially

¹²⁶ (A distinct difference), Ellen Key, *Missbrukad Kvinnokraft*, p. 14.

¹²⁷ Key is traditionally seen as an essentialist feminist. Claudia Lindén, who has published the latest thesis on Key, *Om kärlek* (2002), with a markedly different view on Key's works and opinions than earlier scholars, claims that Key no doubt saw women as different from men, but this did not implicate that she viewed women as the opposite of men, or that women's qualities complemented men's. What Key wanted was to replace a too one-sided masculine power with a feminine/feminist corrective. She hoped that with women's suffrage society would change (C. Lindén, p.156). Lindén strives to change the picture of Key as an essentialist theoretician. In my readings of Key, I give Lindén's creative and interesting study the credit that Key is a contradictory thinker who is difficult to categorise. Lindén bases her sophisticated reading of Key on the notion that you have to read *all* her works in order to categorise her properly. She specifically points out *Missbrukad Kvinnokraft* (1896), one of Key's best known works, as not being representative of Key's point of view as a whole (Lindén, p. 233). I will, however, use *Missbrukad kvinnokraft* and *Livslinjer I* (1903) to extract Key's ideas on complementarity, as they are relevant to the time period I am studying. Although agreeing with Lindén that Key did not necessarily polarise men and women from an evolutionary and biological point of view, I find that she still viewed the genders as complementary to each other, and several times points to 'Nature' as the origin of this.

¹²⁸ Ellen Key, *Missbrukad kvinnokraft: Kvinnopsykologi*, foreword by Björn Sjövall (Stockholm: Logos) 1981, p. 14.

different from men, that they should stay in the home and spend most of their time raising their children, that their work has just as much worth as men's although it is different *et cetera*. However, she sometimes made a clean break with those discourses in a radical way, in claiming that women must have exactly the same legal and political rights as men, in stating, for example, that women must have suffrage and admission to all civil areas on the same terms as men (*Missbrukad...*, p. 55). She bitterly complained that married women had no more legal rights concerning their children, their own person, their work and their property than madmen and criminals (*Missbrukad...*, p. 133). She stressed that women should have a suitable education and be financially independent.

2.1.2 'I hvarje människa hennes eget mål'¹³⁰: Frida Stéenhoff

There were people who did not agree with the common view that men and women represented opposite poles on a dichotomy scale. According to them, men and women were first and foremost *human beings*. As variations of humanity they were in principle equal and had the same value even if society and the gender situation momentarily denied it. Supporters of this view (mainly the feminists of the women's organisations) were more reluctant to define what femininity and masculinity really consisted of, writes Tinne Vammen.¹³¹ The feminist organisations encouraged higher education for women and did not approve of them being defined and determined by their biological sex.

Frida Stéenhoff (1865-1945), radical Swedish feminist and friend of Key's, rejected the notion of men's and women's qualities as a mixture of complementary traits, such as 'intelligence' and 'feeling'. Instead, every human being should strive to become a whole personality (Ahlund, 'Krig...', p. 140). In one of her pamphlets, *Feminismens moral* (1903) (based on one of her many speeches), she promoted a view that 'vill individens utveckling och fullkomning och ser i hvarje människa hennes eget mål – icke *medel* till andras förmån' ('promotes individual development and perfection and that every human being struggles towards her/his own objectives. A human being

¹²⁹ The concept 'radical feminism' in Scandinavia at the time generally meant a feminism that did not see the genders as essentially different, and wanted to give women and men the same formal political, economic and judicial rights. I here use the concept 'essentialist feminism' for the Anglo-American concept 'radical feminism'.

¹³⁰ (Every human being must go for her or his own objectives)

¹³¹ Tinne Vammen, "'Rösträtt till kvinnor!': Den engelska rösträttskampen i europeiskt perspektiv, 1860-1930' transl. by Hélèn Andræ, in *Kvinnohistoria: Kvinnors villkor från antiken till våra dagar* ed. by Yvonne Hirdman (Stockholm: Utbildningsradion, 1992) pp. 169-187 (p. 177).

should not be a *vehicle* for the development of others’).¹³² She refused the view of women as only mothers/helpers/wives of men. Women were not instruments for others’ development or happiness, they were human beings equally entitled to pursue and follow their own destiny, like men.

Other issues in Stéenhoff’s highly progressive and radical feminist programme were that women should not be men’s dependants, but be able to support themselves financially in order to be harmonious mothers, and that all women should have access to contraceptives, as the right not to become a mother against one’s will was ‘the most important issue for emancipation’.¹³³

With the prevalent view of the Breakthrough that the genders were stable, biologically inherent identities complementing each other through being opposite, it is no surprise that *Haabløse Slægter* caused an outcry among the critics at its publication. As mentioned, its characters’ disregard for normatively gendered behaviour and their transgressive trespassing of gender boundaries upset both critics and the censorship authorities. The next section is a discussion of these critics’ reactions.

2.2 The Reviews, the Lawsuit and the Verdict

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I see reviews of the time as interesting indicators of Breakthrough discourses. As an important part of the cultural elite, critics had a real impact on the Scandinavian reading public at the time.

Haabløse Slægter was a *succès de scandale* when published in 1880, generally receiving a negative reception from the critics, but being sold out when the police came round to confiscate the copies.¹³⁴ Decadence as a literary style was not yet known in Scandinavia, so there was little understanding of the typical pessimistic views and decadent representations in the novel (Andersen, p. 148). One main reason for the criticism was the representation of feminine erotic desire. *Aftenbladet*, for example, stated that Bang’s novel was so immoral, that women could not read it, that Eva

¹³² Cited in Ahlund, ‘Krig...’, p. 135.

¹³³ From Stéenhoff’s speech ‘Humanitet och barnalstring’ at Sällskapet för yttrandefrihet, Stockholm, 1907. Quoted from Ingeborg Nordin Hennel, ‘Man måste vara mumie för att inte vara revolutionär: Om Frida Stéenhoff’ in *Nordisk Kvinnorlitteraturhistoria Vol. II*, ed. by Jensen and others, pp. 553-557.

¹³⁴ See for example Jan Mogren, *Herman Bangs Haabløse Slægter* (Lund: Gleerups, 1957), pp. 140-142 and Mette Winge, *Omkring Haabløse Slægter* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel, 1972) and Villy Sørensen, foreword to Herman Bang, *Haabløse Slægter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1977), p. 18.

Hatzfeldt was ‘*modbydelig*’ (repugnant) and did not belong in decent literature, and that they hoped Bang would write no more books like *Haabløse Slægter*.¹³⁵ *Dagens Nyheder* claimed that it was one of the ‘*usundeste*’ (most unsound) books on the market for a long time.¹³⁶ The reviewer in *Den ny humorist* was surprised that the publisher had not printed ‘*Alene for Herrer*’ (only for gentlemen) on the novel’s front page, to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands (meaning those of young people and women).¹³⁷ The other main reason for the reviewers’ moral indignation seems to be their resentment of the protagonist William Høg’s lack of traditional masculinity. In *Illustreret Tidende* reviewer P. H[ansen] stated:

Et voxent Mandfolk, det hvert Øjeblik paa Dagen falder i nerveus Graad, hulker sig gjennem Livet [...] ’sætter sit Haar’ paa Kvindevis, sminker sig og ‘lægger sig Sort under Øjnene’, lader sig karesere i Kvindeklæder, vælter sig i Pantherskind for Fødderne af en Kourtisane og maa helde Eau de Cologne ned ad Ryggen for at faae de slappe Nerver strammede – et saadant Kvindemandfolk bliver kun udholdligt, naar han stilles i komisk Belysning [...].¹³⁸

Referring to ‘William Hoff’, ‘Bernard Høg’, Herman Høg’, ‘William Bang’ and ‘Bernard Bang’, P.H. maliciously identified the author with his fictive characters, implying that the book was autobiographical. P.H. was upset with the portraits of what he saw as unmanliness. It was the young men performing traditionally feminine acts that he did not like: their crying, putting on makeup, behaving subserviently and using perfume. Cross-dressing was another act he did not approve of. Sensing the characters’ refusal to arrange themselves onto the binary gender scale, he called the characters ‘*kvindemandfolk*’ (men-women), and pointed out that it was important, when portraying characters like these, that it be done comically, so that the reader may laugh at them and not take them seriously. It is clear that he found the representations of gender-ambiguous characters in realistic prose by an influential writer provocative, fearing they might be taken seriously by the reading public. P.H. was disturbed by the characters sliding between the gender binaries. Their display of traits that

¹³⁵ *Aftenbladet* 17 December 1880 (unsigned), quoted from Winge, p. 31.

¹³⁶ Erik Bøgh, *Dagens Nyheder* 19 December 1880, quoted from Winge, p. 36.

¹³⁷ *Den ny humorist* 28 December 1880 (unsigned), quoted from Winge, p. 39.

¹³⁸ P.H., *Illustreret Tidende* 02 January 1881, quoted from Winge, pp. 52-53.

conventionally belong to the other gender provoked him, and he indirectly complained that the characters were not ‘properly’ gendered.

Erik Bøgh complained about William Høg allowing himself already in his seventeenth year to be seduced by ‘*liderlige*’ (lecherous) women, who ‘stadig er saa forekommende at spare ham Savnet af det manglende Initiativ’ (sparing him the trouble of having to take the initiative) (quoted from Winge, p. 35). Bøgh found it problematic that the ‘lecherous women’ take the sexual initiative instead of William.

Influential literary critic Edvard Brandes¹³⁹ seemed to agree with Bøgh when he wrote in *Morgenbladet*: ‘Man føler sig noget ubehagelig berørt ved Heltens Kjærlighedshistorier, fordi hans Lidenskab synes saa lidet mandskraftig’ (the hero’s love stories makes one uncomfortable, as his passion seems so unmanly).¹⁴⁰ E. Brandes found it quite unbelievable that a man could love and feel sexual desire in the subservient way William does. However, in a private letter to Danish writer J.P. Jacobsen the next day, Edvard Brandes wrote about Bang: ‘Jeg har nu meget lidt Smag for ham, men “Haabløse Slægter” havde dog forsonet mig med meget. Der er ubestrideligt Talent i denne Bog’ (he is not in my taste, but *Haabløse Slægter* has reconciled me with many things. Doubtless it is a talented book).¹⁴¹ This might show that E. Brandes felt himself compelled to claim certain views officially, while he privately was more positive towards Bang’s writing.

P. H. had quite an original proposal as to how young male characters such as Bernhard Hoff should be cured of their effeminacy. It is unclear whether he actually meant the character Bernhard Hoff or Bang himself – probably an intentional ‘mistake’ to demonstrate his distaste of the author’s sexual orientation.

Hvis [Mark Twain] vilde tage Bernhard Bang med sig over til Amerika, kunde der endnu blive Noget av ham. Tidlig op om Morgonen og ud at fælde Træer; en kraftig Boeuf til Middag, Eftermiddagsarbejde med at flytte Kvæg og tærse Hvede og derefter en Skumringstime med en Aftenpibe udenfor Blokhuset [...].

(P.H., *Illustreret Tidende*)

Besides the passage being amusing, at least to modern eyes, it illustrates the way some people really believed that traditionally masculine tasks such as tree-felling, eating beef

¹³⁹ Brother of Georg Brandes, probably the most influential Scandinavian literary critic at the time.

¹⁴⁰ Edvard Brandes in *Morgenbladet* 09 January 1881, quoted from Winge, pp. 61f.

¹⁴¹ Letter from Edvard Brandes to J.P. Jacobsen 10 January.1881. Quoted from Winge, p. 63.

and smoking a pipe could enhance masculine behaviour in the same way as the ‘cure’ for masculine women often was seen as getting married (read: having heterosexual sex) and getting pregnant: that this would help push androgynous people back to their ‘proper’ places on the binary gender scale.

The reviewers reacted quite strongly to a representation of male characters and their love life that did not fit into the prevailing discourses on masculinity and masculine sexual desire and behaviour. The same views were applied to the female characters and *their* erotic desire. The age difference between William Høg and his lovers was seen as upsetting by the reviewers: ‘[...] det [gjør] et oprørende Indtryk, at begge “Heltens” Elskerinder ere gamle Kvinder, naar de da ikke ere rene Skjøger’ (it is upsetting that the lovers of the ‘hero’ are both old women, if not complete whores), comments *Ude og Hjemme*.¹⁴² The fact that the woman is older than her male sexual partner, and the fact that she takes the sexual initiative, were also aspects that the prosecutor reacted against in the law suit against Bang. In the protocol he wrote that a book such as this, which represented a woman who excites and seduces a young man into an illicit sexual relationship and then depicts their passion and lechery, was indecent.¹⁴³

The verdict, in turn, states that by representing a woman who seeks satisfaction in illicit sexual relationships with young men and who finds pleasure in increasing her lovers’ passion (read: sexual experience and competence), Bang had exceeded the moral boundaries of literature.¹⁴⁴

The comments from literary critics show how unsettling they found the elusive gender of all the main characters William Høg, Bernhard Hoff, Kamilla Falk and Eva Hatzfeldt. That *Haabløse Slægter* refused to place its characters firmly in their ‘proper’ places on the gender scale and allowed them to cross the heteronormative¹⁴⁵ boundaries as they pleased, was something the critics and the court found abominable. The gender identities represented in *Haabløse Slægter*, where the biological body is not conventionally connected with erotic desire, made the critics uncomfortable. The characters refused to take on a ‘proper’ gender behaviour, matching their bodies. Butler writes:

¹⁴² Otto Borchsenius, *Ude og Hjemme* 12 December 1881, quoted from Winge, p. 28.

¹⁴³ Prosecutor Rode in Kjøbenhavns Crim. og Politirets Justitsprotokol 12.02.1881, quoted from Mogren, p. 160.

¹⁴⁴ In the verdict, Kriminal- og Politiretens Dom 23.07.1881, quoted from Mogren, p. 175.

¹⁴⁵ Heteronormativity has been defined by Tiina Rosenberg as those institutions, structures, relations and actions that maintain heterosexuality as an uniform, natural and all-embracing original sexuality (in Tiina Rosenberg, *Queerfeministisk agenda* (Stockholm, Atlas, 2002), p. 13.

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female.” The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender.

(Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 24)

Haabløse Slægter broke the unspoken rules by representing sexual and gender identities that did not ‘exist’, queer identities for which there was no space in the Modern Breakthrough. By representing them, the novel pointed to their forbidden existence and opened up an imaginary space for them, whereupon the establishment reacted, urging that space to be closed again.

What was not mentioned openly in the reviews or the verdict, but which may well have influenced them, was Bang’s own sexuality. Although Bang never publicly spoke about it, he was ‘the public homosexual (and one of the first) in the Scandinavia of his day, a position almost comparable to that of Oscar Wilde in the English-speaking world’, according to Heede (‘Queering...’, p. 11). Heede further points out that the novel was ‘read (and condemned) by contemporaries as the autobiographical confessions of the author’ (‘Queering...’, p. 17). If some reviewers implicitly read the novel as being about homosexual instead of heterosexual love, that would explain some of their comments about ‘unmanliness’, as effeminacy was part of the discourse on homosexuality at the time.¹⁴⁶ If they read it as being about heterosexual love, they might find, just like Edward Brandes, that they could not believe in the gender ambiguous characters.

Herman Bang learned his lesson from the lawsuit, writes Heede: ‘Never again did he portray decadent behaviour and perverse sexuality. And for the next twenty years he avoided male protagonists almost completely’ (‘Queering...’, p. 30). Bjørby points out that hostility towards homosexuality deepened during the latter part of the nineteenth century as a result of a stronger focus on sexuality, which was now seen as the

¹⁴⁶ The concept ‘homosexuality’ was probably in Bang’s time very different from the present, writes Heede (‘Queering...’, p. 16). ‘At Bang’s time, homosexuality was typically a highly hierarchical structure between an older and a younger man, the latter presumed, at least in principle, to be heterosexual. The younger man’s pleasure was not an issue; he was encouraged, helped and – most of all – paid for delivering sexual favours.’

problematic basis of the human psyche. ‘It was a time when men restrengthened assumed notions of proper masculinity, femininity, and sexuality in medical, social, religious, economic, and biological theories and in art’ (Bjørby, pp. 225-26). With this as a background, it is not surprising that most reviewers reacted negatively to Bang’s first novel if they saw it as a homosexual allegory. But in spite of Bang’s homosexuality, the discourses in his novel follow the quite common misogynist pattern of the time. It is not surprising that he created a vampire-like *femme fatale* character to explain who stole all the traditional masculinity.

2.3 Decadence and the Demonisation of the Feminine

Part of the critical reaction to *Haabløse Slægter* was the fact that decadence was practically unknown as a literary style (Andersen, p. 148).¹⁴⁷ Two important traits co-existed and intertwined in European art and literature around the *fin de siècle*, influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and French naturalist writers: decadence and the demonisation of women. *Haabløse Slægter* is strongly influenced by both.¹⁴⁸

The novel can, among other things, be read as an allegory of the decline of both modern Danish society and traditional masculinity. The young male protagonist, William Høg, represents not only this decline, but also the weakness and unmanliness of that young generation. The prevailing opinion towards the end of the nineteenth century was that the crisis in traditional masculinity first and foremost was due to women transgressing traditional gender boundaries and infringing on male power (Fraunhofer, p. 135). The novel contains several characters that represent the typical degenerate and misogynist discourses of the time, such as decadent demonised women and weak, effeminate men. It lets William Høg’s father summarise the typical misogynist discourse of the time:

“Thi, hvis vi spærrede dem alle inde i Bure disse Dyr skabte før at ødelægge, hvis Væsen er Drifter, og hvis Drifter er Fordærvelse og Elendighed, handlede vi ret”-- [---]
 ”Den som ikke gør sig til Herre, bliver Slave, [...] den, som ikke ødelægger, bliver

¹⁴⁷ With ‘literary style’ I here mean both the manner of expression, such as glossary and metaphors used *et cetera*, and the choice of topics.

¹⁴⁸ Although Bang was an early decadence writer, he was influenced by Darwinism and Zola (P. T. Andersen, p. 142).

ødelagt. Thi ingen har betvungen Dyret i Kvinden.”

(*Haabløse*, pp. 110-11)

The connection between the concepts ‘women’, ‘animals’ and ‘instincts’, is here claimed outright, which is not unusual in *fin de siècle* misogynist discourses. These discourses in literature and art both inspired and were inspired by the ‘scientific’ misogynist and often anti-Semitic writings of for example Lombroso, Weininger and Ellis, who in principle only accepted the heterosexual white Aryan male as properly human, while non-whites, Jews, women and those with non-heteronormative sexualities were classified as defective, divergent, infantile, inferior and degenerate.¹⁴⁹

2.3.1 Decadence in a Scandinavian Context

One of *Haabløse Slægter*’s own, very typical, comments placing it in the decadence style is when Hoff says:

”Ja, kære Ven, min private mening Mening er det jo nok, at Samfundet og vi forbereder en ny og forbedret Udgave af Syndfloden, men saa kan vi da idetmindste efterligne de andre: de dansede, lige til Floden kom.”

(*Haabløse*, p. 242).

In these lines the whole idea of a decaying society and the decadent’s ironic wish to ‘dance until the flood comes’ are encapsulated. This is decadence in a nutshell; the decline of society, the degeneration of the young generation who passively look on or even speed up the societal downfall through decadent behaviour instead of acting firmly against it.

Suzanne Nalbantian sees decadence as grown out of ‘the moral maze of a society in transition’, its seeds sown between 1870 and 1900. According to her, decadence was ‘not Aestheticism but an aesthetic of transition expressing a crisis in value and language in the Western world’. It was not ‘a conscious programme as fashioned by the literary schools of the time, for it emerged unconsciously in the texture of the prose of major

¹⁴⁹ For a thorough study on *fin de siècle* misogyny in art and literature, see Bram Dijkstra’s *Idols of Perversity*.

novelists of the period'.¹⁵⁰ Thus, she sees decadence as having organically grown out of the writers' fear of the rapid societal changes which leaves its imprint in their texts, rather than the texts being consciously styled when it comes to choice of words and topics.

Christina Sjöblad writes that the term *literary decadence* can either be generally defined as literature from an *époque* showing signs of decadence or degeneration, or as connecting to the group of French writers who during the 1880s called themselves Decadents.¹⁵¹ Important traits in decadence style are sentiments of pessimism, fatigue, an undefined longing for something else, to get away from it all. There is also an attraction to the artificial and unnatural, its aesthetics leaning towards perversity or eccentricity. Erotic motifs are an important part of decadence literature, coloured by misogynist representations (Sjöblad, pp. 33-34).

Claes Ahlund views decadence as representing an anxiety-ridden perception of discomfort in existence (Ahlund, *Medusas...*, p. 11). He sees the term as unifying literary works that address notions about the decline and degeneration of contemporary human beings and society. Decadence was not seen as restricted to the individual, but was at the *fin de siècle* viewed by many as dominating culture, society, economy, gender relationships, maybe even a whole people or even humanity as such (Ahlund, *Medusas...*, pp. 13-14). Ahlund presses the point that Scandinavian decadence is different from the continental version: in contrast to the intensely aesthetic manner of Western European decadence, the moral aspects of dissolution and decline dominate Scandinavian decadence. There is a large difference between the latter and 'the continental orgies of blasphemy, satanism, incest and sexual sadism at the time' (Ahlund, *Medusas...*, pp. 208, 214).

Andersen defines Nordic literary decadence as thematising identity disorientation and reactions when fundamental, societal values are in a state of change. In decadent literature these are represented as the dissolution of identities. The values and existential pillars of culture and society are destroyed through characters that are destroyed (Andersen, pp. 16-18).

Literary decadence is here defined through the literary characters' inner dissolution representing the dissolving values of society. Decadence literature is no exhortation to

¹⁵⁰ Suzanne Nalbantian, *Seeds of Decadence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Crisis in Values* (London; Macmillan, 1983), p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Christina Sjöblad, *Baudelaires väg till Sverige: Presentation, mottagande och litterära miljöer 1855-1917* (Lund: Liber Läromedel, 1975), p. 32.

‘immorality’; it rather describes a problem and makes a diagnosis (Andersen, p. 151), which can make it seem dark and pessimistic. This is in line with *Haabløse Slægter*, where the male characters dissolve into passivity, decadent gender-ambiguous behaviour and madness, the processes set into motion by Eva Hatzfeldt, but it is worth noting that the novel never *promotes* the perverse behaviour or the refusal of the gender binaries. *Haabløse Slægter* simply allows its characters to reflect a societal transgressive state.

Ebba Witt-Brattström comments on decadence style as representing the static, the unchangeable, the already degenerated. There is no movement forward, no emergency exit, just a downward fall (*Dekadensens...*, p. 146).¹⁵²

In a Nordic context, Baudelaire was first mentioned in a Swedish thesis in 1868¹⁵³, even though his name had been glimpsed here and there in the Swedish press since 1855, when his poems were published in *Revue des Mondes* (Sjöblad, pp. 57-58). He would not, however, be properly introduced to the Swedish and Nordic public through journal articles until 1891. At the same time, the trend towards poetry, *joie de vivre* and nationalism in 1890s Swedish literature led away from Baudelaire, whose influence remained small. In Denmark, however, decadence would take a more prominent place within literature. One of Herman Bang’s most important achievements as a literary critic, writes Sjöblad, is his extensive introduction of French literature.¹⁵⁴ As Danish literature during the 1890s was more influenced by symbolism than was Swedish literature, Baudelaire and Poe were often at the centre of the literary debate in Denmark (Sjöblad, pp. 100, 157-58).

Bang influenced Stella Kleve and Ola Hansson, young authors from Skåne in southern Sweden, whose cultural centre was Copenhagen rather than Stockholm for geographical reasons. He took Stella Kleve under his wing in 1884, helping her edit and publish her first short story and later contributing an introduction to her first novel. Her interest in French literature may well have been inspired by him (Sjöblad, pp. 99-100). Kleve herself wrote in a typical decadence style, causing something of a stir with her representations of feminine erotic desire. She wrote the first Swedish decadence novel, *Bertha Funcke* (1885), and Sjöblad claims that her short story *Höstdagar* (1888) is one

¹⁵² Ebba Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens kön: Ola Hansson och Laura Marholm* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2007), p. 146.

¹⁵³ C.D. af Wirsén’s *Studier rörande reformerna inom den franska vitterheten under sextonde och nittonde seklen*, Stockholm 1868, p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ Bang worked for the newspaper *Nationaltidende* from November 1879 to March 1884 (Sjöblad, p. 99).

of the most decadent literary works in Scandinavian literature (p. 128). Kleve spent much time with Ola Hansson, on whom Bang's influence is well documented.¹⁵⁵ As a result of a common background and intensive studies of Danish decadence writers, both Kleve and Hansson worked to introduce decadence in Sweden, through their articles in the radical women's journal *Framåt* between 1886 and 1888 (Sjöblad, p. 105, Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens kön*, p. 35). Another of Baudelaire's Swedish admirers was the poet Emil Kleen. In 1898, the same year that he died, he published a long essay on Baudelaire in the periodical *Varia* (Sjöblad, p. 130).

In Norway, Tryggve Andersen and Ragnhild Jølsen might be considered as authors with several decadence works, while Arne Garborg's *Trætte Mænd* (1891; *Tired Men/Weary Men*) is a typical decadence novel.

2.3.2 The Importance of Family and Inheritance

In *Haabløse Slægter*, it is not just the degeneration and fall of the protagonist William Høg that symbolises the degeneration of the nation and society and the uncertainty of human existence. His old and formerly glorious and successful family is also marked by this decline, used throughout the novel as a Naturalistic¹⁵⁶, Darwinist background to William's downward fall. The word 'Darwinist' is actually used in a couple of places in the text (pp. 137, 201). As the last male member of the Høg family, it is his female relatives' and his own highest wish and ambition to restore its former glory. 'Noget stort vilde han være – maatte han, det var nødvendigt for Slægten. Alle hans Tanker kredsede om denne Storhed, der smuldrede i den gamle Klosterkirke' (He wanted to become someone great – he had to, it was necessary for the family. All his thoughts were occupied with this greatness that rotted in the old abbey church) (*Haabløse*, p. 56). William thus wants to restore something already buried and gone, wants to wake up the family's glory from its eternal sleep. The once glorious family's importance in the novel is underlined by the title of the novel, which could be translated as 'Families without hope' (*haabløse* is a pun which can be interpreted as both 'hopeless' and 'without hope'). The family and the representations of its last members, their failures and hereditary illnesses indicate the deterministic value universe of the novel. William, who wants to restore the family glory, struggles to realise his ambitions but must fail, as

¹⁵⁵ See for example E. Ekelund, *Ola Hanssons ungdomsdiktning* (Helsingfors, 1930).

¹⁵⁶ The naturalist writers tried, with Zola as their model, to make creative writing as 'scientific' as possible. The text should be 'objective' and not reflect the author's personal fantasy or ideas, but rather show the conformity of human existence to natural laws, and let life itself moralise.

his genes are not good enough. It is worth noting that in *Haabløse Slægter* only male action and success count. All those ancestors buried in the church are men, (*Haabløse*, p. 55); there is no mention of where the women of the family might be buried.

Although William has two sisters, the responsibility for ‘becoming something’ rests on his shoulders alone, with the sisters as worried and encouraging but passive onlookers. A female poet earlier in the family history is rather seen as unfortunate, someone who contributed to the slow decline of the family.

The protagonist is closely tied to the family and its hopes and demands, while this old, noble family is closely linked to the nation. The Høg family has both served and murdered Danish kings for six hundred years, ‘de var jo Kæmper, der havde tømret Danmarks Trone’ (they were warriors that had built the Danish throne) (*Haabløse*, p. 125). One of the most intense scenes in the book is where William’s sister accuses him of being like their father: ‘Du ligner Fa’er!’ (You’re so like Father!) (p.99). William is deeply shaken by her accusation; he wants to escape the madness and fragility of the father he feared and disliked.

Haabløse Slægter made use of popular naturalist and determinist concepts of the time to present William as hereditarily determined by the sickness and weakness of a nearly extinct family. He struggles heroically against Fate for a while before he, ruined by Eva Hatzfeldt, becomes decadent and finally fades away.

2.3.3 Demonic Femininity

At the *fin de siècle*, when women started to organise and openly resist men’s efforts to keep them within their appointed place in the patriarchal hegemony, there was no shortage of demon women in art and literature, disturbing the ‘natural’ patriarchal gender order and usurping masculine power. Dijkstra writes:

[M]en’s cultural campaign to educate their mates, frustrated by women’s ‘inherently perverse’ unwillingness to conform, escalated into what can truthfully be called a war on woman [...]. [T]his was a war largely fought on the battlefield of words and images.

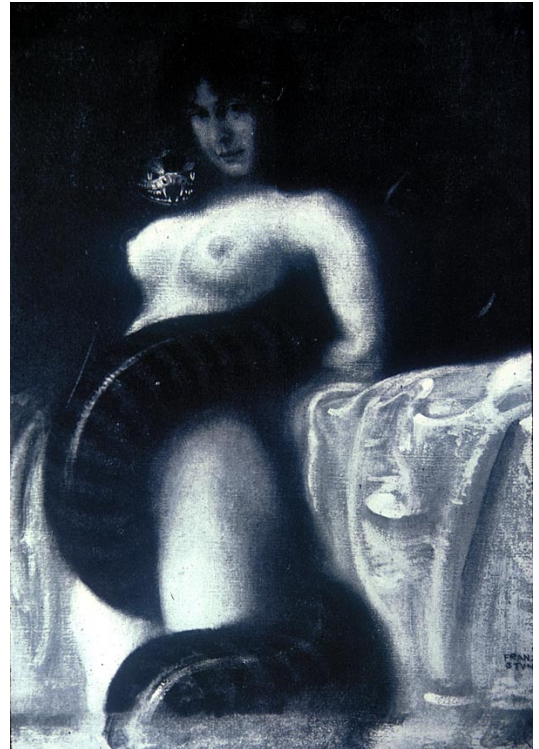
(Dijkstra, p. vii).

In *Idols of Perversity*, Dijkstra convincingly presents how the arts have represented women from the mid-1800s to just after the *fin de siècle*. Starting out with representing women as pure and self-sacrificing, child-like ‘household nuns’, then moving on to

representing women as sick or dying, male artists and writers later depicted women as sexually available. Thereafter, women in art and literature were often represented as sexually charged man-eaters, lesbians, paedophiles and vampires, such as Edvard Munch's 'Vampire' (1895/1902), Franz von Stuck's 'Sensuality' (1897), showing a naked woman encircled by an enormous snake, Carlos Schwabe's 'Medusa' (1895) and Georges Callot's 'Sleep' (1895), representing lesbian love.



*Edvard Munch (1863-1944) 'Vampire'
1895/1902, woodcut and lithograph*



*Franz von Stuck (1863-1928)
'Sensuality' (1897)*



Carlos Schwabe (1866-1926) 'Medusa' (1895)



Georges Callot (1857-1903) 'Sleep' (1895)

Schopenhauer, having published his works about fifty years earlier, suddenly became the rage among Symbolists and Decadents in the 1880s and 1890s, after having been translated into French. '[T]he stinging defeat of the Franco-Prussian war and its aftermath [...] made him particularly satisfying to the morbid, the disillusioned, and the bohemian', writes Shehira Doss-Davezac, referring to Schopenhauer's pessimism.¹⁵⁷ Maybe a parallel with the Franco-Prussian war can be drawn with the traumatic, massive loss of Danish territory to Germany in 1864. Schopenhauer was openly misogynist, arguing that women were innately stupid, false, treacherous *et cetera*. 'Expressing certain fears of sex and castration, [symbolist and decadence works] convey a prevalent attitude towards women felt by an entire generation of young artists and poets', comments Doss-Davezac (p. 252). This attitude colours some of the Scandinavian art and literature of the period too.

Following the misogynist 'scientific' works of for example Weininger and Möbius, men were seen as creative and intellectual beings, while women were seen as purely physical, as being only their bodies and as totally ruled by sexual instincts. What they best understood in a man was his least evolved element: his sexuality. This was what women would use to bring men down to their own low level on the evolutionary scale. 'Thus woman became a nightmare emanation from man's distant, pre-evolutionary past, ready at any moment to use the animal attraction of her physical beauty to waylay the late nineteenth-century male in his quest for spiritual perfection', Dijkstra writes ironically (p. 240). In other words, men were afraid of feminine sexuality. The sexual relationships between the genders *were* complicated at the time; before marrying a woman of their own class, middle-class men who wanted sex would use prostitutes. They ran a very real risk of becoming infected with syphilis (at this time an incurable, deadly disease), and men who had used prostitutes sometimes infected their wives too. Sexual desire could thus be linked to death.

In *fin de siècle* culture *darkness* was a recurring metaphor for degeneration, chaos, instincts, savagery and femininity (as contrasted to light, progress, order, rationality, civilisation, masculinity). Decadence style mixed the morbid and the erotic into a consummate aesthetic where the concepts of femaleness – sexuality – death were closely connected. The woman with a snake coiled around her, the lesbian, the androgynous man-woman, the vampire, the *femme fatale* – they were all variations of

¹⁵⁷ Shehira Doss-Davezac, 'Schopenhauer According to the Symbolists: The Philosophical Roots of Late Nineteenth-century French Aesthetic Theory', in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. by Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 249-276 (pp. 249-50).

the same threat (Johannisson, p. 206). The pre-evolutionary darkness represented the feminine mind, tugging the transcendent, light-aspiring masculine mind downwards. The fact that first wave feminism was at the same time successfully creating a debate about social reforms, and the fact that women were rapidly stepping into public space and the labour market, frightened many people, who saw these changes as a relaxation of the hitherto rigid gender roles.

2.3.4 Textual Representation of the Feminine in *Haabløse Slægter*

While Bang was early in creating his characters for *Haabløse Slægter*, they certainly represent the cultural climate of *fin de siècle* decadence. Some of the female characters are highly dangerous destroyers of masculinity, strictly profiled against the ‘good’, conventional women in the novel. The male characters are weak and fading, showing none or very little determination, action and will. Bang’s homosexuality did not, at least not in his early works, produce a less rigid version of the male authors’ conventional representation of the feminine at the time, according to Ahlund (*Medusas...*, p. 38). Rather, in *Haabløse Slægter* one finds one of Scandinavian *fin de siècle* literature’s strongest expressions of women’s changing roles: the dreaded split into the whore and the madonna, or more specifically, the *femme fatale* and the *femme fragile*. The many literary *femme fatales* and Medusas of the time are phantasms, and, as Ahlund points out, say more about masculine minds than about feminine (*Medusas...*, p. 52).

One of the textual strategies for representing the feminine in *Haabløse Slægter* is profiling two fundamentally different types of women against each other. On the one hand we have the androgynous Eva and Kamilla characters, who are represented as perverse, erotically corrupt, non-creative and parasitic. On the other hand there are the ‘good’, conventional women in the novel; William’s sisters and Margrethe Blom, whom William courts for a while. They are young, innocent maidens destined to become wives and mothers. They are represented as non-creative/passive and parasitic too, in that they just sit vacantly waiting for a suitor. Eva is sharply contrasted with the ‘decent’ young middle-class family girls in the novel. Eva is ‘old’, they are young. Eva’s background is enigmatic, theirs are transparent. Eva is an experienced lover who chooses her own sexual partners, while the family girls must remain virgins until they are married. While Eva travels and has sexual relationships, the young middle-class women cannot allow themselves to make even the smallest social mistake, or they will not be able to marry. The young women are, and will remain, legally and economically

subordinate to men, while Eva is an economically independent widow who answers to no one and who rather dominates men than the other way round. The dualism virgin – whore, or saint – vampire is clearly underlined in the contrast between the different types of woman in the novel. The young virgins are waiting for favourable marriages when they will become a man's legal property. Eva (and Kamilla) have denied men's ownership claims on them, declining to follow the gender script, and are transformed into pre-evolutionary predators.

Another textual strategy for representing the feminine is in line with decadence misogynist perceptions. Eva and Kamilla are both represented as non-human through their transformation into animal shapes, such as the snake. Eva and Kamilla are not the only ones to be de-humanised: William Høg becomes another example, although this change does not take place until he has been 'contaminated' with femininity. In terms of the representation of femininity, this gender contamination constitutes another strategy of femininity representation: Eva in particular carries a strongly contagious femininity. 'Her' young men are robbed of their masculinity and left weak and passive. Eva's vampire traits will be discussed in greater detail below.

A fundamental trait of decadence literature is that the women are strong while the men are weak. But instead of just creating clichéd decadence characters, placed in firm gender positions, Bang has produced characters that twist, bend and escape all efforts to place them at one end or the other of the binary gender poles. Their thin varnish of gender is revealed as performance, in line with Butler's analysis, and they change masks as they transgress the gender boundaries.

2.4 Boundaries

Haabløse Slægter has much to do with boundaries. It is not only the boundaries of femininity, masculinity, non-normative sexuality and social morality that are being discussed, but one can also discern a preoccupation with physical boundaries.

The early emergence of this Danish decadence novel may have been triggered, as mentioned, by a question of physical borders. In 1864, Denmark lost two fifths of its land area and a third of its inhabitants to Germany as spoils of war. Bang, who was seven years old in 1864, was born on the island of Als, which came under Prussian rule. Bang's childhood landscape ended up on the 'wrong' side of the border, and was lost to

him forever.¹⁵⁸ As Axel Lindén points out, several of Bang's novels refer openly to the end of the war and the loss of territory, and to a negative atmosphere generally spread among the Danes after 1864.¹⁵⁹ Tired after the war and disappointed with the loss of territory, the Danes felt their nation was declining and had little hope for the future. Through the importance of the Høg family, closely linked to the nation, the degeneration of William Høg also represents the degeneration of Denmark.

In *Haabløse Slægter*, the crossings of many types of borders are represented, such as those between childhood and adulthood, between social classes, between past and present, between life and death, between sanity and madness and between human and animal. The crossing of boundaries between human and animal is used to represent the feminine and its contamination of the masculine in the novel, an idea which I will return to.

This analysis will concentrate on the boundaries crossed by the ambiguous main characters in their refusal to adhere to the gender boundaries set by the society of which they are part. It may be said that these characters threaten to dissolve social boundaries by transgressing them to such an extent that they almost ignore them.

Of these characters, the main focus will be on Eva Hatzfeldt. She can be characterised as a 'monster woman', a female character who transgresses the 'feminine script', that is, refuses to conform to the patriarchal discourse on femininity, and who revolts against cultural expectations of what women should be. Toril Moi defines the monster woman as 'the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her'.¹⁶⁰ A woman who does not conform to the dominant discourse on femininity is labelled as 'unnatural' and 'unfeminine'. Transgressive women are incomprehensible, as "'persons'" only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility', writes Butler (*Gender Trouble*, p. 22).

¹⁵⁸ Bang, who died in 1912, would never experience the Germans handing back most of Jutland in 1920, although they kept Slesvig-Holstein.

¹⁵⁹ Axel Lindén, 'Herman Bang och gränser' in Clas Zilliacus et als (eds.), *Borders in Nordic Literature IASS XXVI 2006, Vol II* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 2008), 459-465 (p. 459).

¹⁶⁰ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 57.

2.5 The Non-human Femininity and Its Contagiousness

Eva Hatzfeldt carries the same name as the Biblical Eve, the very first woman, who together with the snake is claimed to have caused humankind's fall from Paradise. Eva Hatzfeldt, however, has gone even further than our Biblical foremother. She is in cahoots with the devil, claiming young men's bodies and souls, feeding herself on their lives to be able to live forever. She is a *femme fatale*, a demon, a snake, a vampire woman.

The word *Slangelokker* (snake locks) is not the only reference to snakes in connection with Eva (and Kamilla) in the novel. The name Eva has long been connected with treachery against men and God. It was the Biblical snake that persuaded Eve to taste the fruit. The Eva character in *Haabløse Slægter* on several occasions takes the physical form of a snake: apart from wearing her hair in 'slangeaktige Lokker' (snakelike tresses) (*Haabløse*, p. 283), her arms move playfully over the keyboard of the piano like 'Slanger, der boltrede sig' (snakes that twisted) (*Haabløse*, p. 280). 'In the evil, bestial implications of her beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself', Dijkstra comments on art and literature of the time (p. 305). Both Eva and Kamilla, or parts of their bodies, are on several occasions referred to as snakelike. They are 'woman' turned into the snake, the temptress, the devil. An example of the representation of the feminine body as snakelike is demonstrated in the passage below, where William has just broken with his first lover, Kamilla.

Hun faldt halvt om, men i samme Nu havde hun rejst sig igen, paa Skraa, med Hænderne halvt skjulende Ansigtet, bøjet som et saaret Dyr, saa hun paa ham, mens Læberne lukkede sig om et kvalt Skrig. Og halvt krybende, stadig med løftede Hænder, som om hun frygtede for usynlige Slag, ligbleg, bøjet, slæbende sig frem, som knuget af en unævnelig Rædsel, stirrende paa ham bag de løftede Hænder, flygtede Kamilla ræd --

(*Haabløse*, p. 162).

The passage gives an impression of how an enchanted fairytale monster, being banished from the young man's life, dissolves before his eyes, throwing off her disguise and returning to her natural state of animal, snake, dragon. Many misogynist scientists, philosophers and artists of the time actually viewed women as primeval animals beneath a thin layer of cultural varnish. The female characters in *Haabløse Slægter*

literally slither and twist across the boundary between snake and human, between animal and human, between nature and culture.

But the novel does not only point to the Biblical myth: the Medusa figure of the Greek myth is also connected to Eva and her '*slangeaktige lokker*'. Medusa, the decadence metaphor of castration (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 93, Ahlund, *Medusas...*, pp. 53-54), petrified anyone who dared to meet her eye, and one can easily connect the Eva character with Medusa: the young men who dare to have a sexual encounter with Eva are made passive, and ruined forever. They die a metaphorical death, dominated by the Medusa. Witt-Brattström writes that decadence literature overflows with Medusa heads, but that scholars everywhere miss the obvious gender code (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 96). She explains Medusa as representing the phallic, all-powerful mother who is the deep, subconscious fear of masculinity. The phallic mother 'contaminates' masculinity with femininity through her greater power. This contamination is often symbolised through the representation of syphilis, the female reproductive organs or the sexual act. The phallic mother as Medusa surfaced in literature in the 1880s when women expanded their physical, legal and cultural space. Witt-Brattström comments that the son's fantasies about the phallic mother seem to be a recurrent motif in art, literature, science and philosophy around the *fin de siècle* (*Dekadensens...*, p. 97).¹⁶¹ Men wished to retain their boundaries against women and the feminine. It was thanks to these boundaries that they could construct masculinity and a masculine identity. In literature of the time one can discern a fear of the blurring of the gender boundaries: in decadence texts by male authors this is often expressed as the masculine or male characters being 'contaminated' by femininity.¹⁶²

Villy Sørensen's argument in his foreword to Bang's novel that it is Danish literature's most penetrating analysis of the Oedipus complex might be relevant here (Sørensen, p. 13). William Høg's very close, almost incestuous relationship with his mother runs like an undercurrent through the novel, at the same time as he fears and dislikes his father. William's attraction to much older women can be seen as a continuation of the relationship with his mother after she died. Bang treats pre-

¹⁶¹ In for example Ola Hansson's works, the Medusa head is connected with the female reproductive organ and connoted with 'gender contamination', Witt-Brattström points out, and argues that works like these probably later inspired Freud to his theory of the Medusa head as a symbol of castration fear. Ahlund connects the Medusa with the fear of the empty and unknown: the non-existence of God (*Medusas...*, p. 191).

¹⁶² Witt-Brattström also notes that the combination of women and flowers connotes gender contamination (*Dekadensens...*, p. 126).

psychoanalytic themes in his book long before Freud, and he was not the only Scandinavian writer to do so, which will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter.

Eva Hatzfeldt is a *femme fatale*, a staple commodity in decadence literature. Her erotic fatality is first signalled by the information that her elderly husband died shortly after having married her, unable to endure such strong sensory impressions (*Haabløse*, p. 234). (William's own father also dies a few days after having had a relationship with Eva when he and William travel to Berlin.) The *femme fatale* loves herself through the love of men, but she does not love them back, she just greedily devours love, and she is insatiable. Mario Praz gives a description of the *femme fatale* and her prey that could have been specifically written for *Haabløse Slægter*:

[T]he lover is usually a youth, and maintains a passive attitude; he is obscure, and inferior either in condition or in physical exuberance to the woman, who stands in the same relation to him as the female spider [...] sexual cannibalism is her monopoly.¹⁶³

Praz defines the young lover as being devoured by the *femme fatale*, using the term 'sexual cannibalism', likening her to a female spider that devours her own mate. Eva devours her prey and drains it of its masculinity. These traits do not only connote the female spider, but also the vampire.

2.6 The Vampire

The vampire woman was quite common in literature at the time. Apart from the regular vampire stories, in which there literally *were* vampire women, vampire traits were applied to female characters, even in highbrow literature. Strindberg, for example, created a string of female vampire characters such as Laura in *Fadren*, the cook in *Spöksonaten*, Amelie in *Moderskärlek* and Elise in *Pelikanen*. They all usurp masculine power, taking what is not rightfully theirs. Even the Maria character in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* starts out as a madonna and ends up as something of a vampire, according to Stefanie von Schnurbein. She points out that Maria stands out as a lesbian and perverse vampire with the power to destroy both husband and family (p. 39). Attiring women with vampire traits was quite common, also in combination with lesbianism. The

¹⁶³ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 3rd ed., trans. by Angus Davidson (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 215.

traditional authority of *pater familias* was threatened by women represented as vampires and parasites in literature, Fraunhofer suggests (p. 130).

Like the vampire's background, Eva's too is enigmatic and suspect, and the rumours about her are so unbelievable, they surely cannot be true?

Hvem vilde vel tro den Fabel, at Grevinde von Hatzfeldt var blevet utjaget af Rom af Sædelighedspolitiet? eller at hun havde maattet forlade St. Petersborg, fordi hun blev indviklet i en Skandalproces mellem Fader og Søn, hvori det oplystes, at Grevinden havde været meget elskværdig mod dem begge? eller at Fruen i Madrid havde staaet i Forhold til en Tyrefægter, og at det Ar paa hendes Hals, hun altid skjulte saa behændigt med Kniplinger eller Smykker, at det blev til en ny Tillokkelse, skyldtes hans brutale Tugtelse?
(*Haabløse...*, pp. 282-83).

The narrator lets a collective voice tell of the '*utrolige*' (incredible) rumours, without being able to confirm their veracity. Eva's past, like the vampire's, is hidden behind a smokescreen. In the passage above, the text itself points to the constructedness of the Eva character, while Kamilla is more realistically represented. It is as if the text is showcasing Eva as the evasive monster woman, the narration denying the reader any understanding of her character and actions. It is through keeping the distance that she can be represented as monstrous. Part of the textual strategy of making Eva the Other, is never allowing the reader to get to know her, always representing her actions from the outside, focalised through other characters who may not understand them. Even after having become her lover, William never gets to know her.

[H]an joges rundt nu som da uden at finde Bund, uten at finde Grund, uten at kende hende, han elskede, uden at modtage noget for, hvad han gav...

Thi bag Kyssene, bag Kærtegnene, bag Nydelserne... boede Tomheden eller intet eller... [---]

Maanederne var gaaet paa Jagten efter den sande Besiddelse af denne Kvinde, som bestendig forskellig altid forbausede ham.

(*Haabløse*, p. 291)

Eva, the *femme fatale*, is an empty shell behind her beautiful physical appearance, a monster containing a nothingness which she needs to fill with what she can take from her lovers. William stares down her emptiness, throwing in love until he is drained and

useless, never getting anything back. Eva's emptiness represents the pre-evolutionary nothingness of femininity, dragging the transcendency (spirituality) of masculinity downwards into it, swallowing up its civilising light.

The scene can also be interpreted more practically as Eva taking on a traditionally masculine role, the one in which the man is seen as 'only interested in one thing', while William takes on a traditional feminine role where the woman seeks an emotional relationship. In this case, the gender performance contradicts normative gender behaviour.

Another vampire trait in Eva is that she does not age normally. She has a kind of timeless beauty that does not fade. When William, himself much aged both physically and mentally, at the end of the novel sees her at the theatre with another young man (her latest lover), Eva has not aged at all. Her 'snake locks' and beautiful bosom are the same as ever (*Haabløse*, p. 341). She is like a marble statue; cold and beautiful, but not alive. This might be seen as a misogynist representation of femininity as externally attractive but inwardly empty; incapable of developing, learning or changing. Presumably, Eva must be middle-aged. But as in the case of the ageless vampire, nobody knows:

Ingen vidste, hvor gammel Grevinde Eva Hatzfeldt var, nogle mente fem og tredive, andre fyrre; hendes Beundrere paastod, hun umuligt kunde være mere end tredive, onskapsfulde Medbejlersker og et Par Medlemmer af det engelske Gesandskab, med hvilken Ambassade Grevinden havde adskillig ikke opklaret Forbindelse, vilde mene, at den smukke Dame allerede var højt over de fyrre.

(*Haabløse*, p. 281)

Whether Eva is thirty or much more than forty is not really the point. The point is that in the eyes of her fellow citizens, she is considered much too old for the young men with whom she has sexual relationships. This is also illustrated in another part of the novel, when a friend of the twenty-eight-year-old Kamilla sees her with the seventeen-year-old William:

“Saa,” sagde Præstens Frue ind i Stuen til sin Datter, da William en Dag gik forbi med Frøken Falk, ”nu har hun da faaet et nyt Menneske.”

Frøken Kristine fo'r til Vinduet. ”Men nu er han sytten Aar,” sagde hun spidst, mens hun besvarede Venindens Hilsen og saa' efter dem. ”Tilsidst maa Kamilla vist lære sine Trældyr at tale rent...”

(*Haabløse...*, p. 138)

The contemptuous comments give us an insight into how both the older woman and the boy are perceived. ‘She has a new human’ is expressed in the same way one would say ‘she has a new dog’, implying that William resembles a pet in his and Kamilla’s relationship. This, and the word *Trældyr* (slave) defines the relation in terms of age difference: being older, the woman is assumed to be taking the initiative, leaving the young man deprived of his masculinity, as nothing but a passive slave. In the power relation with her lovers, Eva displays none of the traits expected of a woman at the time. There is never any question of anyone but Eva being in total control of the relationship.

[William] var blevet en Slave, mens han søgde, fra et Barn var han blevet en Dreng. Og for alt, hvad han havde mistet, havde han intet faaet til Gengæld – – Han saa, at han aldrig havde været en Mand i denne Elskov, aldrig; at han aldrig havde hævdet sig, at han først havde været et forskræmt Barn, siden en Slave; at han havde været uformuende i denne Kærlighed – –

Nu var han en Haremsdreng, der tjente en østerlandsk Kvinde, som han kun kendte tilsløret, som han havde favnet, aldrig faaet Lov til at elske – – .

(*Haabløse...*, p. 293)

William sees himself as a slave in his and Eva’s relationship, as a boy odalisque in an oriental woman’s harem. This makes explicit the reversed distribution of power between them. An oriental harem is always owned by a man, and the women there are totally in his power. By naming himself the odalisque/slave and Eva his master, William brutally exposes how their gender roles are turned upside down. Again, there is no pinning the characters down on a traditional gender binary scale, they step into one another’s gender roles. They cannot be placed into masculine or feminine roles as strictly defined by the heteronormative discourse of the time.

Kamilla too has vampire traits, as she emotionally (rather than sexually) exploits young men’s initial feelings of romantic love. Her constant play with the fire that burns finger tips rather than allowing herself a forbidden passion will later be inherited by

Kleve's and Hansson's decadent female protagonists: 'denne evige Leflen med og Befølen af Lidenskaben, hvori hun hendrev sit Liv, havde virket paa hendes Sind som en Drik Saltvand, der kun vækker Tørst og gjør Læberne tørre' (this everlasting occupation with passion had influenced her mind like a drink of salt water, which only increases the thirst and makes the lips dry) (*Haabløse...*, p. 140). Instead, she turns to younger and younger men, in order to drain them of their first love: 'denne Leg med unge Mænds første længselsfulde Hjertebanken var blevet Frøken Kamilla en ren Sport' (these games with young men's hearts had become a sport for *frøken* Kamilla) (*Haabløse...*, p. 141). A *femme fatale*, in other words, playing with and devastating young hearts. She is made suspect by the comment that in spite of her beauty and her father's wealth she has never married (*Haabløse...*, p. 140). 'Kamilla Falk var meget omtalt: hendes Veninder afskyede hende, Mændene betragtede hende med Mistro' (Kamilla Falk was much spoken about: her female friends detested her and men viewed her with suspicion) (*Haabløse...*, p. 139). Kamilla does not fit into the feminine script, and is thus disliked by both women and men, who do not know what to make of her. Transgressing the normative gender boundaries, Kamilla and Eva choose and seduce lovers that are legally children, something that middle-aged men might have done, but that certainly was not acceptable feminine behaviour at the time. Once they have exploited the young men to the full, they discard them for someone new.

Eva as a 'sperm vampire' is illustrated in the following passage:

Saaledes holdt hun ham fast. Som man, naar man presser en Citron til et Glas Sukkervand, blot af Irritation, fordi man vil tage den sidste Draabe, [m]an beholder den i Haanden nogle Øjeblikke endnu, inden man kaster den hen – saaledes holdt Eva Hatzfeldt endnu paa William Høg, mens han udtørredes under sin egen Lede.

(*Haabløse...*, p. 294)

As Dijkstra has put it, 'writers and painters, the learned and the modish alike, had been indoctrinated to regard all women who no longer conformed to the image of the household nun as vicious, bestial creatures, representative of a pre-evolutionary, instinctual past' (pp. 324-25), and the Eva character illustrates this point. She sucks the masculinity out of the young men who become her lovers. This is how her former lover Bernhard Hoff, a successful playwright, is represented, focalised through William:

Men lidt efter lidt faldt han sammen. Han satte Kikkerten fra sig paa Bordet og sad med Hovedet støttet paa Armen bøjet ud over Balustraden. Trækkene var fuldstændig slappe, askegraa, Figuren sank sammen under en Byrde af Træthed. Der var noget uddødt over den hele Fremtoning.

Alle Folk saa' op paa ham, men han lagde ikke Mærke dertil. [---]

Der var kun ét, som undrede [William]. Hoff var jo misundt, tjente flere Penge end nogen anden, levede som han havde Lyst til, dikterede sin Forlægger Betingelser, hvad var der saa bagved? Hvad var han snublet over?

(*Haabløse...*, p. 222)

It is Eva that Hoff has ‘tripped over’, as William shall find out later. And before Eva has finished with William, he will have become just like Hoff: grey, mortally tired, passive and disillusioned, with all his youthful energy sucked up by his vampire lover. The lovers Eva chooses are talented young artists: Hoff is a writer, William an actor and Jansen a painter. This is no coincidence – Eva, as a woman, is seen to have no creativity of her own according to dominant discourses of the time, and now she drains her victims of their masculine creativity. This loss of masculinity makes the young men more effeminate, which is clearly illustrated through Bernhard Hoff. He is represented as artificially feminine, putting on makeup in his perfumed boudoir, a typically feminine space. In his rooms he keeps a statue of Antinous, a reference to homosexuality.¹⁶⁴ According to the ‘scientific’ discourses of the time, his homosexuality may well be due to Eva’s contamination, as she has robbed him of his masculinity, and homosexual men were seen as effeminate while lesbian women were believed to be masculine. Fraunhofer comments that even if masculine willpower always has been a foundational trait of modernity (in contrast to feminine lenience and passivity), it was given a central role in the definition of masculinity at the end of the nineteenth century (p. 139).

Eva drains Bernhard of his masculinity, which is why William finds him passive and without energy and drive. Bernhard has turned ‘feminine’. The following passage shows how William in his turn is drained of everything constituting contemporary masculinity: creativity, energy, sexual drive *et cetera*. Instead William is transformed into the inhuman/animal/feminine:

¹⁶⁴ Antinous was Emperor Adrianus’ favourite male lover.

Saa kunde han standse midt under sine Kærtegn, og mens han stirrede paa hende, kom der noget sløvt og døende over hans Blik, noget angstfuldt, noget som i et Dyrs Øjekast, der er sunket i Knæ for en indvendig Forblødning... Det kunde komme pludseligt, midt som de sad, og hans Hænder, som laa slynget om hendes Hals, faldt slapt ned, og Flammen i hans Øjne slukkedes...

Grevinden saa det, og hans Slappelse pirrede hende.

Saa blev hun den søgende, hun den æggende, hun *vilde* tænde hans Blik, vække ham, bryde Dvalen.

(*Haabløse...*, p. 292)

Although the bleeding referred to here is internal, one immediately connects the word *Forblødning* (bleeding to death) with a vampire. Here, William loses his soul, he is reduced to an animal, the word *Forblødning* also connoting an animal being slaughtered. He falls from the position of man, master of the universe, to a position even lower than that of a woman or a child, namely to that of an animal. His energy, his sexual drive is drained, he is weak and limp. Taking over the sexually active role from William, Eva at the same time drains him of his masculinity and creativity, as the image of internal bleeding symbolises. As mentioned, gender contamination in decadence literature is generally connected with the sex act or the female sexual organs. In *Haabløse Slægter*, it is in the lovemaking process that William is contaminated with femininity, sinking to the level of an animal.

In this context it might be interesting to note that William 'loses his voice' about the time when he meets Eva. His well-sounding has been one of the assets he has relied on when hoping to become an actor. In the end, it will be his voice that fails him, it 'dies' (pp. 169, 352). Having a voice can traditionally be seen as masculine, women did not have a (public) voice. William losing his voice can therefore be seen as part of the de-masculinisation which starts when he comes under Eva's influence.

The vampire is a dead being, artificially staying alive century after century through sucking the blood from the living. Eva wrings all masculine energy from her victims, and so keeps ever young and beautiful. The vampire is by tradition male, even if the woman vampire became popular as a motif in *fin de siècle* literature and art. As a vampire, Eva transgresses the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, of light and darkness, of life and death.

2.7 Non-reproduction and its Punishment

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the representation of the androgyne changes in a negative and pessimistic direction, culminating in decadence literature, writes Ahlund (*Medusas...*, p. 81). In literary decadence, the androgyne is depicted as a representative of evil and vice, associated with various sexual perversions and with a destructive sterility. This is the case in *Haabløse Slægter* too, where none of the four androgynous characters reproduce.

A common theme in Bang's texts is that characters who cannot, or will not, reproduce tend to die, literally or metaphorically. Heede points out that each transgression of the reproductive norm of the heterosexual nuclear family results in resignation, disappearance or death (Heede, *Herman...*, p. 18). While on an explicit level Bang always seems to celebrate reproduction as the meaning of life, he never attaches focus and reader identification to heterosexually reproductive characters, but always to characters that do not contribute physically to their family's continuation (Heede, *Herman...*, p. 24).

Reading those important characters as homosexuals gives one explanation for their inability to reproduce. As mentioned above, another explanation may be their androgyneity, their inability or unwillingness to fulfil the gender script. William Høg, for example, does not reproduce which following the Bang text pattern means that he 'disappears' in the closure of the novel. Eva Hatzfeldt does not reproduce either. However, in spite of refusing to do so, she does not die in the novel but lives on, beautiful and unchanged as ever, with a new boy by her side. Is she allowed this because she is already dead, a 'living dead' like the vampire? She does not need to reproduce to continue living because she lives on the life she sucks from the young people in her power, and they must die a symbolic death in her place.

One might on the other hand read the Kamilla Falk character as a kind of reproduction of Eva. Kamilla is Eva's younger, weaker, twin character, showing the same tendency as Eva to yearn for very young men, and transgressing class and gender boundaries through her behaviour. In the novel it is obvious the two know each other, and even come together at social events.

Eva's refusal to reproduce by having children represents her as a *femme fatale* and monster woman, refusing the gender script. She turns heterosexual marriage upside down and transforms it into a distorted image. She does not behave like a woman at all.

She may, as Heede claims, be a homosexual man through her refusal to reproduce, or simply a non-woman. She may also be read as a lesbian, as illustrated by her desire for William to dress up as a woman, and her sexual interest in his young sisters. Again, Eva defies all efforts to place her on a binary gender pole. She slides in and out of the gender roles she plays, refusing to connect her erotic desire to her biological body in the heteronormative way.

2.8 Pathological Sexuality

Eva displays a whole range of erotic desires which would have been considered as perverse at the time: homosexuality, cross-dressing, paedophilia and incest. She shows sexual interest in both boys and girls. Not only does she choose young male lovers, she also lusts for William's sisters.

“Grevinden har vist os megen Venlighed,” Tonen [William's] var kort, og der var en let Streg paa os.

“Naa – Deres Søstre osse,” Hoff holdt inde, gik lidt igen, sagde saa alvorligere: “Mon det er rigtigt.”

”Hvilket?”

”At lade Deres Søstre komme hos Grevinde Hatzfeldt.” Hoff slog Asken af Cigaretten.

William blev først bleg, saa meget rød. Han følte sig truffet, vidste ikke, hvad han skulde svare.

”Ja, for forstaar De, bedste Høg, at De – men...” Hoff saa' som tilfældig over til Høgs side...

(*Haabløse...*, p. 297)

Having been Eva's lover and knowing her well, Hoff tries to warn William of her interest in his sisters. What Hoff tries to express is so grotesque that it cannot be said explicitly. Hoff's speech ends in an unfinished sentence. But William reacts testily: ‘Grevinden er en Veninde af vor Familje’ (*Grevinden* is a friend of the family) (*Haabløse...*, p. 297). And a ‘friend’ of the family she is, having been the lover of William's father, now being William's lover, and demanding to spend more and more time with his young sisters.

Read, then, as a female character, Eva would be a lesbian or bisexual. Read as a male character, as Heede does, she would be a gay man. Either would have been considered pathological at the time. According to the heteronormative definition, a person's gender is defined by their erotic desire for a person of the opposite gender. With Eva's sexuality being androgynous, her gender cannot be defined this way. In this she undermines heteronormativity. Butler writes:

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.

(Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31)

Refusing to take her place on the binary gender scale, refusing to stick to erotic desire only for men as her body is biologically female and choosing also sexual partners who are feminised men and women, Eva ignores the rules of heteronormativity and thus disrupts the binary construction of gender. Neither of the two gender identities available at the time covers her (in reality, the only gender identity available for a person with a female body would have been the heterosexual feminine). She must have been seen as a decadent, wicked and frightening character, as illustrated by the novel's reception among critics and censorship authorities.

Eva is also a paedophile. The boys she devours and sucks all life from are generally only sixteen when they become her lovers, and she seldom keeps them for longer than a year or so, as it is not a mature, equal partner she is looking for. And William's sisters, in whom she shows a strong interest, are both young and sexually inexperienced, hardly more than children. In the passage below, Hoff reveals to William that he too had been Eva's lover when he was sixteen:

"Jeg var seksten Aar," sagde saa Hoff. Det blev meddelt ganske tørt, som et simpelt Faktum. Og Tonen var den samme, da han tilføjede: "Grevinden holder saa meget af Børn."

De gik ned langs med Nyboder, ingen af dem talte. Hoff tog igen Cigaretter frem, tændte, William ventede. Saa gik de videre. Da de kom til Gernersgade, drejede en Ekvipage om fra Toldbodevejen.

Hoff hilste ærbødig.

William saa ikke op, spurgte halvt tankeløst: "Hvem var det?"

"Det var Grevinden – med den unge Jansen."

William vendte sig med et Ryk. Han saa Grevindens graa Hat, Maleren sat ved Siden af hende paa Forsædet.

”Aa,” sagde Hoff, ”Jansen er et smukt Talent og – et robust ungt Menneske.”

(*Haabløse...*, p. 298)

The ironic phrase ‘the Countess loves children’ implicitly makes clear that Eva will not keep a lover after a certain age. Just as they speak, Eva proves the point by driving past with the sixteen-year-old Jansen in her carriage – her new lover. He is a talented painter, and in him Eva has found a new source of masculine creativity to drain.

Eva shows no interest in having children of her own. She wants other people’s children, not to mother them, but to devour them. While the dominant discourse of the time promoted a nurturing, unselfish and self-sacrificing mother role as the natural result of ‘true’ femininity, Eva inverts the representation of the good mother into an evil monster mother, into the evil bogey-man parents warn their children of. She is the distorted and perverse image of the good mother, a monstrous female who puts on a show of motherliness in order to capture her victims.

Og mens Grevinden smilede med hans Hoved i sit Skød, arbejdede sig langsomt frem en taarevældende Hulken – –

Og under sin Graad begyndte han at tale, afbrudt, som et Barn til sin Moder. [---]

Manden i William forsvandt i denne styrtende Taarestrom, Viljen skyllede bort. [...]

Og nu, da det var forbi, da Slaget var faldet og havde ramt, nu blev denne Vilje til et Barns Klager, som grædende sukkede i en Kvindes Skød... [---]

Han laa udstrakt paa Panterdækket med Armene om den siddendes Liv; en Gang imellen saa han op. Det var et bedende Barns Blik. [...]

“Barn,” sagde hun.

(*Haabløse...*, pp. 279-80)

Although the seventeen-year old William can discern an erotic atmosphere between himself and Eva, he seeks her out as a child wanting motherly comfort after a huge disappointment, ‘[t]il denne Kvinde klyngede William Høg sig som et klagende Barn, der søger Ly’ (William clung to this woman like a child looking for protection) (*Haabløse...*, p. 284). Eva, however, has long ago pinpointed William as her new lover, and now she resolutely seduces him. Through the panther cover and the heavily perfumed boudoir (the conventional feminine space) the narrator provides the reader

with enough evidence for Eva's foul intentions to make her/him dread the unavoidable closing of the trap behind the young, oblivious William. After the seduction, the narrator laconically comments: 'Det var et Barn, Grevinde Hatzfeldt havde gjort til sin Elsker, og det var Barnets Hjælpeløshed, der havde ført William til hende' (it was a child, the countess had made into her lover, and it was the child's helplessness that had brought William to her) (*Haabløse...*, p. 281). Eva may just as well be a man pretending to be a woman.

'It is their very humanness that comes into question', Butler comments about 'beings who do not appear properly gendered' (*Bodies...*, p. 8). Eva, still wearing the mask of a woman but often lapsing into traditionally masculine behaviour, must be seen as ambiguous with regard to gender. Her punishment is being constantly referred to as animal/non-human in the text. She is totally denied the 'natural and inherent' feminine motherly emotions, and instead represented as a monstrous unfeminine Other, waiting for and finally attacking her prey, which is drawn to her through her performance of motherliness.

Eva's sexual seduction of those who seek safety and shelter with her as a mother can be seen as incest. William turns to her as a child, seeking a mother's comfort, but is seduced. 'Og mens hun trøstede, opelskede hun med Erfarenhedens tusinde Kunstgreb Lidenskaben i det syge Sind' (while she comforted him, she increased passion in his damaged mind with a thousand crafty and experienced devices) (*Haabløse...*, p. 287). The motherliness is just performance, a trap. There is no motherliness in Eva, no femininity in this aspect. She is a 'sphinx', with 'kolde Øjne' (cold eyes) (*Haabløse...*, p. 301). She crosses the boundary of morality, poses as a mother to get her way, and then takes what she wants.

The representation of the monstrous, distorted mother figure is a common image in decadence literature. Witt-Brattström refers to these figures as the result of the New Woman threatening the ancient masculine right of interpretation around the *fin de siècle*. In masculine subconsciousness, this threat would take the form of the castrating great mother goddess, in psychoanalysis referred to as an extremely powerful, phallic, femininity (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 64). The great mother, the source of all living, representing the circle of life and death, is in *Haabløse Slægter* represented through Eva. She is here assigned the role of taking lives instead of giving life. She is the nightmare of traditional hegemonic masculine power; and she cannot be tried in court for her crimes as she does not kill in the conventional sense. Instead she uses her

sex appeal to attract and symbolically kill young men. Traditional masculine lawmaking where women for centuries had been kept in their place, property-less and without human rights, cannot touch Eva. She is the phallic mother who appears from dark pre-evolution to hunt men through their least evolved quality, against which they have no rational defence: sexuality.

2.9 Cross-dressing

A further aspect of Eva's sexuality is that she likes cross-dressing. It is William she makes dress up – as a woman.

Men helst klædte hun ham ud som Kvinde, snart i sine egne Klæder, snart som Kammerpige. Og saa i den fremmede Dragt søgte hun en ny Tiltrækning for sin Attraa, som syntes hende ny i den nye Form...

De rejste lidt hen paa Foraaret bort i nogle Dage, han som hendes Selskabsdame: det morede hende at tilkaste den formummede de halve Smil, som Forklædningen skabte.

(*Haabløse...*, p. 294)

By dressing up William in women's clothes, her own and her maid's, Eva virtually 'unmans' the youth, as Heede expresses it (Heede, *Queering...*, p. 26). It is as if cross-dressing was seen literally to contaminate one gender with the other, as if the other gender's traits were passed on through the clothes worn. Heede interprets Eva's delight in cross-dressing as either a manifestation of her homosexuality or an attempt to demasculinise William further. Butler's theory of gender performance provides us with an even more interesting explanation. In the context of *Haabløse Slægter*, the cross-dressing may then be seen as a continuation of the deconstruction of gender in the novel. William's obviously successful dressing-up as Eva's maid demonstrates how fragile gender is, as it is here performed successfully by William: it is the show put on by its 'wearer' that creates and determines gender. William palpably demonstrates how gender is 'appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done' (Butler, *Imitation...*, p. 21).

The setting where some of the cross-dressing takes place is a dressing room in Eva's house with a large mirror. There are wardrobes along one wall, full of different costumes. The masqueradely state of mind in these characters is underlined by the fact

that Eva has such a room in her house, and that William is so familiar with it and its feminine costumes. Again, the image of the mask is highly relevant.

The gender performance act again undermines the concept of a stable (hetero)sexuality; Eva's erotic desire follows William both as a man and as a (dressed-up) woman. The cross-dressing in the novel exposes the instability of the characters' identities, muddling the concept of stability with regard to both subjectivity and gender/sexuality. Not only can William switch gender as Eva pleases, Eva can desire William sexually no matter which gender he performs. She switches between sexual orientations, effectively undermining the notion that sexual orientation is 'naturally' dependent on gender. Eva does not even bother trying to convince the reader of the 'phantasmic ideal of heterosexual identity', she allows it to fall apart in front of our eyes through refusing to take part in the endless repetition of (one) correct gender. In the text we can literally see how the idealisation of gender and heteronormativity fails, just as Butler predicts.

Of course the cross-dressing in the novel is a form of acting, and the William character has had big hopes for an acting career. Acting was a natural career choice for homosexual men, as being a homosexual was a life-long masquerade anyway, Bang writes in his essay *Gedanken zum Sexualitätsproblem*.¹⁶⁵ In *Haabløse Slægter*, however, the whole, overarching concept of acting can be connected with gender; the creation, maintaining and undermining of gender and sexual identity. It is as if the whole novel questions these concepts, seeing them as acting. William himself acknowledges his queerness when his sister doubts he can become a successful actor because she does not believe he can play the part of the hero. William answers: "Ja, men Herre Gud, jeg har jo sagt dig hundrede Gange, det er heller ikke det, jeg vil... det er andre Roller og... det er slet ikke det, jeg vil spille..." (Oh, my God, I have told you a hundred times that it is not what I want... there are other parts, and... that is not what I want to play...) (*Haabløse...*, p. 174). He does not desire to play the typically masculine part of the hero: he cannot play this part because of his gender-ambiguity. He wants to play other parts. He knows he has to play other parts.

¹⁶⁵ Herman Bang, *Gedanken zum Sexualitätsproblem* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. Weber, 1922), p. 20-21.

2.10 Summary

Haabløse Slægter was published at a time when first-wave feminists were getting their acts together in Western Europe and starting to get organised. At the same time, discourses on gender lagged behind, increasingly dichotomised on a binary gender pole, where the masculine was characterised as for example rational, intellectual, transcendent, creative, active and public while the feminine was viewed as emotional, nurturing, reproductive, imitative, passive and connected with the private sphere (the home). As gender was seen as innate, all efforts to avoid the gender binaries, to escape the gender script, would have been seen as monstrous. Still, this is exactly what some of the characters in *Haabløse Slægter* do.

Haabløse Slægter is an early decadence novel, even from a European perspective, in which the decay and degeneration of modern society and culture are represented through androgynous and perverted characters and the decadent relationship between William Høg and Eva Hatzfeldt. The novel was negatively received by contemporary literary reviewers, who reacted against all four main characters not being properly gendered according to the dominant, heteronormative discourses. *Haabløse Slægter* was prosecuted for ‘indecenty’ and would not be reprinted in its original state until eighty-five years later.

In my reading, the novel is characterised by the deconstruction of the gender binaries, making its main characters difficult to place in the gender dichotomy. Like William Høg, Bernhard Hoff and Kamilla Falk, Eva Hatzfeldt is difficult to pin down as consistently belonging to a specific gender; she displays a wide range of traits, desires and behaviours belonging to both genders. These traits, desires and behaviours amount to repeated transgressions of the gender boundaries. Eva Hatzfeldt wears her femininity like a mask, just as William Høg wears women’s clothes. In other words, these characters demonstrate that gender is performative as highlighted by Butler.

In the manner typical of misogynist decadence Eva is represented as a *femme fatale*, vampire and monster woman, a destroyer and usurper of masculinity. She refuses to follow the feminine script and conform to normative feminine behaviour. She contaminates the young men she devours sexually with femininity, represented through the animal and non-human. Eva vampirically drains them of their masculinity and male creativity. She exemplifies how femininity in *Haabløse Slægter* is represented as non-human/animal, parasitical and contagious.

Instead of using the concept of gender dichotomies, either to promote a return to the conventional patriarchal gender order, as for example Strindberg often did, or to promote radical, essentialist feminism, as for example Ellen Key did, Bang's novel subverts it. With *Haabløse Slægter*, Herman Bang has written one of the most radical and modern novels of the Modern Breakthrough, deconstructing and questioning gender binarity and heteronormativity, both of which were more or less compulsory at the time.

3. Desire, Reproduction and Death Ragnhild Jølsen's *Rikka Gan* (1904)

Ragnhild Jølsen's novel *Rikka Gan* (1904) is set in rural Norway about a hundred years before its publication, but is pervaded by *fin de siècle* gender discourses.¹⁶⁶ Here Jølsen (1875-1908) represents female sexuality, the mother who kills her children but is finally overtaken by motherly instincts, and the woman who kills another woman's children for her own financial gain. But *Rikka Gan* does not condemn the female character, leaving her acts incomprehensible and unexplained, as in the case of many texts written by male authors of the time.¹⁶⁷ Instead, the novel manages to permit its protagonist both erotic desire and evil actions without presenting her as wicked. The social background, at the time denying women legal rights and an income of their own, and female anatomy as destiny are constant reminders that women did not have free choices. Rikka is a female character whose life experience reveals the hypocrisy and narrowness of the values of bourgeois society.

Only a handful of scholars have dealt with Ragnhild Jølsen, and even fewer with *Rikka Gan*. Antonie Tiberg published a biography, *Ragnhild Jølsen i liv og diktning*, only a year after Ragnhild Jølsen's death. After that, only articles were published until Kari Christensen published *Portrett på mørk treplate* (1989), which is a combination of a biography with new material that Tiberg would not publish, and a literary analysis

¹⁶⁶ Ragnhild Jølsen, *Rikka Gan*, in *Samlede skrifter* (Kristiania: H. Aschehoug (W. Nygaard), 1923). Louise Bohr Nielsen writes that by setting her book a hundred years earlier the author has tried to distance herself from her material, but failed (Louise Bohr Nilsen, 'Drømmen, virkeligheten og døden', *Vinduet* [1949] 251-62 [p. 253]).

¹⁶⁷ For example Herman Bang's *Haabløse Slægter*, August Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*, Ola Hansson's *Sensitiva Amorosa*.

based on psychoanalytical theory. Astrid Lorenz has written about Jølsen in *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (1996), and Janet Garton has given a concentrated overview in *Norwegian Women's Writing 1850-1990* (1993). A new biography about Jølsen by Arnhild Skre: *La meg bli som leoparden: Ragnhild Jølsen – en biografi*, was published after the submission of this thesis. Those interested in Jølsen's characteristic linguistic style will find Helge Nordahl's article 'Rytme og repetisjon' (1990) interesting.¹⁶⁸ There is also a novel about Ragnhild Jølsen's life¹⁶⁹, and two self-published works¹⁷⁰. It is time for a more extensive gender analysis of *Rikka Gan*, highly interesting because of its provocative representations of femininity.

In this chapter I analyse the radical representation of feminine erotic desire and sexuality in the novel. I argue that *Rikka Gan*, with its strong elements of decadence and pre-psychoanalysis, speaks back to the misogynist representations of male decadence, and this is done through an unorthodox representation of the feminine. 'New Women writers needed to purge aestheticism and decadence of their misogyny and to rewrite the myths of art that denigrated women', writes Elaine Showalter, and this seems to summarise one of the main objectives of *Rikka Gan*.¹⁷¹ The novel holds up a mirror to the masculine 'distorted' image, instead representing the feminine as natural but oppressed. *Rikka Gan* delivers a devastating critique of a society that placed women in an impossible position, subsequently leaving them to deal with the problems that resulted on their own.

Freud never spoke of the social, political and material differences between the genders, but instead chose to construct *another* difference: namely the feminine as defective (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 72, my italics). *Rikka Gan* fights back against the representation of the feminine as lack through re-installing social inequality as the basis of gender difference.

¹⁶⁸ Helge Nordahl, 'Rytme og repetisjon: Noen tanker om sprogkunstneren Ragnhild Jølsen', *Edda*, Bind LXXXX (1990) 163-172.

¹⁶⁹ Jens Bjørneboe, *Drømmen og hjulet* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1964)

¹⁷⁰ Øivin Ribsog's *Ragnhild Jølsens saga* (1976) and Beate Helms Ålien's *Ragnhild Jølsen: Rikka Gan: Kjærlighedsdrøm og skebnetro i gotisk lys* (1990).

¹⁷¹ Elaine Showalter, *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de siècle*, ed. and introduced by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1993), p. x.

3.1 Plot and Literary Style¹⁷²

The main character in the novel is the young Rikka Thorsen, living with her poor family on Gan, a big farm that has been in the family for generations but which they have been forced to sell. Rikka, deeply attached to the farm, persuades the new owner, Aga, to employ her sick, weak brother as a foreman so that she and her brother's family can stay there. In return, she prostitutes herself to the new owner, forced to this by her sister-in-law, Fernanda. Rikka consequently has three children, who are all killed as newborns by her or Fernanda. She lives in a state of depression, longing for a love that is both sensual and spiritual. Finally, she becomes devoted to her little niece, Lillefernanda, which reduces her bitterness and makes her want to save the girl from her own fate. This gives Rikka the strength to break away from her degrading relationship with Aga.

Antonie Tiberg was the first of several scholars to comment that Jølsen was inspired by Selma Lagerlöf's *Gösta Berling's saga*.¹⁷³ Both authors use a mix of realist and romantic levels of text, a rhythmic, apostrophic, archaic and quasi-biblical style, and Jølsen also uses a setting in *Rikka Gan* which resembles that of *Gösta Berling*. There are also comparisons between Amalie Skram's works and Ragnhild Jølsen's, both with regard to the representation of women's unfulfilled longing for love and the linking of themes such as sexuality, reproduction and death. The term *sammenbrudsroman* (breakdown novel) as opposed to *Bildungsroman* goes just as well for Jølsen's works as for Skram's (Christensen, *Portrett...*, p. 25).

Louise Bohr Nielsen has compared the style elements in *Rikka Gan* to those in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (p. 255).¹⁷⁴ Rolf Nettum¹⁷⁵ and Beate Helms Ålien have agreed, also pointing to the Gothic elements in *Rikka Gan*, including the main character's experiences of ghostly visions and voices, as well as murders, darkness and

¹⁷² By 'style' I here mean the use of language as a vehicle of style, the form (i.e. the structuring of the text) and the motifs and themes treated in the text.

¹⁷³ Tiberg, pp 133-34. Selma Lagerlöf's *Gösta Berling's saga* (1891) was clearly an inspiration for Jølsen's novel *Hollases krønike*, but there are similarities between *Gösta Berling* and *Rikka Gan* too, for example in the setting of two farms on each side of the lake and the mood of their inhabitants. Scholars point to biographical resemblances between Selma Lagerlöf and Ragnhild Jølsen: both spent their childhood on large farms on lakesides, and both farms were lost by their fathers' unfortunate business, so that they had to leave. Both were hoping to regain their farms through money earned by their writing, but only Selma Lagerlöf managed this (Bukdahl, pp. 80-81, Nettum, p. 165).

¹⁷⁴ Louise Bohr Nilsen, 'Drømmen, virkeligheten og døden', *Vinduet* (1949) 251-62 (p. 255).

¹⁷⁵ Rolf N. Nettum, 'Romantikk og realisme i Ragnhild Jølsens forfatterskap', *Edda*, 3 (1972) pp. 157-167 (p. 161)

wardrobes leading into secret passages. Astrid Lorenz has compared Jølsen's literary style to that of art nouveau: the motifs express an atmosphere of dreamlike fairy tales, touching upon the taboo and ambivalent areas in society (Lorenz, p. 128). Both Bohr Nielsen (p. 255) and Jørgen Bukdahl have commented on the elements of Shakespearian drama in the text, including evil, passion and crime.¹⁷⁶

Bukdahl has read the novel's tone of loss and downfall as an illustration of decadence (pp. 69-70), and has argued that Jølsen had a 'halvt ubevidst' (half-subconscious) ability to pick up the general pre-psychoanalytic literary atmosphere at the time. She moves into deeper recesses than modern psychoanalysis knows about, he wrote in 1968 (p. 77). Christensen has claimed that Jølsen shows a surprising psychological awareness, and that much in *Rikka Gan* treats topics about which Freud would create theories around the same time (*Portrett...*, p. 116). Like both Christensen and Bukdahl, I see the novel's most prominent traits as decadence with psychoanalytical elements. *Rikka Gan* displays determinism, reversed gender roles, fatigue and hopelessness, and explores the morbidity of the human psyche and actions. The Medusa locks, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, are to be found there too: '[Rikka's] retlinjede ansigt, der, omgivet af det halvvide haar i uordnede lokker, minded om de billeder, der undertiden sees af Medusa' (Rikka's straightforward face, which was surrounded by damp, disarranged curls, reminded of images of Medusa) (*Rikka...*, p. 183). And in the novel both a range of psychoanalytical symbols as well as dreams are put to work. But while decadence (and psychoanalytical) writing by male authors at the time expresses a fear and disgust of the feminine and the female body, these are represented as natural and healthy in *Rikka Gan*. The novel, in other words, resolutely shows that any problems between the genders are the result of women's submissive position and men's inadequacy to love and take responsibility.

3.2 Decadence and Pre-psychoanalytical Literary Impulses

Decadence occurred in the time period when men suddenly had to define themselves against women and not the other way round, writes Witt-Brattström in her fascinating and amusing study *Dekadensens kön* about Latvian writer Laura Marholm and her

¹⁷⁶ Jørgen Bukdahl, 'Romantik og eksistensproblematik: Omkring Ragnhild Jølsen og hendes litterære baggrund', in *Festskrift til Jens Kruuse den 6. april 1968*, ed. by Gustav Albeck et als. (Aarhus; Universitets-forlaget, 1968), pp. 55-86 (pp. 77-78).

Swedish husband, the Decadence writer Ola Hansson (p. 10). The representation of the genders in decadence literature generally took the form of a depreciation of feminine physicality and sexuality, while the more ethereal sides of the feminine were taken over and incorporated as masculine aesthetical traits in decadence texts.

Some twenty years after the publication of Bang's *Haabløse Slægter*, when *Rikka Gan* was fermenting in Ragnhild Jølsen's head, decadence was no longer new in Scandinavia. She would easily have come into contact with and become inspired by decadence works, of which some, like Ola Hansson's, contained psychoanalytical representations and elements which pre-dated Freud. It is clear that literature represented and depicted hysterical symptoms long before Freud did, as can be seen in both Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* and Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*. Witt-Brattström convincingly shows that Freud probably read and used Ola Hansson's texts to construct his theories.¹⁷⁷ Ola Hansson was a celebrity in Germany in the 1890s. Witt-Brattström writes:

Hos Ola Hansson och hans författarkollegor kan Freud under några avgörande år före 1900 finna en skönlitteratur som på många sätt är ett förstadium till psykoanalysen. Psykoanalysen övertar dekadensens förkärlek för det omedvetnas yttringar i sekelslutsmänniskan.

(Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 63)

Witt-Brattström argues that decadence was mostly focused on introducing the subconscious as (psychic) reality, and on launching gender anxiety as men's fascination with women, mingled with terror of the feminine (*Dekadensens ...*, p. 63). Literature at the time can be described as a cauldron bubbling with questions about where to draw the line between the genders, between fantasy and reality, between morality and instinct; and how to challenge those boundaries. But the nature of literature is to refuse theoretical one-sidedness, and literature therefore does not offer clear-cut concepts, as Witt-Brattström points out; instead it would be the scientist Freud who would be known as the normative interpreter of modernity and the patriarchal restorer of boundaries (*Dekadensens...*, pp. 63-64). In decadence literature, the traditional plot is replaced by psychological issues, and the reader of a male oeuvre is expected to identify with the

¹⁷⁷ *Dekadensens kön*. After having published *Tidens Kvinnor (Alltagsfrauen)* in German in 1891, Ola Hansson was seen as the great gender psychologist of decadence (after Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose *Psychopathia Sexualis* became sensational in 1886).

narrator's struggle with the mysterious Woman, often represented by stereotypical, ritualised formulas. This sort of writing exposes a psycho-sexual aggression, writes Witt-Brattström, and demonstrates how the new, sensitive *fin de siècle* men defined themselves by both parasitising on femininity and pathologising it (*Dekadensens...*, p. 64).

Decadence and pre-psychoanalysis were both prominent around the turn of the nineteenth century. They were sensitively picked up and put to use in *Rikka Gan* where dreams, visions, symbols and the subconscious represent what could not be said openly. In the novel, literary styles and techniques of misogynist writers such as Hansson are used to criticise and subvert their own images of the disgusting and contagious feminine. *Rikka Gan* reclaims the space for feminine sexuality and physicality that male decadence writers were denying them through their appropriation of the transcendent feminine elements while refusing the rest as disgusting. In my opinion, *Rikka Gan* is a reaction against male decadence and its misogynist representations of the feminine.

The rural setting of the novel can also be seen as a mirror image of the practically obligatory city settings of the decadence novel. Already in the choice of setting *Rikka Gan* starts speaking back to traditional decadence, where modernity is embodied by the city and the new forms of communication (Ahlund, *Medusas...*, p. 13-14). By placing the protagonist in a rural setting, close to nature, women's 'naturalness' is underlined.

Rikka is also often placed outdoors, in the open, as a contrast to the traditional feminine, enclosed space. The fact that important parts of the action take place in the open, outside the home, suggests both that Rikka is not subject to household control and also that she is metaphorically homeless and unprotected. Interestingly, she is placed in enclosed spaces in sexual and reproductive contexts. For example when she is to sleep with Aga, she has to enter the wardrobe and then the narrow secret passage, and when she is pregnant she has to hide inside the house.

In opposition to male decadence, *Rikka Gan* represents feminine erotic desire, sexuality and reproduction as something basically natural and healthy. Jølsen's literary style, her choice of topics and the way she represented eroticism made many believe she was a male writer (Lorenz, p. 128).¹⁷⁸ Could a woman really write in this way?

¹⁷⁸ Jølsen had asked Norwegian writer Hans Kinck, whom she did not know personally, to read her first manuscript, *Ve's mor*. When it was published, some critics could not accept it being written by a woman, but assigned it to Kinck. Nordahl mentions that this faulty assumption was so general, that when the secretary of the Norwegian Writer's Association wrote to Jølsen, he regretted not yet knowing her, but that he had heard that she had published an excellent book, written by Kinck (Nordahl, p. 170). One can just imagine the reaction of a writer exposed to such misunderstandings.

3.3 The Reviews

Jølsen was probably hardened. When she published her first novel, *Ve's mor*, one critic had claimed it could not have been written by her; a more likely author was Hans Kinck, given that the text was 'dyrisk lodden' (hairy as an animal) and definitely not what one might expect from a woman¹⁷⁹.

In the reviews of *Rikka Gan*, the claims that Jølsen had copied male authors in style continued. F.N. in *Dagbladet* claimed her style resembled that of Arne Garborg and Thomas Krag.¹⁸⁰ N.K. in *Verdens Gang* accused Jølsen of having copied Thomas Krag and Hans Kinck to the degree that her own personal and natural expressivity was held back.¹⁸¹ At the same time N.K. pointed out that the protagonist was not of a kind common to a 'Damebog' (ladies' novel, i.e. female author's novel), which must be seen as a compliment at the time. C.N. in the same newspaper praised Jølsen for not being 'den vanlige skrivende Dame' (the common writing lady) and claimed *Rikka Gan* was 'en stærk og rik Bog' (a strong and rich novel).¹⁸²

While generally praising *Rikka Gan's* richness and Jølsen's impressive imagination, the reviewers were reluctant to credit Jølsen with the creativity in style and topics that she actually showed. They could not but praise her works, but constantly accused her of copying male authors. As was the case with Amalie Skram, they regarded it as a compliment when they congratulated her for writing like a man. They were also suspicious of a young, unmarried woman writing about erotic desire the way Jølsen did.

3.4 Writing about Sexuality

As was common at the time, and especially when it came to female authors, their works tended to be read autobiographically. As late as 1949 Bohr Nielsen gave *Rikka Gan* a rather appreciative review, but suspiciously noted: '[D]en unge kvinnen som har skrevet om [Rikka], må selv ha drukket dypt av lidelsens beger' (the young woman writing about Rikka must have drunk deeply from the cup of passion herself) (p. 255). 'Ragnhild Jølsen was the only woman writer of this kind in literature, and this caused her many problems', Janet Garton dryly comments. She continues:

¹⁷⁹ Anders Stiloff, quoted from Tiberg p. 101

¹⁸⁰ F.N., 'Rikka Gan' in *Dagbladet* no. 307, 1904.

¹⁸¹ N.K., 'Rikka Gan' in *Verdens Gang* no. 326, 1904.

¹⁸² C.N., 'Fernanda Mona' in *Verdens Gang*, no. 365, 1905.

Not only did she live in a way which was hardly respectable for a woman, she also wrote in a way which was hardly respectable for a woman. Some critics had difficulty in accepting that this was in fact a woman writing...

(Garton, *Norwegian...*, p. 82)

Ragnhild Jølsen treated topics that women were not supposed to write about. Living at a time of quickly changing gender roles, women writers of the Breakthrough had a need to discuss the relationship between the genders. What a female author could write about was however very restricted, partly because women's experience and knowledge were generally seen as limited and uninteresting, partly because certain topics were taboo for women.

Society demanded that decent women be inexperienced.¹⁸³ The critics were suspicious and uncomfortable with texts treating sexuality and erotic desire the way those by the unmarried Jølsen did. 'Even when she was well established, her books were thought unfeminine', comments Garton (*Norwegian...* p. 82).

Women writers were generally considered less interesting than male writers, as their range of topics was limited by social convention. There was much a woman could not discuss publicly. She should not be conscious of that which was impure or depraved, much less represent it, writes Qvist (*Konsten...*, p. 28). The reviewers judged women writers both from a moral and a literary point of view. This was problematic for women writers; expected to keep to 'feminine' topics, they, in practice, encountered many obstacles in the form of taboo areas and topics considered uninteresting by male critics.

Many of the female protagonists and other female characters in texts of the time reshape and renegotiate important gender boundaries, such as women's right to access public space, sexuality and its expressions, and women's economical independence. All of this slowly diversified and widened the notion of the concept of 'woman' and of what women could be and do. Rikka, as will be shown, was one of the few adding 'erotic desire' to the list of possible feminine traits.

By using the pen and turning themselves into subjects instead of objects, women writers threatened the gender order, where the actual masculine position was dependent on the feminine object position remaining unchanged. Women writers and artists were

¹⁸³ Karin Palmkvist, 'Hur "skrifvande damer" bedömdes: 80-talskritiken och den tvåsidiga måttstocken', *Tidskrift För Litteraturvetenskap* 1981:2 (pp. 115-123).

caught in a paradox: if they put forward genuinely individualistic artistic expressions and controversial ideological and stylistic statements, they would have their knuckles rapped by critics and the public for being ‘unfeminine’. If they adapted to styles, genres and topics that were acceptable for women, they would be called uncreative, uninteresting and would be seen as copying male artists. A woman had to adapt to the expectations one way or another in order not to be socially stigmatised, or simply to get published at all.

The female body and its functions were taboo. The whole physical area of women’s lives was forbidden ground, such as sexuality, the physical side of motherhood, childbirth, menstruation and female sickness.¹⁸⁴ The general opinion was that women ought to write about love.¹⁸⁵ An unmarried woman writing about sex, as Jølsen did, was seen as scandalous: how could she write about something she was supposed to have no experience or knowledge of?

Feminine creativity was generally regarded as non-existent. Dijkstra sums up the dominant discourse of the time: ‘By the mid-1870s the idea that woman was inherently an imitator, not an originator, had become one of the most pervasive clichés of Western culture’ (Dijkstra, p. 120). In line with patriarchal tradition the influential critic Georg Brandes denied women proper artistry and creative powers, disapproving of women writing about complex topics or questions of vital societal importance. He preferred women writing love stories to women criticising society or writing about women’s art (Dahlerup, pp. 87-89). In short, a woman author in the Modern Breakthrough put her reputation at risk by publishing at all, as she then entered public space. I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The fact that Jølsen chose to represent feminine sexuality and erotic desire must thus be seen as both radical and highly controversial. The way feminine sexuality is

¹⁸⁴ Palmkvist, p. 119, Dahlerup, p. 36, Johannisson, p. 113. Stenport gives an example of a short story by Anna Branting, ‘Edens ve’ (1894), which contains an explicit description of pregnancy and childbirth, which Bonniers publishing house almost found too graphic and naturalist in style to print (Stenport, *Making Space*, p. 217). Another example is Hulda Garborg’s novel *Et frit Forhold* (1892), which depicts the fate of a young shop assistant through seduction, pregnancy, rejection and the death of her child: ‘unusual in its frankness about physical details’ (Garton, *Norwegian...*, p. 23).

¹⁸⁵ The common expectations about women’s writing were that their main subject should be love, and their main interest in their female characters (Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986] p. 32). Margareta Fahlgren shows how young women writers, debuting with critical depictions of society with women protagonists, got reviews and reactions that more or less drove them to abandon their genre for more traditionally feminine ones (Margareta Fahlgren, ‘Det underordnade författarjaget: Några kvinnliga 1880-talsförfattaress minnesanteckningar’, in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, pp. 319-323 [p. 319]).

represented in *Rikka Gan* is also unusual for its time, as will be shown below. In this novel, sexuality is not defined by traditional patriarchal values, that is subdued, inactive and for reproductive use only, but instead strong and instinctive, active and searching, evoking the desire for a man who can fulfil both Rikka's sensual and psychological needs. The text then goes on to represent the hegemonic sexuality Rikka is actually offered: physical, enforced, sullied, one-dimensional and connected with reproduction and death.

To understand fully how radical *Rikka Gan*'s representation of female sexuality is, an explanation of dominating discourses about feminine sexuality around the *fin de siècle* is required.

3.5 Normative Feminine Sexuality in Breakthrough Scandinavia

The normative erotic contract of the Breakthrough meant that unmarried men had sexual access to prostitutes or servants, and married men had sexual access to their wives (though in reality they sometimes kept their mistresses or continued going to prostitutes). Unmarried middle-class women did not have sexual relationships at all, and married women accepted having sex with their husbands because they wanted to have children.

3.5.1 The Chastity Debate

In this context it is interesting to look at the so called chastity debate, which was prominent in the Scandinavian countries between 1883 and 1888.¹⁸⁶ The whole debate revolved around the question of whether society should accept promiscuity in men but punish its female equivalent. This led to questions of free love, prostitution, contraception, the right to divorce *et cetera*. The chastity debate was a key element of gender roles in a state of flux. On one side were the bohemians – young, radical male writers and critics, who saw human beings as ruled by their instincts. They believed

¹⁸⁶ Bjørnson was one of the initiators of the chastity debate with his drama *En hanske* (1883: *A glove*), where the young heroine refuses to marry her fiancé when she discovers he is not sexually 'pure'. This was one of the first works to propose that men accept the same chastity standards before marriage as women, but many more would follow, especially written by women. Georg Brandes attacked some of the Danish feminists in three newspaper articles in 1887 for their demands that both men and women keep from sexual alliances until marriage (Elias Bredsdorff, 'Moralsk forargelse som politisk våben', in *The Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian Literature 1870-1905*, pp. 159-164 [p. 162]). Brandes could not have suspected the consequences – a long, roaring debate ending with his break with Bjørnson, whose *hanskemoral* (glove morality) he detested.

that chastity was damaging to health, and claimed that both women and men should give up their chastity before marriage, which can be interpreted as their wish to have sexual access to young middle-class women before marriage. On the other side were mainly the supporters of the feminist movements, who argued from a Christian point of view that humans were rational beings, well able to control their sexual instincts and instead channel their energy into, for example, work or friendship. 'In the case of women', writes Moi, 'moral self-respect is almost always taken to be identical with bodily chastity. The result is that in a curious reversal of the hierarchy between body and spirit, a woman's honor comes to reside entirely in her sexuality' (*Henrik Ibsen...*, p. 81). There were also conservative men who took on more traditional masculine roles. They did not accept the exploitation of the prostitutes, unwanted pregnancies or men contaminating their wives with venereal diseases.

A weak point in the radicals' reasoning concerned the issue of how unmarried women would be able to support and raise children on their own, when they had been deprived of all economic and social independence for generations. Today, it might seem naïve to argue for erotic emancipation, as the radicals did, when there was no access to efficient contraceptives. When Elisabeth Grundtvig from *Dansk Kvindesamfund* argued that both women and men should refrain from sexual relationships before marriage in her speech 'Nutidens sedelige Lighedskrav' in 1887, which was printed in the association's periodical *Kvinden og Samfundet* the same year, Brandes violently attacked her in three articles in the newspaper *Politiken* (Busk-Jensen, pp. 50-58).

3.5.2 Prostitution

Prostitutes were seen both as lecherous threats against family and society and as unfortunate victims of men's sexual instincts. The defence of prostitution, typically voiced by males, was grounded in the widespread notion that men's sexual desire was greater and more urgent and uncontrolled than women's.¹⁸⁷ The view on these polarised sexual instincts contributed to justifying the branding of the prostitutes, so important for men as a sexual labour reserve, as constituting an antithesis to the 'respectable' women to whom sexual access was much more difficult. At this time, the

¹⁸⁷ Tinne Vammen, 'Sexualitetens outsider', transl. by Nenne Runsten, in *Kvinnohistoria*, ed. by Hirdman, pp. 86-103 (p. 92).

women's movements in all three Scandinavian countries fought actively against prostitution and regulation.¹⁸⁸

Syphilis was until the twentieth century an incurable, deadly disease. For every one thousand men in the British army in 1859 there were 422 reported cases of venereal disease (Ledger, p. 111), and in 1902 French specialists calculated that twenty per cent of the population of Paris was infected (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 87). Married women, infected by their husbands, died from the disease without ever knowing what it was, having been told by their family doctor it was the measles.¹⁸⁹

Paradoxically, the general idea concerning prostitution was that women contaminated men, and regulation worked in line with this notion by punishing the prostitutes for the disease while leaving their infected male customers in peace. Although the women in public prostitution were regulated, examined and controlled, their male customers were not. According to North and Western European law prostitution was banned: it made the woman a criminal. Procuring and pimping were also banned, but being a *customer* was not. Regulation was abolished in Great Britain in 1886, in Norway in 1887,¹⁹⁰ in Denmark in 1906 and in Sweden not until 1918, when

¹⁸⁸ Regulation was a government-controlled power function where police, medical doctors and administration worked together to control public prostitution. It started in the largest cities of Italy, Austria and France at the beginning of the nineteenth century and spread to the larger cities of the Nordic countries and Great Britain in the following decades. It was a control- and power function which was one-sidedly, unfairly gender- and class discriminating. Its scapegoats were the young working class women who could not manage to keep within hidden prostitution, away from the growing control apparatus.

The goal of regulation was not to *abolish* prostitution, but to *control* the women. The police got the right to arrest women just on suspicion that they were living professionally on fornicating, suffering from a venereal disease or just behaving in a way that might suggest they had no legal profession. Regulation, of course, failed to control the spread of venereal diseases. Infected women, not their customers, were forced to go through medical treatment, leaving the equally infected male clientele to re-infect anyone they came into contact with. Public prostitutes were obliged to have gynecological examinations by a police doctor regularly, and in some places in North and Western Europe they were only allowed to live in brothels. In other places private domiciles were accepted, but the police had the right to inspect them at any time (source: Vammen, 'Sexualitetens...', pp. 94-96).

¹⁸⁹ Ibsen's *Gengangere* (1881; *Ghosts*) and other texts by women writers address the problem of venereal diseases and the problem of young women being infected by their husbands. This is not to say it was acceptable for women to discuss such subjects: Gerda von Mickwitz's short story 'Messling' (Measles; 1886), treating the above-mentioned topic, caused a scandal upon its publication.

¹⁹⁰ This was due in large part to Alexander Kielland's short story 'Else' (1881), depicting an honest working-class girl, seduced by a cynical adventurer and forced into prostitution to stay alive. The story helped raise a storm of indignation, which led to a change in the law. Other authors who joined in the battle were Christian Krohg with *Albertine* (1886) and Hans Jæger with *Fra Christiania-Bohømen* (1885). Both latter books caused such scandals they were banned.

it was replaced by a law which made both men and women responsible for spreading sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁹¹



'Albertine i politilegerens venterum' by Christian Krohg. Suspected prostitutes are waiting to be examined by the police doctor. Krohg's novel *Albertine* was published in 1886.

The prostitutes came from all social classes. Between the 'hidden' luxury courtesans with one or a few rich customers and the public ones, consisting of all the lower-class prostitutes in the streets and brothels there was an enormous range of financial standards and lifestyles, which regulation added to by drawing an even sharper line between them (Vammen, 'Sexualitetens...', p. 89). Poverty was the primary reason for young women to prostitute themselves. Most of them were badly educated women of the working or lower artisan classes. For most of these young women (generally between fifteen and thirty years old) prostitution was a short, transient period in their lives.

Sexually transmitted and therefore considered a 'shameful' disease, syphilis is a secret code in both naturalism and decadence, without which the high-strung fatigue and fear of the feminine that characterises art and literature from the late nineteenth century cannot be understood, writes Witt-Brattström (*Dekadensens...*, p. 86). Within

¹⁹¹ Sources: Vammen, 'Sexualitetens...', pp. 97-99 and Yvonne Svanström, 'Through the Prism of Prostitution: Conceptions of Women and Sexuality in Sweden at Two Fins-de-Siècle', *NORA*, 13 (2005), 48-58 (p. 49).

the arts, syphilis symbolised the ‘contamination’ of the masculine by the feminine, as the New Woman moved her position forwards.

3.5.3 Ruled by Instinct

Paradoxically, while women were seen as having no sexual desire, they were considered to be totally ruled by their sexuality. The scientific, medical and philosophical discourses referring to women as ruled by their instincts were constantly used as reasons for not admitting women to higher education, politics *et cetera*. However, this discursive construction was a problem for male hegemony: if women were sexual beings totally ruled by their instincts, they could easily be led to infidelity, and then men would no longer be in control of feminine sexuality. The debaters within the dominant discourses thus constructed and presented *motherhood* as woman’s strongest instinct.¹⁹² As women were humans too, but (as science did everything to prove) another *sort* of human, they were allowed another *sort* of instinct: that of motherliness. Women’s sexual instincts were hence believed to amount to an interest in reproduction: it was their duty, and in their own interest, to fulfil their ‘natural’ need to become mothers. ‘A virtuous woman might, following an appropriate display of distaste, submit reluctantly to the sexual advances of her husband, but only in joyful anticipation of immediate impregnation’, comments Dijkstra (p. 74).

Masculine sexual desires were thus presented by some writers as an unavoidable natural force, which led to illness if suppressed.¹⁹³ Some of these male writers were influenced by George Drysdale, who in his bestseller claimed that prostitution was a necessary consequence of society’s prohibition of sexual relationships before marriage.¹⁹⁴ The prostitutes were sexual martyrs, necessary to prevent young men from perishing. Drysdale had a liberal view of feminine sexuality: ascribing sexual desire to women and considering it natural for them to have sex, he acknowledged their

¹⁹² Lisbeth Stenberg, ‘Sexualmoral och driftsfixering – Förnuft och kön i 1880-talets skandinaviska sedlighetsdebatt’ in *Nationell hängivenhet och europeisk klarhet – Aspekter på den europeiska identiteten kring sekelskiftet 1900*, ed. by Barbro Kvist Dahlstedt & Sten Dahlstedt (Stockholm: Symposion, 1999) pp. 173-225 (p. 215).

¹⁹³ For example Gustaf af Geijerstam’s *Erik Grane* (1885), Hans Jæger’s *Fra Christiania-Bohømen* (1885), Arne Garborg’s *Mannfolk* (1886), Christian Krohgs *Albertine* (1886), August Strindberg’s *Giftas* (1884).

¹⁹⁴ George Drysdale, *The Elements of Social Science or Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion. An Exposition of the True Cause and only Cure of the Three Primary Social Evils: Poverty, Prostitution and Celibacy*. Drysdale’s book had an enormous circulation; first published in 1854, by 1905 it had been released in thirty-five English editions and translated into ten languages (Boëthius, p. 316, Ahlund, *Medusas...*, p. 36). Translated into Swedish in 1878 and into Danish in 1879, it influenced many of the radical male writers.

difficulties in having a love life outside marriage because of society's intolerance. His views were very controversial at the time, which can be demonstrated by the fact that when a *female* writer, Stella Kleve, let her *female* character in the short story 'Pyrrhusegrar' (1886) die as a result of chastity, the readers were scandalised. Kleve contested the masculine right to interpret feminine sexuality.¹⁹⁵ This is exactly what Jølsen did too.

In light of the widespread distribution of Drysdale's book in Scandinavia, Bredsdorff calculates that quite a significant part of the middle classes did not approve of the basic principles of the prevailing sexual discourses (*Den store...*, p. 404). They might have had the opinion that a less dogmatic and repressive sexual moral would actually contribute to reduce prostitution and make people happier. Most of these people, however, would have kept silent, writes Bredsdorff, as it could have nasty consequences to express unconventional viewpoints on sexuality openly.

Women's sexuality was seen as ambivalent, in terms of either the madonna or the magdalen-syndrome, which is evident in, for example, Bang's *Haabløse Slægter* or Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*. While most middle-class women were seen as asexual madonnas, morally superior to men and to be placed on a pedestal, prostitutes, and often women of the lower social classes, were seen as magdalens. They were more sexually attainable for the middle-class men, who used them to have sex before, and often after, marriage to one of the 'madonnas' (Frykman & Löfgren, p. 250). A significant part of the middle classes felt that discussions like the chastity debate should not take place, writes Bredsdorff (*Den store...*, p. 398-99). Women were seen as the 'priestesses of marriage and chastity', their 'inborn' modesty was precious, and they should be kept in unawareness of the aspects of physiology and procreation, it was thought. A debate where women could get the idea to demand the same sexual privileges as men was both immoral and dangerous.

There were of course those who opposed prevailing discourses about feminine sexuality, those who publicly and controversially claimed that women did have sexual desire, and that it was not necessarily connected to reproduction. However, most of these recommended that sexuality be channelled into love, hopefully marriage, and in combination with having children. One of them was Ellen Key. She turned against the notion that women had less sexual desire than men and controversially wrote in

¹⁹⁵ The publishing of 'Pyrrhusegrar' contributed to the discontinuation of the periodical *Framåt* and the editor losing her job as an art teacher.

Livslinjer I (1903) that a new idea of chastity would only be possible if women recognised their sexuality.¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Key did not *approve* of sexual relationships without the intention of reproduction (*Livslinjer*, pp. 49, 124, 184). Hers was a new secularised ethical view, positive to eroticism and sexual instincts that also included social reforms to strengthen the financial conditions of women, and those of unmarried mothers in particular (C. Lindén, p. 267).

Ellen Key was inspired by her friend, German-speaking Latvian author Laura Marholm (1854-1928) (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 201). Around the *fin de siècle* Marholm was even more widely read than her contemporaries Ellen Key and Lou Andreas-Salomé (Witt-Brattström, 'Det stora...', p. 59). Marholm insisted that women had a strong sexual instinct, and that the most important thing in a woman's life was her man. Hermione Ramsden, Laura Marholm's English translator, commented in 1896 that Marholm was certain that women were ruled by their instincts, but did not accept motherliness as an important one. For Marholm a woman was first and foremost a man's lover, and only heterosexuality could develop her creative, societal and sexual potential.¹⁹⁷ 'A woman's life begins and ends in a man. It is he who makes a woman of her. [...] [Man] is the only meaning of her life. For without him she is nothing', wrote Marholm.¹⁹⁸ Marholm's and Key's essentialist, radical feminism was very influential at the *fin de siècle*, and together with Andreas-Salomé they formed a European troika whose works and concepts would influence both feminism and its antagonists well into the twentieth century (Witt-Brattström *Dekadensens...*, pp. 339-42).

Another radical voice, but in the liberal tradition, was that of Swedish feminist Frida Stéenhoff, who believed that sexual equality was the fundamental condition, not only for the individual relationship between the genders, but also for a solution of societal problems between them (Kyle, p. 49). She advocated love without marriage, and contraceptives. She criticised marriage as an institution and demanded that women become financially independent, so that they would not have to marry a man in order to be able to support themselves and their children.

The women's organisations hardly concerned themselves with sexuality as such. Early feminism coincided with the chastity debate and the feminists profiled themselves

¹⁹⁶ Key, Ellen, *Livslinjer I: Kärleken och äktenskapet* (1903), 3rd edn. (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1923).

¹⁹⁷ Hermione Ramsden, introduction to Laura Marholm Hansson's *Modern Women* (London: John Lane & Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896), p. vii.

¹⁹⁸ Laura Marholm, *Modern Women* (London: John Lane & Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896), p. 189.

as asexual guardians of bourgeois morality.¹⁹⁹ Through their stand against prostitution and double moral standards, many feminists saw sexuality as something masculine and negative. Female sexuality was banished to another type of woman: the women of the working classes, of the streets and brothels (Johannisson, p. 70). Johannisson points out that before Freud, few authorities treated feminine sexuality in a positive way, even if there were exceptions, such as Anton Nyström,²⁰⁰ Ellen Key and George Drysdale (pp. 67-68.). The feminist movements had other wars to fight beside the chastity debate. They were trying to persuade the men in power to introduce social and political reforms in women's favour. This had to be done with patience, forbearance and coaxing. The women's organisations could not afford to act too radically; the men they were working to influence must not be upset by unwanted information about feminine sexual desire. The feminists tried to keep their associations and periodicals free from everything too radical. When it came to questions of morality, the feminist movement showed its most conservative side (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 262).

With this picture of normative Breakthrough sexuality as a background, it is easy to see how the Rikka character deviates from the dominant discourses on femininity. But how could something as taboo as feminine sexuality be represented, especially by a woman writer? Jølsen needed a textual strategy that could express what she wanted to say without spelling it out.

3.6 Textual Strategy: What Must Not Be Said Openly

Rikka Gan treats topics that were highly controversial at the time, and asks its readers to identify with a protagonist who has a sexual relationship with a married man and then kills her own children, a protagonist who would normally be viewed as a 'monster woman'. In this section I will discuss some of the textual strategies used.

3.6.1 The Narrator

The narrator in *Rikka Gan* is an extradiegetic (external) narrator, focalising different characters (although mostly Rikka). *Rikka Gan's* narrator is not personal and angrily

¹⁹⁹ *The Fredrika Bremer Association*, for example, had a Christian liberal-feministic ideology where reformism, cooperation between the genders and a belief in the possibility to change attitudes were important (Nordenstam, p. 32).

²⁰⁰ Anton Nyström (1842-1931), a Swedish doctor of medicine, wrote in total twenty-two works on topics ranging from medicine, history and politics to marriage and love life. He stated that women had a right to sexual pleasure.

witty as Axel is in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*, nor sarcastically distanced as the narrator in *Fru Fanny*, but as serious and melancholy as the *Rikka Gan* tale itself. This narrator stands on Rikka's side whatever she does. Even in Rikka's worst moments, as when she tries to stab Aga to death, or when she scares the young Katarina so that she jumps out of a window and dies, or when she has killed her own children, the narrator tenderly registers Rikka's feelings of fear, hate, sorrow and depression instead of judging her actions. This is a narrator, who, when all is said and done, lets the bailiff note in the local records:

– Og aldrig havde denne pige havt nogen, med hvem hun kunde tale fint och stille. Aldrig forstaaelse uden klager. Aldrig betoelser uden sorg. Og aldrig havde kjærligheden rørt hende. – Ja, om hende kan der i sandhed siges – og det siger jeg, prokuratøren paa Haug: ”Gud Herren hende mætted med bedske ting. Han gjorde hende drukken af malurt.”

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 198)

The reader's sympathy for Rikka is constructed through the old bailiff's sympathy. He is a stable and normalising character whom the reader can trust. The world's verdict on a woman like Rikka would surely have been that she was an evil adulteress and murderess, threatening society and its laws. The narrator exposes, through the bailiff, what this book really is about: Rikka's 'natural' feminine sexuality is harnessed, abused and ravaged by patriarchy, which then leaves the responsibility for its unjust laws with the abused woman, leaving her to deal with its fatal consequences, forcing her to act the way she does. In the phrase from the quotation above: 'The Lord God filled her with bitter fruit. He made her drunk with wormwood' (transl. Janet Garton), 'the Lord God' could be replaced with the word 'patriarchy'. The narrator's tender tone in its treatment of Rikka and the reader's insight into her tortured mind sums it all up: Rikka is caught in the patriarchal trap, she has no choice but to play along with rules that have been created to her own detriment, and which will leave her isolated, responsible for a situation she has not caused alone. By taking Rikka's side, the narrator makes a political statement.

The narrator sometimes keeps up a personal and chatty tone with the reader: 'Om Rikka Torsen var smuk? Kanske Rikka Torsen kunde kaldes smuk' (if Rikka Torsen was pretty? Maybe Rikka Torsen could be called pretty) (p. 110). Here it poses a

question to the reader, and responds to it. This gives an impression of intimacy with the narrator, as someone the reader knows and can trust.

3.6.2 Essential, 'Original' Femininity

In *Portrett på mørk treplate* Kari Christensen reads Jølsen's novel as being about female inheritance and tradition, and as being full of symbols pointing to the mythical earth/mother goddess. Although I read the novel differently from Christensen, I think she opens up interesting perspectives on how psychoanalytical symbols are used in *Rikka Gan*; and especially *urmodern*, the great mother goddess. This symbol is used as a counterweight to male decadence, as a means to reclaim and empower the feminine, so ignominiously 'stolen' and depreciated.

In assigning its female characters strength, passion and bravery and in constantly connecting Rikka with the past and her ancestresses, *Rikka Gan* provides its protagonist with an air of divine, powerful and magnificent femininity. This femininity would, in accordance with the old goddess myths with their narrative concept of a glorious feminine past, be 'original'. Rikka is related to the great goddesses and foremothers from long ago simply through being female, but the connection is underlined through the constant references to the past and the symbols. For a character like Rikka, with something of the 'original' femininity still left in her, erotic desire and sexuality are natural. The great goddesses of the past were, after all, fertility goddesses.

But Rikka lives in a modern age, in a patriarchy. Her greatness and her sexuality are harnessed, her wings are clipped; she is a prostitute, a slave. By connecting its protagonist with the feminine all-powerful, fertile, divine past, *Rikka Gan* makes a political statement about the situation of women at the time. Women have been robbed of their power, with their natural sexuality and fertility enslaved and misused by men. Modern patriarchal society is unnaturally and insufficiently organised for women, repressing the 'truly feminine'.

Haabløse Slægter only deals with the importance of male ancestors, leaving no space for female ancestry, except possibly as a negative influence, indicating that the best women could do was to keep as passive as possible. *Rikka Gan*, on the other hand, offers the opposite strategy. Here only the female ancestresses are mentioned, their impact as influential and overwhelming for the protagonist as *Haabløse Slægter's* male ones. The only male ancestor mentioned in *Rikka Gan* is Vilde Vaa, and he is

represented as a negative influence. In this respect *Rikka Gan* is an inverted mirror of *Haabløse Slægter*.

3.6.3 The Silences Telling the Story

In spite of the fact that what women were supposed to write about was very restricted at the time, Jølsen chose to write about the taboo areas in her society: feminine erotic desire, infanticide and women's desperate financial dependence on men, leading to men's sexual exploitation of women.

Susan S. Lanser recommends that when reading female authors, works with female narrators or works representing the feminine in general, gaps and silences need to be taken into account.²⁰¹ In *Rikka Gan* it is evident that the gaps are used as a textual strategy to represent what must not be said openly.

This strategy is interesting: it consists of never describing or representing the events outright. Instead, it is the unspoken that speaks, the events hidden in what is never mentioned. It is, literally, in the gaps of the text that the events take place, in the white spaces between chapters or blocks of text ostensibly treating more ordinary matters. The text represents where it does not represent at all. It is not until after reading a section of the text that one understands the events that have taken place in the text, just as the picture of a jigsaw puzzle cannot be properly discerned until the last piece is in place. It takes more than one reading of this text to interpret its textual gaps and symbols, and discover what awaits the reader in the silences.

To analyse what this technique means in practical terms, I will take the example of how Rikka's first pregnancy, childbirth and infanticide are represented. The series of events starts with the old bailiff driving to Gan farm through the snow to investigate why all the servants and workers except Rikka's old nanny have been dismissed. The drive leading up to the farm from the main road has not been cleared.

“Sne. Sne ja,” gjentok han aandsfraværende. ”Sne, som dækker. Sne, som gemmer. Sne saa tæt og svær, at den næsten ikke trænges igjennem.” [...]

For noget saa ødsligt som her inde paa Gans gaardsplads syntes han aldrig i sit lange liv at have seet. Saa tyst og mennesketomt var der. – Sneen hvid og urørt. Bare med nogen

²⁰¹ Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Points of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 42-43.

enkelte dybe mærker saa her saa der efter folk, som havde gaaet frem og tilbage i sine egne fodspor.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 134)

Here, the snow represents what is hidden in the text, what cannot be mentioned openly. Its blank, white surface blinds the bailiff, not allowing him to see what has happened: that the young, unmarried middle-class woman Rikka, of an old, well-known family that has lived on the farm for hundreds of years, is pregnant by the married, rich upstart Aga. The yard of the large farm is absolutely empty; it has not been cleared of snow and there is no one there to tell him what has happened. As the consequences of the events are fatal, all is hidden away, not only from the bailiff, but also from the reader. In this part of the text, the reader is left with only the focalisation of the bailiff, leaving the reader as puzzled as he is. Something is wrong; something is hidden, but what? The bailiff has to leave without any answers, and without seeing Rikka, whom he secretly loves, as she too is hidden away, 'sick'. Fernanda adequately expresses the screaming silence of the text when she says to the bailiff concerning the complaints of the dismissed servants: '[F]eilen er ikke at gjøre en gal ting; men feilen er at paatale den' (The error lies not in doing something wrong, but in speaking about it) (p. 135). The bailiff's confused visit to the snow-covered farm amounts to the entire representation of the disastrous pregnancy.

The childbirth itself is only represented through a few lines commenting that spring has arrived, the servants have been re-employed and everything has returned to normal. The only thing that has changed during the winter is Rikka:

[H]un holdt sig helst for sig selv og saa anstrængt ud – var hvid, saa hvid, at hun næsten var farlig at se paa. Øinene glimtete ofte med blikket til siden, og læberne saaes kun som en smal, rød stribe.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 137)

The typical decadence image of the vampire is here used to represent how Rikka feels after secretly having given birth and killed her child. She feels like a living dead. She has also acquired her vampire traits through the infanticide. She cannot kill her child without changing for the worse, without taking on monster traits. We get a total of thirteen lines representing the childbirth, and those lines do not refer to the childbirth,

but are about the re-employment of the servants and everything getting back to normal on Gan farm, finishing with the above quoted lines about Rikka.

The representation of the infanticide, like the representation of the childbirth, is narrated in retrospect and only implicitly. The narrator comments: ‘Og udpaa vaarparten hændte der riktignok noget besynderligt paa Gan. Men ingen fik ligesom rigtig tag i, hvad det var, - og saa døde det da bort med dagene, som lysned’ (In spring something strange happened at Gan. But no one could get the grip of what it was, and then it died away, with the arrival of long daylight hours) (p. 137). Something has happened at Gan. But the reader is presented with a scene, where during suppertime in the large Gan kitchen, a boy comes running in saying that something covered in linen is floating in the well. Instead of going with him, Fernanda forces him to sit down and have coffee with the others, and sends the old nanny for cream in the cellar. The nanny takes her time, and comes back all soiled and wet, and has forgotten the cream. When they all finally go to the well to take a look, there is nothing there.

These examples demonstrate how events that must not be spoken of are consequently represented through a textual technique where the gaps and recurring depictions of what is not there, what is missing and what is hidden are used to represent what cannot be said. The fact that everything in the novel treating sexuality and reproduction falls into the white spaces of the text indicates that there is no place for these matters in Breakthrough literature. Still *Rikka Gan* insists on representing them. Jølsen wrote about topics that were taboo in literature at the time, especially for a woman author, but she employed a strategy where she uses psychological symbols as well as textual gaps to keep the events boiling under the surface of the text.

3.7 Feminine Sexuality in *Rikka Gan*

Åse-Marie Nesse sees the strong woman who hungers for erotic fulfilment and the high price she must pay as the main motif in all of Jølsen’s books.²⁰² By representing feminine erotic desire in an explicit way, Ragnhild Jølsen was one of the first to break the taboo on feminine eroticism. Stella Kleve had already done so in an implicit way in the 1880s, causing a scandalised outcry (Ney, *Bortom Berättelserna*, pp. 67, 77), and the female protagonists of J.P. Jacobsen’s novel *Fru Marie Grubbe* (1876) and Amalie

²⁰² Åse-Marie Nesse, ‘Menneskesindets Flora. Om Ragnhild Jølsen’ in *Forfatternes Litteraturhistorie Vol. 2*, ed. by Kjell Heggelund and others (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1980), pp. 125-134 (p. 126).

Skram's *Lucie* (1888) both express sexual desire. Rikka, however, is allowed the overt desire for both spiritual and sensual love in the form of her imaginary dream lover, Vilde Vaa, in her crush on the young man from the farm on the other side of the lake and in the physical sex with Aga, who both repels and attracts her.

3.7.1 The Symbols of Sex and Desire

I argue that the main theme of *Rikka Gan* is feminine sexual desire and its consequences in the form of reproduction, social repression, psychological depression and death. Gan farm itself is full of objects and spaces which can be read as symbols of feminine sexuality and sexual desire, objects and spaces which, following traditional psychoanalysis, can be seen as symbolising the vagina and the uterus (Christensen, *Portrett...*, pp. 100, 114).

Early in the novel three important objects at Gan farm are described, objects connected with the strong foremothers, their sexual escapades and the resulting infanticides. Of these objects two are vessel-shaped: a clay cup, exposing only in a certain light a row of hanged women as decoration, and a copper tub, giving off a muffled thud whenever a murderer is close. Apart from the vessel-shape of these objects, connoting feminine sexuality in psychoanalytic theory (Christensen, *Portrett...*, p. 110), the copper tub was once made by Vilde Vaa, the beautiful lover of one of Rikka's ancestresses who killed her own child and had to flee for her life. Rikka dreams and has visions of Vilde Vaa as the perfect lover who can fulfil her dream of both physical desire and sensual love. In this way the copper tub represents Rikka's sexual desire, but guilt-ridden as she is, she is also constantly disturbed by the sound it makes when she is close by. The copper tub connects sexuality, guilt and death. The third object at Gan is an iron hoop, also inherited from the foremothers. Its perfect round ring-form is the ancient symbol of the great earth goddesses, the cyclical symbol of life, death and rebirth, but the Church would later use it to attach women, guilty of illegitimate sex, to the pillory instead.

Other symbols of feminine sexual desire and reproduction are a wardrobe and a secret passage. Cupboards and wardrobes can also be seen as psychoanalytical symbols of the female reproductive organs (Christensen, *Portrett...*, p. 114). The door of the wardrobe in Rikka's room, decorated with the image of a cupid and a snake, leads into a secret passage to Aga's room. While the cupid represents eroticism, the snake image is more ambiguous. As discussed in Chapter 2, the snake is an ancient symbol of the

magna mater and her wisdom, though Freud would later transform it into a psychoanalytic symbol of the male phallus in his attempts to secure the phallus power for masculinity (Bratt-Wittström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 97). Instead, regarding the snake as a symbol of the earth goddess, would underline the strong undertow of feminine power in the novel.

The secret passage leading from the decorated door to Aga's room, and other secret passages in the novel, can, as mentioned, symbolise vaginas. This is where Rikka passes through to sleep with Aga. Another secret passage is only known by the women of Gan, and it leads down to the lake. In this passage, it is said, Rikka's foremothers have buried their newborn children. When Rikka lies sick in the room where the passage begins, she imagines she can hear the voices of both the mothers and children, lamenting their lost lives (pp. 157-58). If we choose to see this secret passage as symbolising a vagina too, the lake at the end of it symbolises the uterus, filled with amniotic fluid. It is in this large expanse of water that Rikka will finally give up her life, devoured by the *magna mater*, according to Christensen (*Portrett...*, p. 115), thus making the lake into both a uterus and death chamber. But the question is whether she gives it up or begins it again, in those amniotic fluids, in the eternal cycle of life and death.

Rikka is both attracted and repelled by Aga and the imperfect, physical sexuality he can offer. This is shown in the following passage about the wardrobe with the secret passage leading to Aga's room:

Engang havde Rikka Torsen kunnet fortabe sig i beskuelsen af denne besynderlige, lille fyr [the cupid], hun havde ogsaa fundet noget farve og gjort hans vinger større og hvidere. Men senerehen havde Rikka Torsen leet af den amor, og hun havde ofte tænkt, hun egentlig burde sværte ham to horn paa hovedet og en hale. Hun befatted sig jo endel med dette skab, Rikka Torsen, og kunde vanskelig undgaa det.

Naar Rikka Torsen kom ind i sit værelse, kunde det hænde, hun skjøv slaaen for udgangsdøren, gik saa hen til skabet, kikkede derind, og gik atter tilbage.

Men undertiden kunde det ogsaa hænde, hun traadte helt ind i det store skab og lukked døren efter sig fra indersiden.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 145)

The passage demonstrates how ambiguous Rikka is towards her sexual relation with Aga. She paints the wings of the cupid larger and whiter, and then she thinks she ought

to paint black horns and a tail on him instead. Her feelings for Aga, represented through the reactions towards the cupid, recall how men could feel towards women in fiction of the time: they were split between madonnas and magdalens. Here, the male character Aga and what he offers is instead seen by Rikka as a split between the angel and the devil. Sometimes she peeks into the wardrobe just to change her mind and turn back again. But at other times she steps into the wardrobe and heads for the lovemaking that awaits her at the other end of the secret passage. Her feelings towards Aga are contradictory: she both searches out and avoids the sexuality he can offer. When she finally decides to go down to Aga after all, it is again with mixed feelings and no happiness.

[H]un lukked skabdoeren op og atter igen. Men tilsidst drog hun pusten langt og gik indenfor. [...]

”Her er jeg,” sagte Rikka Torsen.

Det gav et chok i den store mand, og han vendte sig om mod hende:

”Riketia.” Saa blev han staaende og stirre.

”Spørg ikke, Mattias Aga,” sagde Rikka Torsen og kastet stolt med hovedet.

”Berolige dig forresten – og giv din frue et smukt diadem.”

Hun lo haardt; men øinene hvidnet, og munden var som blod.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 146)

Every line in this passage reveals Rikka’s ambiguous feelings towards Aga and her own sexual desire. The closing and opening of the wardrobe door again and again, the drawing of a deep breath before finally going in. Judging by Aga’s surprise he did not expect her, so it was on her own initiative that she went. She neither can nor will explain her motives: ‘Don’t ask’, she says to Aga, without him having asked. She then reminds him and herself of her status as his mistress by speaking of his wife. The comment, ‘calm down, and give your wife a nice tiara’ from a woman to a man she intends to make love to, demonstrates her deep bitterness. The position as mistress, as illegal, means she cannot lead a ‘normal’ life, she is denied motherhood. As an unmarried woman, she has no right to sexuality, no right to reproduce. Her sexuality must be hidden away; her children must be killed, erased.

The mistress usurps the legal, patriarchal family structure and the wife’s lawful position. In *Rikka Gan*, the economic and sexual power between husband and wife is distortedly intertwined in the relationship between Aga and his ‘servant’ Rikka too.

Rikka does not respect Aga's wife, who is her lawful mistress; instead, she chases her off the farm, and then takes her place in that confined space. On Gan, Rikka is the mistress of the house, a distorted version of a position that can never be publicly acknowledged.

The mistress's unlawful position as usurper of the family is underlined by the vampire image in the last line: Rikka's hard smile, her widening eyes and the lips like blood. The mistress 'steals' both affection and money that rightfully belongs to the man's family, and she must steal the lives of her own children, who cannot be allowed to live.

A paradox in the story is that Aga's wife, whom Rikka on her first visit scares away from the farm so that she never comes back, is barren. It is worth noting that Aga too loses out on Rikka's illegality and her lack of legal and moral rights. Aga has no children except the three he has with his mistress, and they are all killed, with his consent. Having biological children was considered important for the middle-class man at the time; he needed them to build an existence that would carry him on beyond his death. Bergom-Larsson points out that the material meaning of the bourgeois family was to carry on the father's name, property and position to the next generation (pp. 93-94).

The first time Rikka and Aga make love, it is Rikka who takes the initiative. It is at a social gathering with a game of *høg og due* (hawk and dove, a game where you chase and catch each other) that Rikka encourages Aga to chase her, and then keeps running with Aga behind her, leaving the others standing.

”Hænderne af lommen, hr Aga!” raabte jomfru Rikka, hun sprang ret forbi ham, – og Aga strakte med en kort latter haanden ud og sprang efter.

– At Aga kunde springe! At Rikka Torsen var smidig! – Slig hun lod ham komme indpaa sig, men svinged rundt og lod ham gribe i luften! – Slig hun sprang imøde, og hid og did, og han aldrig fik tag i hende! [...]

Selskabet raabte og lo, saa rækken løstes. Og Gan hovedbygning gav spektaklet tilbage, dystert, grættent, som en gyger, der uroes i søvnen, – mens Rikka Torsen sprang om uden en lyd av latter, men tænderne skinned, fordi hun pusted med aaben mund. [...]

”Stop lidt, I springer for langt!” skreges der efter dem. Men ret frem fór jomfru Rikka, stadig ret frem [...]. Aga efter og halende indpaa. En stund syntes det endog, som løb han jevnside med hende uden at strække armen ud. – Men det sidste glimt af dem saa de øverst

paa den solbelyste bakke. -- Blæsten tog i jomfru Rikkas røde kjole, og et øieblik flagred den op, vildt som et løsrevet seil.

(*Rikka Gan*, pp. 109-10)

This is not the conventional chase of a desired woman by a man. It is Rikka who leads the chase, who sets the pace and who turns Aga on. It is she who takes off with Aga, she who makes the decision to seduce him. Although Aga officially plays the role of the hawk, it is in reality Rikka who is the hawk and Aga the dove. She does not laugh while she runs, because for her this is serious business. And Gan, the old farm which has seen so many of its strong women fall prey to their sexuality, is uneasy: it is gloomy and moody like a giantess disturbed in her sleep. Gan knows what will come, it has seen its women destroyed by their erotic desire and longing for love before, it has seen that what they get from their longing is physical sexuality, pregnancy and death.

‘Stop, you are going too far!’ the others cry after Rikka and Aga, metaphorically warning Rikka, who here takes her first step onto the path of sexual desire that will dominate and darken her life from then on. The last thing to be seen on the hill before Rikka and Aga disappear out of sight, is Rikka’s red dress wildly folding itself out like a loose sail. Red being the colour of love and blood, the red dress represents Rikka’s sexuality and erotic desire, her giving up her virginity and the blood of their children to be sacrificed later in the relationship. The phrase ‘vildt som et løsrevet seil’ (wildly, like a loose sail) indicates that Rikka’s longing for love is wild, passionate and desperate. But the phrase ‘et øieblik flagred den op’ (‘it spread out for a moment’), *flagred* in Norwegian being the same word as the English *flared*, as in a fire that flares up, indicates how short Rikka’s experience of love will be. It will flare up, it will be gone. Rikka will not get the love she is looking for. Instead she will be claimed by a physical sexuality and all its implications, leaving her with blood on her hands, frustrated, disappointed and full of hatred, both towards the man who keeps her as his prostitute and towards the world for so severely reducing women’s lives and possibilities.

3.7.2 Transgressive Sexuality

If Rikka ever shows remorse about the sexual act, it might be in the following passage, where her regret is based on the idea of romantic love:

“Elsked du ham, Rikka?” hvisked nogen fra skogen.

”Nei. Nei.” Og der fór feberfrost gennem hende.

”Ve over kvinden som falder uden elskov.” hvisked det saa. ”Synd følger synd. Hvad tror du, Rikka Torsen, at ’kvinden uden kærlighet’ har, naar ruset er borte?”

”Skammen.”

”Ja. Og der findes ikke den stakkars sten, hvortil hun kan støtte sit hoved. Pine følger pine, Rikka Torsen, livet tilende.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 115)

In the ‘romantic love’ discourse, it is acceptable for a woman to have sex with a man if she loves him. And Rikka does not love Aga. She had sex with him because she is passionate. She has followed her sexual instinct, and the aim of that instinct is not reproduction and motherhood, as the hegemonic normativity around her insists it should be. However, Rikka’s remorse seems rather to stem from the fact that she has betrayed her own ideals in the form of true love, the spiritual *and* physical love she constantly longs for. She realises now what the liaison with Aga, that she has been more or less tricked into, actually means: she is stuck with Aga and the incomplete, physical love he can offer.

For the female character the romantic plot must lead to marriage (or possibly death). But Rikka does not follow the feminine script. Her erotic desire seems more conventionally masculine than feminine. Just as men’s sexual ‘instincts’ send them off to prostitutes, so Rikka seduces Aga. But while the man can pay his prostitute, go home and forget her, Rikka is poor. She has no money, and cannot pay. Instead, it is she who is turned into the prostitute when Aga refuses to be turned away and let her go. She is hit by the implications of her femininity and inferior position, just like the prostitute. Her ‘masculine’ sexual desire has made her overstep the line of normative feminine behaviour, and now she is severely punished: her woman position makes her a victim, a prisoner, and the shame of illegitimate reproduction belongs to her alone, as a woman.

However, it is not only the sexual experience with Aga that is connected with death. The perfect love Rikka dreams of is deadly too. Vilde Vaa, her dream lover, was the lover of one of her foremothers, one of Fru Brynhilde’s unhappy daughters. He left her, and as the Brynhilde daughter killed her child she was prosecuted as a witch and had to flee for her life. Rikka connects perfect love with fire and death: “[J]eg drømmer om ild, – og det betyder kærlighed.” Og hun vilde synes, tanken paa høitidelig stilhed kom

over hende – – døden’ (‘I dream of fire, and it means love.’ And the thought of solemn quiet came over her – death) (p. 150).

3.7.3 The Right to Look

But Aga is not the only lover in Rikka’s life. While caught in all the sordidness of everyday life, Rikka has Vilde Vaa, a dream lover representing love the way it should be, spiritual as well as sensual. Rikka has her first vision of him when she, overwhelmed with guilt and fear because she is pregnant, has spent the night in the forest.

Idetsamme kom en ung mand over lyngen. Hverken saa han til høire eller venstre; men aldrig havde jomfru Rikka seet saa herlig en gang eller saa stolt en holdning. – Hun fandt intet forunderligt ved, at han gik der, men fornåm en tomhed, fordi han var gaaet forbi. Og hun laa videre – uden drømme og uden tanker – og træerne suste – og klokken ringte – – da bøied nogen sig over hende. Hun saa op i et blegt ansigt med vaagdunkle øine. Hun saa ogsaa, han havde mørke, iturevne klæder, og brystet var nøgent. Og der paa det nøgne bryst var ridset en flyvende fugl.

”Hvem – hvem er du?” spurgte Rikka Torsen.

”Vilde Vaa.”

Hun grebes av en stor glæde og rakte armene ud:

”Vilde Vaa. Vilde Vaa. Endelig kom du.”

Men den unge mands ansigt blev fjernere – blegere – fuglen og de fillede klæder – der kom taage imellem.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 116)

Vilde Vaa is everything Aga is not: young, beautiful and offering the prospect of true love. The tattooed flying bird on his chest symbolises freedom, what love could be like if it was not bought, sold and enforced. He is the part missing in Aga, the part Aga would need in order to achieve an acceptable masculinity in Rikka’s eyes.

The way Vilde Vaa and other young men are represented in Jølsen’s novels is unusual for the time. She depicts them as sexual objects, their appearance defined and commented on by her female characters. As subjects in Jølsen’s texts, her female characters are permitted a gaze that traditionally had been reserved for male characters in literature and art. Fernanda accuses Rikka of letting her gaze play over Aga’s body: ‘du har ladt dine vandblaa øine spille nedover ham’ (you have played your waterblue

eyes over his body) (p. 127), condemning this as indecent behaviour. Through this behaviour, Jølsen's female characters reveal their erotic desire and place the male characters in a conventionally feminine position: of being looked at and objectified. Here the look is reversed. This new, desiring gaze on men as sexual objects was very daring at the time. In 1886, Kleve had been the first Swedish (probably Scandinavian) writer to allow a female character such an objectifying gaze at a man (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 151), and the question is whether anyone had dared repeat it until Jølsen did so.

Griselda Pollock writes that women 'did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch [...] They are positioned as the *object*'.²⁰³ '[Jølsen's] handsome young men are described with a sensuous enjoyment of their nakedness which had previously been reserved for women' notes Garton (*Norwegian...* p. 83). Jølsen was criticised for representing men as clichés (Christensen, *Portrett...*, p. 61), presumably because the reviewers were not used to male characters being objectified by a woman's eye. In *Rikka Gan*, Rikka comments on the young man from the other side of the lake as having *skjønn mund* (beautiful lips) (p. 122) and a *slank skikkelse* (slim figure) (p. 123). Rikka reverses the gaze, removing herself from a conventionally feminine position and placing herself in a traditionally masculine one: as the subject who looks and openly expresses her active erotic desire.

3.8 'Strong women and feeble men'

As in the other three novels analysed in this study, *Rikka Gan* discusses the phenomenon of strong women and weak men, and what this reversal of the conventional gender roles leads to. The women in *Rikka Gan* are strong and the men are weak, a typical decadence trait as already discussed in Chapter 2:

[D]er vokste op en slægt udi bygden, en, med stærke kvinder og svage mænd, en, hvis arv fra mor til datter var hemmeligheder fra Gan og et stolt og stridigt sind.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 100)

²⁰³ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, with a new introduction by the author (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 100.

Both Rikka and her cousin and sister-in-law, Fernanda, belong to this family of strong women, keeping secrets from the men and having a proud and pugnacious mind, ‘*begge af saa gammel slægt, at mændene er degenererede og kvinderne underkastet manier*’ (both of a family so old, that the men are degenerated and the women suffered from certain manias) (p. 197). Rikka’s brother, Jon Torsen, is presented as ‘*skral og uduelig*’ (poorly and useless). Paradoxically, his strong-willed wife bears him many children, ‘*more than one would have wished for*’ (p. 105). In spite of his sickliness and incapacity there is nothing wrong with his reproductive powers, implying a lack of (sexual) self-control that underlines his unmanliness. Unfortunately, as Jon Torsen’s feeble body and mind do not match his capacity for reproduction, he cannot provide for the children he fathers. This task is left to his wife and sister, as women totally lacking the education, legal rights or social acceptance to find an income. All they have is their inherited strength, which they use when against all odds they manage to persuade Aga to give Torsen a job as foreman on Gan farm:

[M]ed *det* blikket og *den* maaden at snakke paa! Ja, madamen havde vel ladet mer tilbageholden og beskeden hun da. Men Jomfru Rikka – kors i krøgels! – hun havde sagtens kneiset som en stashest, saa den svære haarknuden hendes dukket langt ned i nakken.

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 105)

Already in these lines the characteristics of Rikka and Fernanda, and the relationship between them, is established. Rikka is extrovert and active, here inviting Aga’s erotic interest in her, interestingly enough expressed in masculine terms: she ‘*rears up like a stallion so that her heavy hair bun falls down her neck*’. Fernanda, the pimp, is defined as more quietly but decisively steering the ship. Rikka is strong and active but inexperienced. Fernanda is strong and calculating, making use of those around her, including the young sister-in-law she is in charge of. Fernanda steps into a long literary line of phantasmic evil stepmothers, which I shall return to below.

Although Rikka’s strength is inherited and deterministic, it is made clear that she has no choice but that of establishing the family back on Gan farm and later prostituting herself for them to stay there. The alternative is starvation for the Torsen family. The weakness of the men in the family enforces the strength of the women: when the men cannot manage their ‘*masculine*’ tasks, such as supporting their family, the women must do this instead. To take on masculine tasks and traits is not a choice the women

make; it is something they take on out of necessity, to make up for the lack of masculine strength. The text does not appear to present gender in binaries here, but rather as a balance: traits like strength should be equally distributed, otherwise the balance is upset and one part has to take more than her/his share.²⁰⁴ The text implies that the inadequacy in Torsen, who fails to take care of his family, creates a situation where his wife and young sister are forced to take on the whole responsibility without having any of the legal (male) rights that go with it. They take on the management of the farm, using Torsen as their figurehead. ‘Kvinderne styrte til hverdags. Og til søndags, naar Aga var der, da skikked de Jon Torsen ivei med strikketørklæder under trøien’ (The women ran the farm on a daily basis. And on Sundays, when Aga was there, they sent Jon Torsen off with warm underwear) (*Rikka Gan*, p. 106). Having none of the official rights that go with the job, the women are dependent on Torsen in spite of his uselessness. They run the farm, but their ‘illegitimate’, dependent position cannot protect Rikka when Aga, through blackmail, demands her continued sexual favours. Indirectly, Jon Torsen’s weakness and unmanliness lead to the catastrophe to come.

The *skjebneorm* (snake of fate) is a strange symbol in *Rikka Gan*. Every time Rikka sees the *skjebneorm* in her dreams and visions she can hear her brother’s dry cough (pp. 172-73). Jon Torsen, who fathers children without being able to support them, is not the only weak man with a dangerous sexuality in the novel. Rikka’s dream lover, Vilde Vaa, was beautiful and sexually attractive, but left Rikka’s foremother to her fate when she became pregnant. Aga offers only physical sexuality and then death to the children *he* fathers. Weak men, offering nothing but physical sexuality, is a recurrent theme in Jølsen’s novels. If male decadence writing expressed a fear of the feminine, *Rikka Gan* expresses a deep disappointment in the masculine.

In traditional psychoanalysis the snake represents the male phallus.²⁰⁵ It is a phallic symbol, but as I mentioned in Chapter 2, I would agree with Witt-Brattström that it is not the male phallicism that Freud tried to convert it into (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens kön*, p. 97). The snake has a long history as a symbol of the great earth goddesses, of wisdom and connectedness to the female/feminine, the snake of Eden sharing its wisdom with Eve being but one example. Christensen, who reads the novel

²⁰⁴ For a presentation of the ideology of gender binaries of the time, see Chapter 2.

²⁰⁵ See Kari Christensen ‘Det kvindelige livsmønster i Ragnhild Jølsens *Rikka Gan*’, in *Norsk Litteræer Årbok*, ed. by Leif Mæhle (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1983) pp. 35-46 (p. 44) and Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens kön*, p. 96.

from a psychoanalytical point of view, claims that *Gan* farm itself is a representation of *magna mater*, the great mother goddess. She generally sees the psychoanalytical metaphors as representing *female* phallicism, meaning the mythical, overwhelmingly powerful, good/evil feminine principle with its circle of reproduction, life and death. Male decadence writers such as Ola Hansson used the Medusa/snake symbol to represent their fear of the phallic mother/feminine (Witt-Brattström, *Dekadensens...*, p. 97). Freud would later construct the female body and biology as lack and envy of the male, but during decadence the masculine psyche still feared female physicality as men's dependence on women/the mother, argues Witt-Brattström. Before Freud twisted this around to the contrary, it was the male that felt different from the female, who was perceived as 'original' (*Dekadensens...*, p. 163).

Instead of using the snake phallic symbol to represent the deep, phantasmic fear of the feminine as male authors have done, *Rikka Gan* turns to female phallicism for help for its female character. This must be seen as a criticism of the patriarchal society *Rikka* lives in: she gets no help there. It offers no place for a 'natural' woman with a biological/physiological body and with sexual desire. When the *skjebneorm* shows *Rikka Lifsens flod* (The River of Life) and asks *Rikka* to love herself and to break free from her oppressed life, the *skjebneorm* is a great goddess trying to help her (p. 173). Like the Biblical Eve, *Rikka* is shown how to break free from a restrictive environment.

Jølsen uses the degenerative theme of reversed gender strength in her novel, as so many other writers of the time. But while Bang presents the degenerative theme as gender inversion, Jølsen represents feminine strength as something essential, inherited since the beginning of time. Through the frequent use of the motif of the powerful and strong foremothers as an explanation for *Rikka's* destiny and identity, the novel is given a touch of radical, essentialist feminism. This is also underlined by its frequent use of pre-psychoanalytic symbols, as (Freudian) psychoanalytic theory rests on the notion of biological destiny.

It is not as if women through their strength usurp the strength of men, but rather as if women are originally strong, and the men in the novel cannot match them. *Rikka Gan* does not discuss the reason for reversed gender strength, but rather what happens when those with all the legal rights (the men) cannot or will not take the responsibility that goes with these, and leave the problems to the women, whose hands are legally and socially tied.

3.8.1 Gender Asymmetry

In context of the discussion about power relationships above, a word about *gender asymmetry* feels beneficial. It is a concept that does not seem to be a properly established term within gender studies. I have not managed to find an outright definition, and it is generally not included in the subject indices of books in gender theory.

Gayle Rubin uses the concept in her now classic article about marriage transactions, where she concludes that the 'basic generalities about the organization of human sexuality' that can be derived from an analysis of Levi-Strauss's theories of kinship are the incest taboo, obligatory heterosexuality, and asymmetric division of the sexes.²⁰⁶ The asymmetry of gender – the difference between male exchanger and female exchanged in marriage transactions – entails the constraint of female sexuality.

Judith Butler uses the concept in for example *Gender Trouble* when discussing Simone de Beauvoir's theory about male transcendence/female physicality (pp. 15-16). She goes on to make clear that gender asymmetry is reproduced by 'fundamental structures', although different theorists have concentrated on different aspects of these structures (p. 18). Examples of such aspects can be language, psychological aspects, socialisation, *et cetera*.

Gender asymmetry can thus be described as a socially instituted difference in sexuality, power relations, legal rights *et cetera* between people with female bodies and people with male bodies. Gender asymmetry is based on and upheld by, for example, language and other social conventions.

In the case of *Rikka Gan*, it is clear how gender asymmetry worked in Norway at this specific time with its specific historical context. Speaking of 'power' in relation to the women of the story, it is at the same time evident that legitimate power can only belong to someone with a male body. In spite of the women's competence, they are never allowed official power. It must always be legitimised by Jon Torsen's weak and useless male body. As long as Torsen is alive and plays the role of the official power-holder, the family can stay on the farm.

Never is gender asymmetry more evident than in the case of sexuality. The social rules for what kind of sexual behaviour can be accepted in someone with a male, respectively female body are generally quite different.

²⁰⁶ Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women. Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *The Second Wave Feminism*, ed. by L. Nicholson (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) p. 42.

3.9 Evil Mothers

As a result of being prostituted to Aga, Rikka bears three children, who are all killed immediately after birth, by Rikka herself or by Fernanda. Rikka seriously contests the discursive image of feminine sexual desire having maternity as its only goal. This, and the fact that she kills the children she has as a result of her erotic desire places her among the wicked and unfeminine: the evil mothers. The fact that Fernanda prostitutes the young relative in her care and kills that woman's children for her own benefit places her among the evil stepmothers. Fernanda is an interesting paradox, as she is a good mother to her own children. The damage she does to Rikka and Rikka's children is legitimated by the fact that she must save her own children from starvation. 'En kvinde var stærk og dræbte sine børn af had og stolthed. En anden kvinde var stærk og dræbte andres for sine' (One woman was strong and killed her own children in hate and pride. Another woman was strong and killed another's children for her own), the old bailiff notes in his chronicle after Rikka's and Fernanda's deaths (*Rikka Gan*, pp. 197-98). Again female strength is highlighted as something negative, leading to monstrous behaviour in a patriarchal society.

Then as now, the traits represented in both the Rikka and Fernanda characters were at odds with everything a woman and mother should be. Normative motherliness demanded women's behaviour to be quite different.

3.9.1 Motherliness as a Discourse during the Modern Breakthrough

The construction of motherliness as an important feminine trait had started early in the nineteenth century, and during the Breakthrough it was reinforced (Johannisson, p. 58), probably as part of binary gender discourses. The definition of women as females and mothers was given priority over the image of women as rational and sexual beings, which can be seen in both *Fru Fanny* and *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*. In *Fru Fanny* the protagonist is severely punished with the death of her child for not accepting motherhood as a full time occupation, and the narrator in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* continually defines women as mothers and biological females in the first place.

The 'mother instinct' and women's call to become mothers were seen as the most powerful of all female instincts, especially by the middle classes. Motherhood was normative: those women who did not have children were pitied, scorned and regarded as incomplete women with unfulfilled lives. 'Kniplingsdukken [...] som ikke kan faa

børn engang!’ says Fernanda contemptuously about Aga’s wife (that lace doll, who can’t even have children!) (p. 108).

Even worse than those who *could* not have children were those who *would* not. Eva Hatzfeldt in *Haabløse Slægter* is a good example of a character who has abandoned this, the most important marker of ‘proper’ femininity, standing out as unnatural and unfeminine. ‘Den kvinde, som av inga allvarliga skäl avhållles från moderskapet, hör till snyltplantorna på stamträdet’ (the woman who for no good reason refrains from motherhood belongs to the parasitic plants on the family tree), Ellen Key sternly lectured (*Livslinjer*, p. 197), and explicitly stated that women who are mothers are worth more than those who are not (*Livslinjer*, p. 192). To her, it was an almost inescapable duty to have children (and she meant a *minimum* of 3-4 children) if you were to be considered a moral person. For infertile women she recommended adoption. For unmarried women longing intensely for a child, she controversially suggested they have one anyway (Key, *Livslinjer I*, p. 179). As an unmarried middle-class mother around the *fin de siècle* would have been gravely stigmatised and denied access to social life with her own class, this must be seen as both naïve and very radical.

For much of the nineteenth century and far into the twentieth, motherly love and devotion was seen as a biological instinct. ‘Not to love one’s child had become an inexplicable crime. A mother was loving – or she was not a real mother’, Elisabeth Badinter comments on the era (p. 178). A woman could no longer escape the mother role without becoming the object of moral condemnation. ‘Feminine nature’ was now defined as synonymous with the model mother, writes Badinter (p. 206). Devotion and sacrifice were emphasised as traits characterising ‘normal’ women, who had to bow their heads or be defined as abnormal.



In artwork of the period the desired, self-sacrificial mother role is depicted, for example in the sculpture 'The Captive Mother' (1889) by Stephan Abel Sinding, where a tied-up woman painfully bends her body to be able to breastfeed her baby. In Christian Krohg's painting 'Sovende mor' (1883), an exhausted mother has fallen asleep by her baby's cot.

Badinter convincingly claims that there is no such thing as mother instinct. The willingness of European women to love and look after their children fluctuates greatly between the centuries, from sending them away to wet-nurses immediately after birth and not asking for them until years later, to personally nursing, tending to and educating the children. Badinter shows how women's will to be 'good mothers' is 'a direct consequence of the level of esteem the society bestows upon the maternal role' (Badinter, p. 4). This, in turn, is governed by economic factors like the authorities' need of a growing and healthy population, for example, to supply a basis of soldiers or workers.

It is no coincidence that women were pressed to start nursing and tending to their own children at the moment that European societies were just discovering the child's commercial value and starting to view it as a potential economic resource and a basis for the state's military power (Badinter, pp. 124-25, Foucault, *Sexuality I*, pp. 140-42).

On the whole, the perspective on the role of the mother in Scandinavia would seem to have developed in tandem with that on the Continent. The change started when the status of the middle-class woman was gradually reduced from that of being her husband's business partner to his wife, housekeeper and mother of his children.²⁰⁷ Another important driving force was the state, which in Scandinavia as in the rest of

²⁰⁷ During the nineteenth century, the wife's status in the household had been more and more reduced. In traditional society, she had been her husband's working partner in the production unit the household consisted of, with important responsibilities and tasks of her own, which the household could not do without. Towards the end of the century, the married middle class woman's working tasks had been severely reduced, and with it her prestige. This was more and more transmitted to the wage-earning husband, for whom the wife's importance was now limited to being a sexual partner (Ahlström, p. 160).

Europe had discovered the advantages of population growth (Berg, Frost & Olsen, p. 288).

Badinter does not say that motherly *love* does not exist, just motherly *instinct*, and she is convincing in that parental love and its expression are acquired through socialisation, by both women and men.²⁰⁸



Giovanni Segantini, 'The Evil Mothers' (1894). The painting shows a half naked woman wildly blowing in a tree in an open, northern landscape. She is alone, witchlike, not contained in the feminine space of the home, seemingly absorbed in her egocentric self.

Ellen Key saw motherhood as the most important cultural task for women: '[M]oderligheten är kvinnans djupaste bestämning, hennes innersta egendomlighet' (Motherliness is a woman's outmost destiny, her outmost essentiality) (Key, *Missbrukad...*, p. 59). All women could be excellent mothers. Key not only made a distinction between spiritual and biological motherhood, she also made clear that it was the first one, motherly love as a cultural phenomenon, which interested her and thus she displaced the view of women expressed by the male 'mother ideologists' (C. Lindén, pp. 156, 176-77). Motherly instinct was not a result of giving birth, but an attitude towards the child, and Key saw spiritual motherhood as something essentially feminine that men in general could not possess. The fear of women 'wasting' their capacity for motherliness resulted in her encouraging women to choose motherhood and

²⁰⁸ One criticism against Badinter's study might be that she uses just one relatively short time period (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) to prove a non-existent maternal instinct. Maybe this time period was a divergence in an otherwise long, unbroken period of more or less loving and caring maternal 'instinctive' behaviour, where most women kept their children close to themselves? She has also been criticised for mainly describing the behaviour of the middle and upper classes, but in fact she discusses the artisan and working classes too, who treated their children much the same way.

homemaking in the first place, and leave academic studies and the public sphere to men. Key's concept *samhällsmodern* (the social, or spiritual mother) was a political metaphor for women's participation in public life when universal suffrage had been achieved (C. Lindén p. 159).

Key believed in motherhood's overwhelming importance for women. Ibsen had presented a contrary discourse in his play *Ett dukkehjem* (1879; A Doll's House). Here Nora ends the play by walking out on her husband and three children, because she believes there must be more important things in life than being a wife and a mother: that first of all she must learn to grow as a human being. The play was seen as shocking and scandalous at its time, and when set up in Germany the end was changed so that Nora came back home again.

Key's acceptance of motherhood other than biological was an unusual view at the time, as the dominant discourses were closely tied to biological instincts. The advice books of the time state that no one can replace the biological mother. Nurses were viewed with suspicion, also by Key. '[T]he stepmother and the nurse were considered incapable of loving the children for whom they had "accidentally" been given responsibility. Since their instinct would not urge them on, they rarely experienced – it was said – affection for those unwanted burdens' (Badinter, p. 160). In *Fru Fanny*, Badinter's claim is explicit; Fanny's child dies because she is not at hand, and she herself admits that all the tiny threads between herself and the child have been cut while she has been working professionally outside the home. The nurse, otherwise sympathetically portrayed, is indifferent to or does not understand the needs of Fanny's child.

According to Badinter the father had had an almost total moral responsibility for the child only a hundred years earlier. Now it was the mother who was considered important for the children and the father's role was much diminished compared with, for example, the seventeenth century. Although he was still the lawful guardian of his children, he was now seen as the one who had sown his seeds, and after that his responsibility was mainly to support his family financially. 'It was entirely on [the mother] that everything was to depend', Badinter quotes the doctors of the time (p. 237). Should the child die or become a criminal, it would now be considered the mother's fault. It was no longer the father who had to answer for the child's offences but the mother, and it was her failure as a mother that was the reason. 'Even the

irresponsibility of the father was her fault' (Badinter, p. 167). She had to discreetly lead him on to the right, paternal path.

In all fairness it must be admitted that the man was stripped of his fatherhood. In granting him (and him alone) an economic role only, society was gradually removing him, literally and figuratively, from his child. Physically absent the whole day, tired out in the evenings, the father did not have any great opportunity to develop a relationship with the child. All the evidence would indicate, however, that this privation in a society run by men was greeted with more than a little complacency on their part; they seem to have been willing victims.

(Badinter, p. 258)

The question of a fatherly instinct, making a father want to tend to and teach his little ones, never arose. It was the mother who had the almost complete responsibility for raising and educating the children, and it was her influence that was considered important for their development. Frykman and Löfgren, however, doubt that the mother's influence on the children was as total as the Victorians generally thought: although the children's view of the world was filtered through her eyes, much of what they learned came from the servants (p. 245).

From Badinter's description of both parents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neither appears to take much interest in their children, and neither was willing to give up their time to raise the children. As Frykman and Löfgren point out, raising children belongs to the turning nature-into-culture category of 'dirty' tasks that are in general assigned to women all over the world (p. 247). Women might have reached out for emancipation and started to compete with men in the labour market even earlier than they did, if they had not had normative motherliness assigned to them. The timing of philosophers and scientists in defining women as biologically programmed for motherhood and homemaking in the nineteenth century could not have been more advantageous for men. Now, the middle-class women could be kept in their homes for at least another hundred years. Badinter comments:

Men and society could not prevent the desire for emancipation from taking hold, but they very skilfully managed to create obstacles to the acquisition of power and return the woman

to the role they felt she should never have left: that of the mother. As a bonus, they would get their wives back.

(Badinter, pp. 72-73)

However, there is both historical and literary proof that there were Scandinavian men who, if they had the time, were willing to put much of it into the raising of their children. Garton tells of how Danish writer Erik Skram welcomed his fatherly role in his working partnership of a marriage with Norwegian writer Amalie Skram: they divided their daughter's care between them, Erik often minding her while Amalie worked.²⁰⁹ As a writer working from home Erik Skram had time for and physical closeness to his daughter, as well as a hard-working, talented wife.

The discourse of motherhood as a biological instinct was otherwise routinely used to keep middle-class women in the home and deny them equal social and political rights with men. The aspiration for emancipation was seen as incompatible with women's natural function, which was to give birth to and take care of children. 'When a woman had ambitions (whether for social standing, intellectual achievement, or professional careers) [...] she was infinitely less tempted than any other woman to invest her time and energy in the raising of children' (Badinter, p. 194). Everything had to be done to persuade middle-class women to drop all professional and academic ambitions and stay at home as childrearsers and homemakers. For the first time, a distinction was now made between 'good' and 'bad' mothers (Berg, Frost & Olsen, p. 273). This distinction seems to divide mothers who would/could spend most of their time with their children, and those who would/could not fit into the said categories. A working class woman may not have been considered a good mother, as she had to leave her child with a nurse, but at least she was excused as she was financially forced to work. But an intellectual woman, pursuing her 'personal' interests to the disadvantage of her child and husband was seen to be a selfish mother.

Being a failing mother is a wicked trait in many literary female characters of the Breakthrough. Eva Hatzfeldt in *Haabløse Slægter* carves out her own feminine deficiency by refusing to reproduce and by seducing and devouring boys. Axel in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* constantly complains about Maria's inadequate motherliness. While Fanny in *Fru Fanny* egoistically devotes her energy to work and politics instead of her

²⁰⁹ Janet Garton, 'Language and Gender in the Correspondence of Amalie and Erik Skram' in *Ästhetik der skandinavischen Moderne: Bernhard Glienke zum Gedenken*, ed. by Annegret Heitmann and Karin Hoff (Frankfurt am Main: New York, Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 105-118 (p. 115).

children, Rikka sacrifices her babies on the altar of sexuality and survival. Rikka does not only refuse motherhood: she first reproduces, and then kills her children.

By undermining the romantic plot, in which feminine sexuality, illicit or not, ends with marriage, *Rikka Gan* undermines a whole discourse where infanticide is seen as tantamount to women's vile attempts to cover up their erotic passion. In the novel, infanticide is instead presented as the result of a merciless society where all the horrors of prostitution and sexual abuse, often with the consent of the young women's relatives, are unveiled. Infanticide is the inevitable result as there is no social space for illegitimate children. Those women who do not conform to the feminine script with its romantic plot are monstrous and not allowed motherhood.



Erik Henningsen's painting is called 'Summum jus, summa injuria' (the highest justice is the highest injustice) (1886). Pictured here is the young working class woman, surrounded by men of whom any one, according to the statistics, may well have been the father of the child she has buried in despair.

3.9.2 The Infanticides in *Rikka Gan*

The good mother is seen as life-giving and caring. What could be more evil than the opposite: a mother who kills her children, who snatches away the gift of life as soon as she has given it? Rikka is not the first woman in her family to kill her newborns. But it is not something she does out malice or wickedness. Because of social conventions, she has no choice.

When Rikka gets pregnant, guilt and depression eat her from inside. Lying on the green moss of the forest, she thinks that if wild animals were to slay her now, it would matter little. ‘Rikka Torsen er falden’ (Rikka Torsen is fallen) (p. 115). It is primarily her pregnancy that makes her a ‘fallen woman’, guilt-ridden and remorseful, not the sexual act itself, which is an interesting standpoint in the novel. The concepts of sexuality, fertility, guilt and death are closely intertwined, but while it is the sexual act *per se* that is usually connected with guilt in literature of the time, in *Rikka Gan* it is rather reproduction. Or rather, the lack of the right to reproduce. While being lawfully married did not guarantee the right sort of love, as proved by many novels of the time, especially by female authors, it did guarantee the wife’s right to keep her children. The right to reproduction through marriage only is criticised in the following passage, where Rikka imagines hearing the dead children’s voices whispering to her from the walls of Gan manor:

“De spørger mig [...] hvorfor kvinder havde saant had til *dem*, mens andre barn faar kys og kjærtegn og varm melk med sukker i. – De spørger, hvordan mon det liv vilde været, som blev berøvet dem. – Og jeg siger dem, at de levnetsløb vilde bli de elendigste af alle. – Men de graater og siger, at det elendigste liv er dog livet værd.”

(*Rikka Gan*, p. 157)

The unfairness of the social system is here explicitly criticised through the dead children’s voices asking why they are so hated, while other children get kisses, cuddles and warm milk with sugar, those other children being legitimate. The dead children will not listen to Rikka’s defence that their lives would have been unbearable. The text judges social conventions unacceptable, which do not treat all children alike.

On the whole, Rikka’s feelings of guilt do not derive from her erotic escapades, but from committing infanticide. Depression makes her feel like ‘et afhugget træ’ (a cut down tree) (p. 150). Instead of being allowed to grow naturally, Rikka’s motherliness is mutilated and cut down, as a tree is cut down. The killing of her first child changes Rikka. She takes on vampire traits: ‘Rikka [...] var hvid, saa hvid, at hun næsten var farlig at se paa. Øinene glimtete ofte med blikket til siden, og læberne saaes kun som en smal, rød stribe’ (Rikka was pale, so pale that she looked almost dangerous. The glinting eyes often looked aside, and her lips were like a thin, red stripe) (p. 137). The image represents Rikka’s state of mind: she feels like the living dead. Again, it is the

image of the vampire which is used. As a result of the killing of her children, Rikka and her brother's family can survive: like the vampire, Rikka lives off the lives of others (her children). She is filled with hate and bitterness; she has her children's blood on her hands.

Once she starts to feel this way, Rikka identifies with the evil mothers. Full of hatred against Fernanda, who struggles to keep Rikka in her prostitute position, she attacks Fernanda through her little daughter, Lillefernanda.

Rikka Torsen lo lydløst, mens der gik en styg flimmer over hendes øine:

"Lille Fernanda vokser jo til nu." Hun tog og vendte barnet om mod lyset: "Hun blir pen, ungen, du. Gratulerer dig, svigerinde, jeg tænker nok, det gaar." – Den anden kneb læberne sammen og kunde ikke faa ret tvinn paa traaden:

"Tag ikke i barnet mit, du," hvisked hun hæst. "Der blir mærker efter fingrene dine."

"Pas du mærkerne efter dine egne fingre," svarte Rikka Torsen haankoldt. [...] Hvad siger du da, Lillefernanda, " spurgte hun barnet, "om at bli faster Rikkas stedfortræder paa Gan?" [...]

Fernanda rev den lille heftig til seg. "Dit udyr du er."

(*Rikka Gan*, pp. 177-78)

This is the novel's turning point. Rikka reverses what Fernanda has done to her when prostituting her to Aga, and proposes that Lillefernanda take over as Aga's mistress, so that Rikka herself can leave Gan and get away. Only later will real fear grip her that her proposal might actually come true when she breaks free, and it is then she begins her unselfish acts that bring no gain for herself, among those securing Lillefernanda's future financially.

How does one win the readers' sympathy for a female character who experiences and acts upon sexual desire outside marriage, and who then kills her own offspring? The non-egotistical actions towards Lillefernanda suddenly provide Rikka with a motherliness she has lacked so far. The text now reconstructs Rikka into a more socially acceptable version of femininity by giving her maternal feelings, helping the reader to warm to her.

By allowing the killing of her newborns, Rikka emerges as an evil mirror image of the good mother. Fernanda, killing her young protégée's children as well as prostituting her, joins the group of literary evil stepmothers who do not protect and love the children and young people they are in charge of.

3.9.3 Infanticide and Sexuality

In her study of child murder in British culture, Josephine McDonagh shows that infanticide has not seldom been connected with erotic desire.²¹⁰ The connection illicit sex – illegitimate child – infanticide is obvious. Illicit sex might be seen as feminine erotic desire and wickedness and the infanticide itself as a sexual act. Infanticide also has connotations to social disorder, as feminine sexual desire was seen as rebellious in itself (McDonagh, p. 84).

Susan C. Staub points out that in cases of unmarried women committing infanticide, they are treated in seventeenth century English literature as ‘decidedly unnatural, monstrous and sexually promiscuous’.²¹¹ However, towards the end of the eighteenth century another version of the child murderess emerged, which can also be found in Scandinavian Breakthrough literature a hundred years later: namely that of ‘the unmarried and destitute mother, who kills her child in poverty and emotional despair’ (McDonagh, p. 69). The two versions, the erotic, wicked woman with undesirable sexual desire and undesirable femininity, and the poor, destitute, unmarried woman are mixed together in the representation of Rikka. The two images complicate the image of the child murderess and the reasons for the murder. Child murder was irreconcilable with how women were idealised. The child murderess had both an illicit sex life and was capable of violence, the two most feared and provocative feminine acts against patriarchy. On the other hand, the unmarried woman who committed infanticide was recognised as economically and socially powerless. Through textual measures, *Rikka Gan* would have to ensure the sympathy of its readers for such a controversial protagonist as Rikka. Providing Rikka with maternal feelings in spite of the murders is such a measure, helping to restore her to ‘proper’ femininity.

Rikka is neither raped nor seduced, even if she has to stay in the sexual relationship for economic reasons. Her erotic desire results in children and infanticide, as the narrative rejects the romantic plot in which the woman marries. At the same time, Rikka laments her dead children and questions why there is no place for them in patriarchal society. In spite of her erotic desire and illicit sexuality, the story allows Rikka an acceptable femininity through her motherly feelings for her dead babies and

²¹⁰ Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²¹¹ Susan C. Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 46.

for Lillefernanda, and can thus channel the events into a societal critique instead of a total condemnation of its protagonist.

3.9.4 The Evil Stepmother

In the passage below, where Fernanda sits spinning, she is represented as the classic evil stepmother from a fairy tale.

Saa sad de da videre de to kvinder i det halvmørke rum, der stilheden forstørredes ved rokkehjulets snurr. Og ofte forekom det jomfru Rikka, der hun selv sad med hænderne i skjød, at den anden traadte endnu en rok, og traaden hun der spandt spandt hun av guld, blod, ondskab og fine trevler af kjød. Og rokken var jomfru Rikka.

(*Rikka Gan*, pp. 127-28)

Spinning is a common activity in many myths and fairy tales, from the three Norns in Nordic mythology, spinning the threads of each individual's life, to the spinning in *Sleeping Beauty* or *Rumpelstiltskin*. Here it is only Fernanda who spins, symbolising her as a spider luring on her prey. The thread she spins ensnares Rikka more and more tightly, just as Fernanda keeps Rikka attached to Aga in spite of her efforts to break free. In Rikka's mind, she spins a thread of gold, blood, evil and fine shreds of flesh. The gold represents the economic gain Fernanda and her family make from the relationship and the blood symbolises Rikka's murdered children. The evil represents Fernanda's refusal to see what the relationship does to Rikka, who, like the streetwalking prostitute is rapidly breaking down physically and mentally. The flesh represents the sordid lust of the flesh, the physical sexuality from which Rikka tries to escape but which Fernanda firmly spins into the thread of her life, like a Norn. However, Fernanda has no choice.

”Og du tænker vel paa, at Aga er en skurk?” spurgte hun tilbage. ”Og da tænker du vel paa, at du nødig vil styrte din svigerinde i elendighed; – fordi du ogsaa selv er den nærmeste til at sørge for din syge mand og dine børn?”

”Elendighed?” svarte Fernanda Torsen, idet hun greb haardt om jomfru Rikkas haandled. ”Hvem snakker om elendighed for dig? Det er jo over os andre elendigheden kommer – sult, sygdom og skam.”

”Sagde du skam, Fernanda?”

”Hvad andet skulde jeg kalde det, du, naar jeg jaged børnene paa bygden at tigge mad? Naar vi knapt havde tag over hovedet? – Og du, stolt jomfru,” tilføied hun langsomt – ”vilde du slaa følge som bagstekone til hverdags [...]”.

(*Rikka Gan*, pp. 126-27)

When Rikka points out that Aga is a scoundrel and that Fernanda herself, and not Rikka, is responsible for supporting Fernanda’s children and sick husband, Fernanda sees Rikka’s pride as luxurious, and asks her if she is willing to do menial work for other people instead of what she does. Again, the text looks to social explanations for evil feminine behaviour rather than inherent ones. All through the novel, Rikka and Fernanda are pushed into making almost unbearable decisions through the responsibility laid on them by men who refuse to take *their* responsibility.

3.10 The Closure

Through blackmailing Aga, Rikka secures her family’s future financial situation, and takes the final step to break free from the degradation she hates. But in spite of Rikka’s confinement in a more acceptable femininity through her motherliness, the text will not let her escape. In crossing the lake to the coach and much hoped for freedom waiting on the other side, Rikka drowns, taking Fernanda with her. Rikka and Fernanda had refused to conform to the feminine script. They were monster women. Rikka did not fit into the romantic plot, which ends with marriage. For a female character, practically the only alternative to marriage was death.²¹² Generally, there was no place in the Modern Breakthrough for the kind of unconventional femininity Rikka displayed. Although Rikka mounts a thematic assault on the social conventions of ‘femininity’, her death in the closure reinforces the traditional form of the novel.

²¹² In *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985) Rachel Blau DuPlessis establishes that nineteenth-century novels about women are characterised by a conflict between love and the woman’s personal development. The conflict is usually resolved by her personal development being set aside through marriage or death. The alternatives ‘marriage or death’ have then during the twentieth century been a literary inheritance and a challenge for writers (Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 3-4]). However, there are several examples in Nordic literature from the Breakthrough period which shows that a woman can put her own development first and hope to survive, Ibsen’s *Ett dukkehjem* maybe being the most well-known example. Other examples are Bjørnson’s works *Magnhild* (1877) and *Leonarda* (1879), and Quiding’s *Fru Fanny*, analysed in the next chapter. And in her excellent study of the female *Bildungsroman* in Finland’s Swedish literature, Maria Lival-Lindström analyses several novels by female authors where the female protagonists manage to work their lives out without either marrying or dying (Maria Lival-Lindström, *Mot ett eget rum: Den kvinnliga bildningsromanen i Finlands svenska litteratur* [Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2009]).

3.11 Summary

Rikka Gan joins a line of novels by female authors, criticising the sex life and marriage women had to put up with at the time.²¹³ But Jølsen's female protagonist does not follow the romantic plot and take the place of a wife, but of the mistress. The protagonist Rikka's unlawful position leads to infanticide of her children.

The novel is one of the first to represent feminine sexuality. Feminine erotic desire is represented as active, searching and appreciative of male beauty. This was most unusual for the time, when feminine sexuality was seen as practically non-existent, except for reproductive purposes.

It is not only with regard to sexuality that Rikka transgresses normative behaviour of the time. Breakthrough motherhood was presented as self-sacrificing, loving and practically a full-time job for mothers. In *Rikka Gan*, there is no societal and cultural space for the illegitimate children Rikka bears: she must kill them. Traditionally in literature, there is a connotative link between erotic desire and infanticide. Still, Rikka stands out as strong but pitiful, gaining the sympathy of the reader.

Rikka Gan's strategy in representing topics as controversial as feminine sexual desire and infanticide has been to leave textual gaps. Faced with the missing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the reader does not realise until afterwards what has happened. Keeping the reader's sympathy with Rikka in spite of her transgressive actions is achieved by securing for her the sympathy of the old bailiff, a trustworthy character the readers feel they can rely on.

The novel shows many decadence and pre-psychoanalytical style elements, but strongly rejects the misogynist view of the feminine that is typical for male decadence and Freudian psychoanalytical theory. Instead, *Rikka Gan* delivers a devastating critique, both of a literary trend that represents the feminine as something negative and of a patriarchal society that offers no place to the unmarried woman and her children, a society where women are misused and abused and illegitimate children killed. *Rikka Gan* is a contribution to the discussion about gender at the time, a text fighting back against the one-dimensional feminine representations of decadence by using its own stylistic weapons. Here women are full of life, physical and ethereal, good and evil: in short as human as are men. *Rikka Gan* is a painful dissection of many Breakthrough

²¹³ For example Erik Skram's *Gertrude Coldbjørnsen* (1879), Amalie Skram's *Constance Ring* (1885) and Victoria Benedictsson's *Pengar* (1884).

women's constricted sexual experience, and the psychological and emotional damage such experience was having on them.

Rikka Gan's female characters are not inferior to men in any way. They are fertile goddesses, although wing-clipped and harnessed by patriarchal society and its misogynist laws. True femininity, *Rikka Gan* claims, is strong, active and sexual, the opposite of femininity as presented by Modern Breakthrough discourses. But in spite of its insistent, oppositional representation of such femininity, there was no place for that sort of femininity at the time. In the closure of *Rikka Gan*, the soft, cold waters of the lake swallow up both Rikka and Fernanda.

4. Threatened Masculinity

The Narrative Voice in August Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (written 1887-88, published 1893)

Swedish August Strindberg (1849-1912) is (together with Ibsen) probably the most internationally well-known Scandinavian writer of the period today. Strindberg was very productive during all the four decades of his active writing career. While earlier having viewed 'the woman question' with some understanding, he during the 1880s turned into one of the more ferocious gender debaters, opposing female emancipation and even taking a misogynist stance. In a string of dramas and prose works from that decade he examined the changing relationship between the genders from a masculinist point of view, as contrary to Ibsen, expressing a longing for times when patriarchal values had not yet been challenged by women. Strindberg explicitly promoted conventional gender roles, and tended to express himself offensively, sometimes bitterly accusing women in the most derogative terms. He also debated sexuality quite openly, and sometimes explicitly named the sexual organs, which was unusual and highly controversial at the time. 'The woman question' as treated by Strindberg and other male authors is really about men and the threatened position of patriarchy, writes Fahlgren. The breakthrough of the women's movement meant that dominant power structures in society were challenged, and men had to take a stance to this. The reaction of Strindberg and other men was to take on a traditional role and longing back for a time when the husband was the head of the family. According to Strindberg, women demanding equality were not normal (*Kvinnans...*, p. 28).

In my opinion, the short story collection *Giftas I (Getting Married I; 1884)*, *Giftas II (Getting Married II; 1886)*, the two dramas *Fadren (The Father; 1887)*, *Fröken Julie (Miss Julie; 1888)* and the novel *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* (written in French 1887-88, first published in 1893)²¹⁴ constitute the core of Strindberg's gender debates. In these works, new ideas of femininity clash against those of conventional masculinity, and most of them are tragedies. Ulf Olsson states that in Strindberg's texts a layer of contemporary ideas are constantly floating around, and that *Le Plaidoyer* contains gender discourses that are 'only too typical of their time'. 'The view of women', he claims, 'is not just Strindberg's, it is expressed in various versions by many writers, artists and scientists' (p. 172).

Although Strindberg's explicit intention was to give a pessimistic picture of the New Woman and the damage he believed she would cause the relationship between men and women, his works express much more about contemporary gender discourses. His oeuvres also (unwittingly?) display the considerable gender asymmetry at the time, exposing the very fragile legal situation of women and what they had to put up with from husbands who had total control of the family and its finances. Even though Strindberg generally represents as villainesses the women who fight back or deviate from conventional femininity, their signs of distress in a patriarchal society are not lost. The resistance of Strindberg's female characters and its consequences are part of the Breakthrough gender discourse, and make his 'gender' works deeply ambiguous. It is precisely this ambiguity that makes Strindberg's works interesting from a gender point of view. Gender scholars have commented that there is never a final solution to the gender problems in his works. These problems are, like in *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*, explored from a masculine point of view in an attempt by the male characters to understand themselves through the female characters.

Le Plaidoyer d'un fou represents a female protagonist, Maria, who consistently transgresses the rules of normative femininity, while its male narrator, Axel, desperately struggles to make her conform. The novel can be characterised as a frantic and fearful masculine protest against the growing independence of women, while Maria is an early representation of the New Woman. I have chosen this novel because of its intense gender discussion and its interesting autodiegetic narrator, Axel. His narrative voice is a site of crisis and contradiction as he struggles to silence the voices of all the

²¹⁴ August Strindberg, *Le Plaidoyer d'un Fou*, ed. by Göran Rossholm and Gunnel Engwall, (Nationalupplaga. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1999).

women in the novel. I see this silencing on his part as an expression of a wish to quench the early New Woman and reverse the changing relationship between men and women. Axel is not only the narrator of this story; as it is an autodiegetic story he is also the male protagonist. In this study, however, it will be mainly Axel the narrator that will be analysed.

The plot of *Le Plaidoyer* centres on how Axel and Maria meet and on the ups and downs of their courtship and their ten years of marriage. Axel's lover and subsequently wife Maria exasperates him with her refusal to become the conventional wife. The first half of the novel represents Axel's and Maria's courtship in Stockholm, the second half their rootless and often unhappy wanderings in France, Switzerland and Germany, where the family travelled and stayed for five years.

Although the novel treats the lack of conventional femininity in Maria and her transgressions into masculine territory, its real focus turns out to be Axel's masculinity. His conventional masculinity is so dependent on Maria sticking to her pole on the traditional gender binary, that it starts crumbling whenever his wife refuses to meet his demands. Maria is represented as intentionally setting out to destroy Axel's masculinity, eventually causing their divorce, while Axel terrified and outraged watches her transgress conventional gender boundaries.

Vast amounts have been written about Strindberg and his works. Many scholars have taken an interest in *Le Plaidoyer*, some of them from a gender perspective. Ulf Boëthius's *Strindberg och kvinnofrågan till och med Giftas I* (1969) discusses Strindberg's treatment of 'the woman question' from a historical perspective. Maria Bergom-Larsson makes a traditionally sociological but pertinent gender analysis in her contribution to *Författarnas litteraturhistoria* (1978), 'En dåres försvarstal och mansmedvetandets kris'. Margareta Fahlgren adds some psychoanalytical aspects in *Kvinnans ekvation* (1994). In *Making Space* (2004), Anna Westerståhl Stenport analyses the novel in terms of gender and space. Together with Anna Cavallin, Stenport has edited a collection of essays examining gender theory applied to Strindberg's works, *Det gäckande könet* (2006), where a couple of the essays refer to *Le Plaidoyer*. Finally, Ann-Sofi Lönngren reads the novel as a homoerotic story in *Att röra en värld* (2007).

Several scholars have also taken an interest in *Le Plaidoyer*'s extremely self-assertive and dominant narrator, mostly from a psychological perspective, where Axel's

sanity, reliability, motives *et cetera* are discussed.²¹⁵ Apart from in the gender discourses, my interest lies in the narrative voice from a gender perspective, where I use Susan S. Lanser's gender-based narrative theory to analyse Axel as both form and content, as a function of the text itself. Axel will be read as a representation of contemporary gender discourses, as a built-in denotation. I demonstrate how the narrative voice itself can be seen as both a literary technique and a display of discourses.

As far as I am aware I am the first to examine the narrator in *Le Plaidoyer* from a narratological perspective, not to mention one combining narratology and gender. Not even Ulf Olsson, in his sophisticated reading of *Le Plaidoyer* in *Levande död* (1996) gets down to much more than mentioning the narrator.

Le Plaidoyer was written in French in 1887-88 while Strindberg lived with his family in Denmark and Switzerland. Strindberg had his original manuscript edited by French writer and dramatist Georges Loiseau (1864-1949), and it would be Loiseau's edition that was published in 1893. I have, however, chosen to use Strindberg's original manuscript (complete with grammatical flaws) in my analysis.

4.1 The Question of 'Originality'

I call Strindberg's manuscript the 'original', but the fact is that the concept 'original' is rather fluid in this context. First of all, the original manuscript itself can in a sense be seen as a translation or transcript, as it was written in French about Swedish characters, thinking and speaking in Swedish, with half of the novel set in Stockholm. Secondly, Loiseau's French edition was actually produced in *cooperation* with Strindberg.²¹⁶ Thus, the authentic writer Strindberg was co-producer of the edited text which he himself *intended* as the original, as this was the text to be published. What I here call 'Strindberg's original' was really raw material and not intended for publication. In this sense, Loiseau's text could be seen as the original, although it will not be treated as such in this study. The reason for this is that *Scandinavian* discourses are the main focus of this thesis, and Loiseau added a filter of French discourses to his text.

²¹⁵ See for example Sven Rinman's 'En dåres försvarstal' (in *Svensk litteraturtidskrift*, ed. by Algot Werin, 1965) and Margaretha Fahlgren's *Kvinnans Ekvation*.

²¹⁶ Göran Rossholm, 'Kommentarer' in August Strindberg's *En dåres försvarstal*, , transl. Hans Levander, ed. by Göran Rossholm and Gunnel Engwall, (Nationalupplaga. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1999), pp. 519-597. The two writers evidently met on several occasions to discuss Loiseau's text (pp. 578-80).

As Göran Rossholm points out, Loiseau's editing has been radical (p. 586). Loiseau accepted very few sentences from the manuscript unchanged, and the changes do not only concern the language, for example the syntax, length of sentences and choice of words and expressions. He also made changes to the representations and the actions of the characters.

Loiseau's edition would be seen as the original one for a long time, forming the basis of other translations. The first Swedish translator, John Landquist, for example, complained that he could not recognise Strindberg in French. Gunnel Engwall points out that Strindberg's original manuscript shows that it was Loiseau's changes that made Strindberg's prose difficult to recognise.²¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of Loiseau's influence on the text, with examples of both his and the other early translators' changes, I refer to my article 'Translating Gender in Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*'.²¹⁸

The disparity between French and Swedish gender discourses is thus my main reason for using Strindberg's original manuscript. That he, as a non-native French speaker, clearly saw the need for a French writer to edit his manuscript before publication is evident: the book could not have been published in French without it. The French editing is part of *Le Plaidoyer*'s muddled publishing history several years after it was written, and I would like to give a brief account of the interesting history of the novel's early years.

4.2 A Short History of *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*

When Strindberg wrote *Le Plaidoyer* in French, he never intended it to be published in Scandinavia; it would most almost certainly have caused a scandal as it would have been seen as an autobiographical text. Another reason for writing directly in French was Strindberg's hope of establishing himself in the French market. Loiseau's version of Strindberg's original manuscript was used, at least as a base, for all translations until 1973, although the anonymous first German translator had access to the original.²¹⁹ In 1973 Strindberg's original manuscript, which had been lost for about eighty years, was

²¹⁷ Gunnel Engwall, "'Det knastrar i hjärnan": Strindberg som sin egen franska översättare', in *August Strindberg och hans översättare*, ed. by Meidal & Nilsson pp. 35-51 (p. 49). Both Landquist and Swedish critics seem to have believed that Loiseau had hardly changed Strindberg's text, which proved to be totally wrong when the original manuscript was found (Engwall, p. 47).

²¹⁸ Kristina Sjögren, 'Translating Gender in Strindberg's *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou*', *Scandinavica*, 48 (2009), pp. 8-30.

²¹⁹ The first German translation, *Beichte eines Thoren* (1893), was done by an anonymous translator, identified as a Dr. Wilhelm Kämpf (Rossholm 1999, p. 556).

sensationally found in Oslo. All this means there were several people involved in the production of all versions of the novel until 1973, which destabilised Strindberg's authority over the text for almost a century.

For various reasons the French publication of the novel was delayed, and it was to be the anonymous German translation, made directly from the original manuscript, that was first published, in 1893.²²⁰ This book was confiscated shortly after, when a lawsuit was brought against it on grounds of 'indecentcy'. In spite of Strindberg's protests a pirated translation was then published in Sweden later that year,²²¹ causing the expected scandal, and another pirated translation was published in 1903²²². The novel was finally published in France in 1895, in the language in which it had originally been created. The Swedish and German reviewers were highly critical of the first German translation, seeing the novel as wholly autobiographical, but the French critics were much more positive about it a couple of years later (Rossholm, pp. 564-65, 587-93). An official translation into Strindberg's mother tongue only appeared in 1914, made by John Landquist.

4.3 *Le Plaidoyer's* Narrator

The narrative voice in *Le Plaidoyer* is what Genette calls an autodiegetic narrator, who 'never yields the privilege of the narrative function to anyone'.²²³ Axel not only participates in the story, but also tells his own story; he functions as the central protagonist in the tale he is narrating. In this way, Axel is both the narrator and a character in *Le Plaidoyer*. These two functions should not be wholly mixed up: a narrator has always a privileged status *vis à vis* the narrated characters. As the narrator's acts literally bring the story into existence, the narrator always has more authority than any other character, and structurally always stands at a level 'above' the narrated events by virtue of narrating them. 'The narrator, *as narrator*, cannot communicate with the characters who engage in the narrated events, even if that

²²⁰ Lars G. Warne, 'Strindberg Redivivus', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Spring (1980), 183-95 (p. 183).

²²¹ 'En dåres bikt' in *Budkavlen* 1893 no. 25-50 and 1894 no. 1-17.

²²² *Ett äktenskap* (Stockholm: P.E. Nilssons förlagsaktiebolag, 1903).

²²³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, transl. by Jane E. Lewin, foreword by Jonathan Culler (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 247.

narrator is also a character in those events', writes Lanser.²²⁴ My interest in this analysis lies primarily with Axel the narrator, and his relationship to the two main characters Axel (himself) and Maria.

It can be added that Axel is probably one of the most self-assertive, one-sided and attention-seeking autodiegetic narrators in literary history. He completely takes over the story, leaving its other protagonist, Maria, without any voice or subjectivity at all. We cannot know her apart from Axel's vision, we have no idea how she herself perceives her life. Although Axel claims the story is about her, she is an object in it, carefully prevented from stepping forward into subjectivity. Axel the narrator tells the story entirely from his own point of view and the novel is focalised through the Axel character alone.

Axel *is* an unusual narrator in all his hectic, not to say hysterical, efforts to convince the reader of his own credibility. Until quite recently *Le Plaidoyer* has been read as an autobiography²²⁵ and been analysed in connection with Strindberg's own life, which is not surprising, as Strindberg evidently used experiences from his own life and first marriage to construct the novel.²²⁶

What I wish to do here, however, is to disconnect the contents of the text from the author and his life, and analyse the narrative voice in *Le Plaidoyer* in a more poststructuralist manner, using both narratology and a general historical/social context, including gender aspects. Narratology, as all formalism, is traditionally gender-blind and does not take gender into account as a structuring factor. Susan S. Lanser insists that gender constitutes an important, but hitherto ignored, factor in narrative studies:

²²⁴ Susan S. Lanser, 'Sexing Narratology: Towards a Gendered Poetics of Narrative Voice', in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. 3*, ed. by Mieke Bal London & New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 123-139, p. 127.

²²⁵ See for example the works on Strindberg by Martin Lamm, Eric O. Johannesson's *August Strindberg: A Study in Theme and Structure* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968) and Anders Öhman's 'August Strindbergs En dåres försvarstal och den självbiografiska romanen' (in *Det moderna genombrottets prosa*, ed. by Yvonne Leffler (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2005).

²²⁶ Lanser points to certain fictional structures that conventionally presume an equality between the extra-fictional voice (the textual counterpart for the historical author) and the public narrator. One of those is the unmarked narrative voice. What she means is that if the public narrative voice is not marked in some way to distinguish it from the historical author's voice, readers will conventionally assume that they are the same. Markings include, for example, naming the narrator differently from the author, giving the narrator a different gender or different historical setting or making into an unreliable or incoherent narrator (*The Narrative Act: Points of View in Prose Fiction* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1981] pp.151-52). Narrators who do not take part in the story world (third-person narrators) are conventionally most closely associated with the authorial voice. In spite of Axel both being named differently to August Strindberg, narrating in first person *and* being seen as unreliable by many critics, he was long taken for granted as being the author. The reason for this may be that Strindberg used crucial experiences from his own life in constructing the events and the plot, easily recognisable for the Swedish public.

One effect of isolating the text from social realities is the complete disregard of gender in the formalist study of narrative voice. [...] [N]owhere in modern narrative theory is there mention of the author's or narrator's gender as a significant variable.²²⁷

As my interest lies in examining gender discourses, the gender of *Le Plaidoyer*'s dominating narrator cannot be overlooked, and neither can the contextual history from when the novel was produced. I find Lanser's theory of how gender must be taken into account as a necessary and important element in narratological analysis useful here. As she points out, the notion of form can be perceived quite broadly, where form can be understood as content, and ideology as form, while relationships between textual and extra-textual structures can be recognised (*The Narrative Act*, p. 7). Textual structures can be seen as 'content', because they organise and mix social and aesthetic materials into a new 'content' where form makes out part of the organisation. 'The creation, limitation, and renewal of aesthetic form is socially meaningful *as content*' writes Lanser, and explains that in texts where ideological assumptions in the 'culture text'²²⁸ are challenged or undermined, the form is likely to reflect the conflicts inherent in the attempt (*The Narrative Act*, p. 100). This happens in *Le Plaidoyer*, as will be demonstrated. Lanser points out that narrative technique should not only be seen as a product of ideology, but as ideology itself, where narrative voice 'embodies the social, economic, and literary conditions under which it has been produced'.²²⁹ Narrative structures are determined by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text, writes Lanser (*Fictions...*, p. 5).

As the sphere of sex, sexuality and gender is neither stable nor consistent across culture or history, it can be used in a narratology that 'recognizes absences and presences, texts and contexts, sameness and difference and their movements over time and place' (Lanser, 'Sexing...', p 135). In a story like *Le Plaidoyer*, gender and sexuality must be taken into account as a structuring factor when analysing its narrator, as these issues are the topics of the book.

²²⁷ Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Points of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 46.

²²⁸ Defined by Lanser as 'the particular set of expectations, values, emotional conventions, norms, and assumptions dominant or at least acceptable within a given community' (*The Narrative Act*, p. 93).

²²⁹ Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 5.

Lanser has written about narrative voice and point of view from a gender perspective, specifically examining female narrators. I agree with Lanser that the narrator's gender is a significant factor in textual study, as is often seen, for example, in the reception of literature. The rules and expectations governing the production and reception of a text are as much a part of the textual structure as the words on the page. I have not found anyone specifically examining the *male* narrative voice. Instead, the usual tendency to treat the male as the universal seems to be evident. With Axel in *Le Plaidoyer*, I have found an excellent reason to indulge into an examination of the male narrator, using Lanser's theory as a sounding board.

4.4 Lanser about Narrative Voice

Lanser uses certain basic narratological concepts in connection with narrative voice which I find useful and interesting, and which I will briefly summarise here.

4.4.1 Public and Private Narrators, and Focalisers

Lanser distinguishes between *public* and *private narrators*, and *focalisers* (*The Narrative Act*, p. 137). *Public narrators* are the only narrators capable of addressing a narratee who represents the public/readers, rather than just another persona within the narrative world. The public narrator has more control over her or his self-presentation, creating her/his own voice, as there is generally no other narrator to describe or define her/him. The public narrator strongly resembles, or can be equalled with, what Genette and Rimmon-Kenan call the extradiegetic narrator. The extradiegetic narrative voice generally carries more authority and is interpreted as more reliable than the intradiegetic one, as the intradiegetic narrator is a character in the fictional world.

The intradiegetic narrator strongly resembles what Lanser calls *the private narrator*. The private narrator is usually a character in the text, 'bound to the fictional world, and dependent upon the existence of that world for his or her authorization to speak' (*The Narrative Act*, p. 138). Private narrators are not capable of addressing personae outside the fictional context, so their speech is directed at a more limited audience instead of the textual equivalent of the reading public.

A *focaliser* is a 'point-of-view' character or a silent presence in the text.

In *Le Plaidoyer*, Axel is a public narrator, addressing his narratee²³⁰ outside the fictional world. The *character* Axel is the only focaliser. With Axel as both narrator and the only focaliser it is clear that Maria is not allowed to say much in this story.

Lanser also uses the term *authorial voice* for ‘heterodiegetic, public and potentially self-referential’ narrators (*Fictions...*, p. 15). The term indicates both that such a voice carries authority and resembles that of an author. Axel is a typical authorial voice.

4.4.2 The Autodiegetic Narrator

The autodiegetic narrative form was an unusual choice by Strindberg, who nearly always used third-person narrators.²³¹ The autodiegetic voice differs in authority from the heterodiegetic voice. ‘[W]hile the autodiegetic “I” remains a structurally “superior” voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to [the heterodiegetic] voice’, comments Lanser (*Fictions...*, p. 19). Also, its authority is dependent not only on the reader’s response to the narrator’s acts but to the character’s actions. Lanser writes that these differences may have made the autodiegetic voice easier to use for women than the heterodiegetic voice, ‘since a [heterodiegetic] narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgement, while a [autodiegetic] narrator claims only the validity of one person’s right to interpret her experience’ (*Fictions...*, p. 19).

It might be interesting to consider some gender differences relating to the narrative voice that do not directly concern *Le Plaidoyer*. One of these is the relation between the author and the autodiegetic narrator. Autodiegetic fiction is usually formally indistinguishable from autobiography, writes Lanser, and adds that given the precarious position of women in patriarchal societies, women writers may have avoided this form, fearing their work might be read autobiographically or being seen as ‘self-expression’ (*Fictions...*, pp. 19-20), a problem discussed in connection with Ragnhild Jølsen in the previous chapter. As mentioned, Strindberg was well aware of this danger, which is why he did not want *Le Plaidoyer* published in Scandinavia. In spite of his precautions, the novel has for a long time been seen as autobiographical. ‘Despite critical prohibitions against equating narrating characters with their historical creators, readers nonetheless often presume affinities of identity, perspective and experience between

²³⁰ See section 4.4.4.

²³¹ One exception is the autodiegetic narrator in Strindberg’s novella *Taklagsöl* (1906). This narrator is, however, subordinated a heterodiegetic narrator on a level above him. There are also a few short stories in *Giftas II* with an intradiegetic narrator who calls him/herself ‘I’, although not really telling his/her own story: ‘Den brottsliga naturen’, ‘Omakar’ and ‘Den starkare’.

author and fictional voice', writes Lanser, who confirms the frequent surprise among readers when male authors create female I-narrators and vice-versa ('Sexing...', p. 132). This, she continues, is however an asymmetric axiom:

[I]f a text is known or believed to be male authored, its unmarked heterodiegetic narrator is normatively identified as male; if the text is known or believed to be female-authored, however, the sex of the narrator is not necessarily presumed to be female.

(Lanser, 'Sexing...', p. 132)

This shows that the authority connected with narrators is conventionally attached to masculinity rather than femininity, probably because female public voice has been almost non-existent through history. 'Indeed', comments Lanser, 'authorial voice has been so conventionally masculine that female authorship does not necessarily establish female voice', and she points to several wellknown women-authored novels where the unmarked narrator is often interpreted as male (*Fictions...*, p. 18). On the other hand, as she also points out, the possible unmarkedness of a heterodiegetic narrator has allowed women access to 'male' authority by separating the narrative voice from the female body, exploiting male narrators and pseudonyms.

Another interesting case concerns the gendering of narrators depending on at what level they participate in or 'outside' the story. Lanser concludes that the gender of heterodiegetic²³²-extradiegetic²³³ narrators is normally unmarked, while the gender of both homodiegetic²³⁴ and intradiegetic²³⁵ narrators is normatively marked. In the case of autodiegetic narratives of any length, Lanser adds, marking the narrator's gender 'is so conventional as to be virtually requisite in order for the story to proceed' ('Sexing...', p. 129). In *Le Plaidoyer* the narrator is not only gender marked, but Axel spends most of the story convincing his readers that his masculinity is adequate and sufficient.

²³² Heterodiegetic = on an external level, does not participate in the story.

²³³ Extradiegetic = the narrator belongs to an 'above' or superior level to the story.

²³⁴ Homodiegetic = on an internal level, takes part in the story, at least in some manifestation of her/his 'self'.

²³⁵ Intradiegetic = second-degree/level narrator, who is a diegetic character in the first narrative, told by an extradiegetic narrator.

4.4.3 Narrative Authority

An important key to the differences between male and female authors and narrators is the concept of authority, according to Lanser. For a text to gain the authorisation of its readers, it must carry authority. And authority depends on ‘a complex of factors involving the speaker’s relationship to the listener, the message, and the verbal act’ (Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, p. 86). Lanser calls these factors *status*, *contact* and *stance*.

Status concerns the relationship of ‘the speaker’ to the speech act: the authority, competence and credibility the audience conventionally allows her/him personally. The individual’s ‘right to communicate’ depends on factors such as her or his ‘identity, credibility with respect to the verbal act in question, apparent sincerity and skill in conveying the message’ (Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, p. 86). Especially identity is in my opinion determined by social hierarchies and roles. The speaker’s gender, class, race and social position are bases for identity status, and thus for the ‘right to speak’. In Western society, novelistic authority is given more easily to men than women, for example.

Credibility is an interesting factor in connection with *Le Plaidoyer*, as scholars have often commented on its narrator’s (inadequate) credibility. ‘Even in the fictional text, statements and events must be motivated and plausible’, writes Lanser (*The Narrative Act*, pp. 87-88). If the textual assertions posit connections with historical reality, they must be credible in the historical world as well. (I will not go into any detailed narratological analysis of Axel’s much-discussed credibility in the relatively limited space of this chapter, but it could be an interesting project to examine for example how *Le Plaidoyer*, while perceived as ‘autobiographical’, failed to convince Swedish critics of its historical reality concerning ‘Strindberg’ and his ‘wife’.) Conventionally, an author’s or narrator’s credibility has also been influenced by her or his perceived gender.

Contact is the contact a writer or narrator establishes with the readers or narratees, and can be expressed both physically (like the layout on a page) or psychologically. It is dependent on such factors as the power relationship between narrator and narratee/reader, their level of trust and affectation and the narrator’s status.

Stance is the narrator’s relationship to the message s/he is uttering. Stance is a powerful determinant of what is said and how it is expressed, for example the use of irony. This means that the reception and understanding of a message is dependent on

how the stance is presented, and of the relationship of that perspective to the reader's own, or to the 'culture text' (*The Narrative Act*, p. 93).

Axel puts quite some energy into establishing himself as a truly masculine narrator. He introduces and maintains throughout the novel the image of himself as an intellectual, at the same time as underlining this quality as typically masculine. In his introduction of himself he also has a discussion on national politics, which I imagine would clearly have established his maleness (*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 28). National politics, unless these did not directly concern women, would not have been an appropriate issue for a female narrative voice at all.

4.4.4. The Narratee

'The narratee is the agent addressed by the narrator', according to Rimmon-Kenan (p. 105), and Genette points out that '[l]ike the narrator, the narratee is one of the elements in the narrating situation', (p. 259). All the criteria for classifying the narrator also apply to the narratee. For example, the narrator is always located at the same narrative level as the narrator, and s/he cannot be merged with the actual reader any more than the narrator can be taken for the actual author (Genette, p. 259). The intradiegetic narrator must 'speak' to an intradiegetic narratee, while the extradiegetic narrator, like Axel, must direct himself to an extradiegetic narratee.

'A narrator who says "I" establishes overt contact with the corresponding narratee' writes Lanser (*The Narrative Act*, p. 174). Other narrators may make no contact at all. While the narrator who communicates directly with the narratee (in the extreme case even entering into dialogue with the narratee) can be seen as situated on one pole of a scale while the narratee with indirect, covert contact (where the reader would not understand who "I" was if the narrator suddenly started calling her- or himself that) would be situated on the other.

In *Le Plaidoyer*, I would situate Axel relatively close to the pole of the direct narrator with overt communication with the narratee. While never entering into dialogue with the narratee, Axel addresses him (for it is men only) openly, asking for his sympathy and support: 'Jeune homme, toi, qui lis cet aveu véridique' (young man, you, who reads this truthful confession) (p. 441), '[m]aris, trompés ou non, croyez-moi, votre bien dévoué et sincère ami' (husbands, deceived or not, believe me, your warmly devoted, honest friend) (p. 456), '[m]a foi, messieurs les juges' (truly, Your Honours) (p. 514) and 'messieurs les cocus!' (Messrs. cuckold!) (p. 512). He sees his narratee as

educated and male, probably of his own class (p. 279). It is from this male narratee Axel seeks understanding and fair judgement. The ideology of the book, trying to prove the inferiority of women, ‘naturally’ excludes a female narratee. Axel *could* have addressed a female narratee: he could have scolded her, mocked her, taunted her. But he simply ignores her: she is not included in his address. His tale about a woman, about Maria, about the female sex, is only for men, he seems to say. The fact that the female narratee is ignored, implicitly underlines the anti-feminist ideology of *Le Plaidoyer*: not even when women are being discussed are they worthy of taking part in the discussion. The selection of male narratees only is part of the plot.

4.4.5 Absence/Silence

As in all study of gender, the issues of absence and silence are important. One must constantly ask: what is said between the lines? What is not said, and why? Particularly when studying women authors, narrators and characters, the question of silence can become as crucial as the question of voice, as Lanser notes. “[W]ho does not speak?” is as revealing as “who speaks” (*The Narrative Act*, pp. 42-43). She writes:

The textual meaning is found neither in the isolated discourse content nor in the systems that produce the text, but “in the resonance of the tension between the two structural levels – existing social reality and reality as transformed in the text.”²³⁶ The very gaps or spaces between underlying structures and textual forms reveal meanings in both of these realms.

(Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, p. 107)

The inquiry into absence and silence may be discouraged by the text’s own naturalising activity, writes Lanser, but exploring absences in a text may uncover ‘the system of values which has made the textual perspective *seem* natural [...] rather than ideological’ (*The Narrative Act*, p. 241). In *Le Plaidoyer*, for example, Maria’s silenced voice needs to be examined. Why is she silenced? Why is Axel so careful to prevent her from speaking? Although Maria’s silence is naturalised in the novel, it is such a conspicuous part of it that it needs a closer examination. By insisting on looking into the absence of feminine voice in *Le Plaidoyer*, we will be able to approach the question of *why*.

²³⁶ Lanser here quotes from an unpublished paper by herself and Angelika Bammer, ‘Censorship, Women and the text’ (1975, p. 7).

4.5 The Silent Female Voice

When I say that Maria is not allowed a voice of her own, I do not mean that she has no lines to say. She occasionally speaks, but she is never focalised or handed the narrator's role. When she speaks, it is entirely on Axel's terms, and what she says is a subordinate discourse filtered through Axel's own. She is an object. Susan C. Staub claims that speech is placed at the centre of patriarchal authority: to have speech is to have agency. 'The woman who speaks neither in acquiescence nor in answer to her husband reveals an independence that endangers the patriarchal order. Since she ignores the social tenet requiring female silence, she may very well ignore other rules of marriage' (Staub, p. 36).

There are only two instances in *Le Plaidoyer* when the reader is allowed to hear Maria's voice directly, without Axel's intervention. One is when three of her letters are set into the text (pp. 372-74), the other is a love song that she has written for a female friend and sings for her (p. 495).

Even if the short letters are expressions of Maria's own voice, they are included in the text by Axel, and chosen by him among many letters to confirm the truthfulness of *his* story. It is also interesting that when we get to hear Maria's own voice, it is in the epistolary form: the traditional and maybe best accepted female literary form up till the twentieth century.

The song is also evidence of Axel's claims about Maria's 'unnaturalness', but it is still surprising that he would include the lyrics. He could just as well have stated that 'Maria performed a love song for her female friend, which just proves her villainy'. His excuse for supplying the reader with the song, expressing female love and longing, is Maria's 'élan' and 'sentiment si vrai', her 'naïveté' and 'sincérité' in performing it (p. 495). (As a footnote, it is telling that Maria's song was excluded by both the first German translator and Loiseau independently of each other, and so disappeared from all versions of *Le Plaidoyer* until the original manuscript was found in 1973.)

A recurring element in the story is the arguing between Axel and Maria. For an argument between two people to take place, both of them need to have things to say. Axel, however, will not let the reader know Maria's responses in their arguments. His tactic is to proclaim that there has been a quarrel and to promote or summarize his own view, without allowing the reader to hear Maria's version. In the following passage,

Maria has in Axel's eyes behaved improperly together with some young girls, and the unavoidable argument takes place:

La nuit, seuls, je m'en prends à Maria, et un entretien orageux se prolonge vers le matin. Comme elle a trop bu elle se dévoile malgré elle, et confesse des choses horribles, jamais devinées.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 508)

This statement is followed by a two-page, jumbled speculation from Axel's side about whether Maria possibly was prostituted by her mother before she married her first husband, years before Axel met her: a speculation that Axel as usual bases on very loose circumstantial evidence which mostly seems to be made up in his own mind. Maria is never allowed to put her view forward or to defend herself during their arguments; she is pinpointed as the sole cause of them while never permitted to speak out.

In the following passage there is yet another row about a female friend of Maria's.

D'abord, l'amie est installée dans une chambre meublée détachée de notre appartement, à titre de locataire, et après de combats terribles. Maria l'a voulue en pensionnaire alimentaire, ce à quoi je m'opposai décidément, et d'une façon vigoureuse. Pourtant et malgré mes précautions la belle amie et ses jupons traînent partout dans mon logis, en sorte que je puisse m'imaginer avoir contracté une bigamie. Et les soirs, que je voudrais passer avec ma femme, celle-ci s'absente dans la chambre de l'amie, ou l'on se régale sur mon compte, fumant mes cigares, buvant mon punch.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 465)

Although Axel takes for granted that his view is the only reasonable one, the reader can discern Maria's distress between the lines: Axel's unreasonable jealousy towards everyone who approaches her (including Maria's dog), Maria's uneasiness when alone with Axel and her need for having someone else to talk to, and her need to fulfil her sexual desire for women. Still, she is not allowed to express this in words. What the reader notices is her anger; the evidence that her will has clashed with Axel's in his statement that there have been 'combats terribles' (horrible arguments) concerning these issues. What Axel offers the reader is a fossil: an acknowledgement that something has happened, but never the full picture, never the full understanding of what

has happened. The arguments are vaguely outlined because we only ever get Axel's version while Maria's is suppressed.

The objectification of Maria is confirmed in the following passage:

Je voulus entamer une recherche scientifique pour découvrir la formule de cette femme ; j'entendis y reconnaître l'espèce, le genre où elle ressortit. [...] J'établissai des comparaisons, je vérifiais mes aperçus comme un savant, j'étais traîné d'un bout à l'autre du vaste bâtiment, conduit par les renvois de tel ou tel ouvrage, en sorte que l'heure du travail allât sonner et l'arrivée des collègues me ramenèrent à mes devoirs.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, pp. 316-17)

Axel treats Maria clinically as a scientific object, to be examined and categorised. Her objectification is part of the gender discourse at the time, when women and femininity were made into research objects, to be defined and explained by men. In the process the object, the woman, loses her voice, as objects cannot speak. Or rather, the object's voice is not important, as it is the scientist who draws the conclusions, who has something to say, who has the right to speak.

Why will Axel not let Maria speak? The Maria character represents the New Woman and women's emancipation and encroachment on traditionally masculine territory. She will not support Axel's masculinity by adapting to the role of conventional femininity. Axel feels threatened. Part of his strategy towards this new version of femininity is silencing it. Silencing is part of the politics in the narrative voice, and part of how the narrative voice is used as form to structure the story's content.

The objectification of Maria and other women fits well into the value universe of *Le Plaidoyer*, where women do not deserve a voice, as they are inferior. This was not an unusual discourse at the time, and just one of the gender discourses put forward by Axel.

4.6 What Does Axel Speak About?

In *Le Plaidoyer*, many gender discourses, which are typical of the 1880s, are expressed. In my opinion the most dominant ones are the inferiority of women, feminine sexuality and the fear of women abandoning the conventional feminine role. In Axel's narrative,

all of these are connected, and here they will be scrutinized with regard to how they are used by Axel to promote a return to more conventional femininity.

4.6.1 The Inferiority of Women, and Men as Their Creators

Although Axel's self-assertiveness and cockiness start crumbling more and more under the pressure of the New Woman, as the novel proceeds there is one thing he never doubts: his intellectual superiority over Maria and all women. In spite of this, he feels the need to point out this fact again and again:

A la fin du séjour je l'avais invitée à une visite à la bibliothèque, dans l'intention de l'éblouir, de me montrer dans un milieu écrasant pour un petit cerveau d'oiselet présomptueux. Je la trainai de galerie en galerie, faisant étalage de tout mon savoir bibliographique [...] à tel point qu'elle se sentait gênée devant son infériorité.

(Le Plaidoyer, p. 290)

This is Axel's idea of courting a girlfriend: crushing her 'conceited little featherbrain' with his superior intellect, making her ashamed of her own inadequate intelligence. This desire to denigrate women because of their lesser intellect is prominent all through the novel. Why is it so important for Axel to state the inferiority of women again and again?

Axel profiles men as superior to women. This was a common strategy at the time, writes Fahlgren (*Kvinnans...*, p. 21). At the same time as men shut women out of public life through maintaining masculine values, there was a 'scientific' focusing on women at the end of the nineteenth century. Men found it necessary to define women and femininity in order to be able to control women in a new way.

What Axel never tires of endorsing the suggestion that men and women *complement* each other. Men have intellect and intelligence, women are vessels to be filled with what men have to give them, whether it is intellectual stimuli or babies. 'Et l'homme, supérieur par l'intelligence à la femme, n'est heureux que quand il s'unit à une être de pair' (And man, intellectually superior to woman, is not happy except when he is united with a female being who is his [social] equal) (p. 391) Axel informs us. Women need men, because without them they would be empty. Men need women, because they need someone to educate, and an emotional platform: 'Pygmalion a soufflé sur le marbre et il possède une déesse' (Pygmalion has breathed on the marble,

and now owns a goddess) (p. 376) is how he expresses his relationship with Maria. Axel describes his falling in love with Maria in the following terms:

Cette femme s'était inoculée dans mon sang, nos courants de fluide nerveuse s'étaient mis en tension, ses germes femelles demandaient la force motrice de mes germes mâles, son âme avait soif de mes facultés intellectuelles, et mon esprit aspirait à se verser dans ce vase subtile.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 332)

The passage is a representation of men as creators of women, typical of its time. Love means mutual dependence, but it is the man who inscribes on the woman, seen as a blank sheet. He is her creator: he fills her empty vessel with knowledge and semen. What *he* gets out of all this giving and filling is a companion, someone he has taught to understand him, serve him, fill his needs and bear his children.

As Axel gets more and more disappointed in the resisting Maria, it is mainly two things in her he criticises: her inadequate intelligence and her inadequate moral standards. These he sees as essential and inborn in women. '[M]on cerveau se détraque en s'accommodant à l'enrouage d'un cervelet féminin, réglé d'une manière autre que celui de l'homme' (my brain is upset in trying to adapt itself to a woman's little brain, functioning differently than a man's) (p. 411). When Maria resists his efforts to manage and control her literary attempts, he complains:

Je n'existe que par elle, et moi, la racine-mère traîne ma vie sous-terrine, nourrissant la tige qui monte au soleil pour éclore dans une fleur magnifique qui me réjouit par sa splendeur, parce qu'elle, oublieux qu'un jour arrivera ou la greffe va se détacher de la souche épuisée se vantant de sa stature empruntée.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 411)

The imagery, borrowed from botany, reveals that Axel sees Maria as a vampire (which he openly calls her later in the novel [p. 209, p. 255]), using him and sucking out his creativity for her own use. He repeatedly feels the need to point out her inferiority and his own superiority. At the same time, his reasoning fits into a Darwinist pattern, where the strongest and fittest survives, and he paradoxically indicates that this would be Maria, after having drained him of his creativity and strength.

When Maria refuses to take his advice during her theatrical studies, Axel's wounded vanity has no limits:

Elle, une ignorante de premier ordre, ne sachant que parler le Français, d'une instruction négligée, élevée à la campagne, sans connaissance du théâtre ni de la littérature, endettée chez moi, qui lui ai donné les premières notions de l'accent Suédois, l'ayant enseigné les mystères de la prosodie, de la métrique, elle me traite en fainéant. [---] Moi, l'érudit, l'auteur dramatique, le critique de théâtre, initié à toutes les littératures, en correspondance directe par les trésors de la bibliothèque avec les courants littéraires du monde entier, je suis mis à la défroque, traité en ignorant, en page, en chien.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, pp. 419-20)

The reader already knows everything of Axel's merits, as he has been very careful to present them early on. Why does he feel the need to drum them in? Axel wants the conventionally masculine role of Pygmalion, as creator of the woman he has chosen. When she refuses to comply, it is a refusal of the static relationship where the man paints on the woman's blank canvas. This refusal is interpreted by Axel as a refusal of love, as he rigidly sees it, that is, love as the genders complementing each other, on male terms.

For Axel the narrator, this refusal of conventional gender roles by the New Woman instigates an effort to convert her, to reverse her development by repeating again and again what she no longer accepts: that she is inferior and that she must thus obey him and succumb to his will.

4.6.2 Feminine Sexuality

The 'investigation' that Axel intends to carry out is aimed at investigating if Maria has been unfaithful to him. Sexuality is one of the main topics in *Le Plaidoyer*, and, again, it helps define discourses on masculine and feminine sexuality that were typical at the time.

Feminine sexuality is here openly divided into two different kinds: the 'chaste' sexuality of the middle-class women and the 'animal' sexuality of working-class women. In connection with Maria, the first half of the work is literally littered with the word *chaste*. This is how Axel wants to see her: as a madonna with a subdued sexuality, intriguing his soul rather than his sensuality. When Axel invites Maria and her husband to dine in his attic room the first time, he feels Maria, as the chaste mother,

will ‘cleanse’ his room of the ‘dirty’, physical lovemaking that has taken place there before:

Car ma chambre n’avait reçu une femme depuis la rupture avec la petite infâme dont les bottines avaient laissé ses traces encore visible sur le bois de mon canapé. Cette glace au dessus la commode n’avait reflété des seins de femme depuis lors. Et maintenant une femme chaste, mère, bien élevée, aux sentiments délicats allait épurer cette demeure, témoin de tant de peines, de misères, de douleurs.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 334)

Axel calls his former lover a ‘slut’. She offered him physical love, and was from the lower classes. She did not have the education, fragile emotions and refinement of the upper-class woman Maria. The concept of chastity is here closely connected to class, but also to motherhood. Axel repeatedly connects the triangle chastity – education – mother. He needs a woman to hold in high esteem, and that woman must be sharply profiled against the working-class women he sleeps with. Although Axel himself belongs to ‘the secret gang for liberated and paid love’ (p. 284), he gets very upset when offered free love by a woman of his own class, and sees this woman as a monster (p. 304).

The connection to motherhood is so strong it makes Axel feel guilty because of his erotic desire for Maria:

Femme-mère, douce, chérissante, me choyant, cajolant comme à un bébé.

Et tout de même je l’aime, je la désire en femme, ardemment.

Est-ce une anomalie d’instincts. Suis-je un produit d’un caprice de la nature. Serait-il que mes sentiments soient pervers, puisque je possède ma mère ! L’incestrie inconsciente du cœur ?

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 399)

So powerful is Axel’s idea of the middle-class woman as a pure and chaste madonna mother, that the passage ends in a remorseful lament in pre-Freudian oedipal style when he contemplates the impossibility of what he is doing: feeling erotic desire for a middle-class madonna.

Axel is disappointed and appalled when Maria displays sexual desire, even when it is in the marital bed. He wants a madonna as his wife and the mother of his children,

but Maria's display of erotic desire moves her closer to 'animal' sexuality. When Maria has disappointed Axel deeply by trying to confide in him her husband's infidelity, he goes on a drinking spree with his bachelor friends:

Je me grise des paroles crues, des profanations de le madonne, produit maladive d'appétits inassouvis. Tout mes haines contre l'idôle perfide se déchainent, si bien que j'en ressent une consolation amère. Les convives, pauvres hères, qui n'ayent jamais puisé de l'amour qu'à la maison publique, se réjouissent d'entendre crotter les femmes du monde, hors d'atteinte.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, pp. 317-18)

In her plea for sympathy, Maria did not only mention her first husband's illegitimate sexual desires, she also asked Axel to liaise with her against him, against another man. This makes Axel react strongly, and he insults what he sees as a disloyal woman, 'de la part de mon camarade de sexe' (out of loyalty towards a person of my own sex) (p. 311). The middle-class woman had to keep herself above all such pettiness, she must never discuss sexuality. She had to stay 'clean' and madonna-like. Maria's asking Axel to sympathise with her because of her husband's escapades makes Axel angry and frightened, as she then asks him to take sides and support with femininity against masculinity. And Axel's tale is a defence for conventional masculinity.

4.6.3 The Fear of Infidelity

The discovery that his Madonna actually has erotic desires triggers Axel's jealousy. If Maria can have sexual desire, she can also be unfaithful. Why this profound fear of his wife's possible unfaithfulness? A large part of the answer seems to be his sense of ownership over Maria as soon as they are married.

Trève de la vertu ! Je ne m'en flattai point, puisqu'un homme ne prend ce qui se donne, de sorte qu'il n'est jamais un voleur. Ce n'est que la femme qui vole ou qui vend. Et le seul cas où elle donne, désintéressée, au risque de tout perdre, c'est, malheureusement, dans l'adultère. La fille se vend, l'épouse se vend, et la femme adultère seule donne à l'amant, en volant de son mari.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 312)

The text accurately pinpoints the gender asymmetry concerning sexuality at the time. Feminine sexuality belonged to men only, never to the woman herself. Further, it is only defined according to male standards. A woman either sells her sexual ‘services’ on the street, or to a husband. The only woman who gives her sexual desires freely, as a gift, is the adulteress, but she, on the other hand, gives away what is not her own, but her husband’s. Consequently, Maria’s adultery would be theft from Axel. She is his madonna, her chaste sexuality intertwined with her motherhood.

The family, of which the wife constituted the centre, is described by Axel as an organic system, which would wither and die if its most important element was rejected or should chose to leave. In connection with this it could be interesting to take a look at common middle-class discourses about the father during the Modern Breakthrough.

4.6.4 The Father during the Modern Breakthrough

Reading *Le Plaidoyer* today, one may feel surprised by Axel’s constant fear of Maria being unfaithful. This had much to do with the idea of fatherliness at the time, and of the family being seen as an organic whole.

The wife during the Modern Breakthrough, having no civil rights, not being a legal adult, usually obliged to stay in the home and with her husband being in charge of her financial assets and her children, ‘belonged’ to her husband. This, explains Bergom-Larsson, made the wife a symbolic, organic part of the man’s body, and every attempt to break away the woman from the family body where the man was seen as the heart and head, was experienced as a catastrophic threat (p. 93). Axel feels that he, Maria and the children are intertwined as a living organism:

[L]a famille m’est devenue un organisme, comme une plante, un animal dont je suis un parti intégral. [...] [L]a transfusion de mon sang se poursuit par des grandes artères, débouchant de mon cœur, se ramifiant dans l’utérus de la mère et rayonnant dans les petits corps des enfants. C’est un système de vaisseaux sanguins, qui s’enchevêtrent l’un dans l’autre, et en coupant un seul j’irai perdre la vie avec le sang, qui s’écoulera dans le sable. C’est pourquoi l’adultère de l’épouse est un crime affreux [...]

(*Le Plaidoyer*, pp. 465-66)

Axel claims that it is ‘a horrible crime’ for a wife to be unfaithful. The middle-class wife’s first and foremost task was to give birth to legitimate children, raise them and

see to it that they were educated to take over the father's position in society. She had to raise her children into the same social class as the father, and see to that they were socialised according to prevailing gender norms.

As the passage above shows, the family was seen as an integrated organism. Bergom-Larsson writes that the wife was seen as inoculated on the husband's body, as a blank sheet to be inscribed by her husband (p. 93). If the woman gave birth to illegitimate children, she blew the family organism to pieces. Illegitimate children were something foreign that did not properly belong. '[J]e n'ai pas voulu jouer le rôle de la dupe, j'ai exécré de travailler pour les enfants d'autrui, j'ai detesté a bâtir mon existence sur le sable' says Axel (p. 602). By accepting to raise and pay for another man's child, he would be making a fool of himself. He would be building his existence on sand, because he would be building it on something imaginary: that child would not be a 'proper' child as it would not be his own. For a man to construct a life that could carry him beyond his death, he needed biological children and a faithful wife, so that he could be certain of the paternity of those children. Axel feels both his identity and existence are threatened when he suspects the possibility of his children not being legitimate.²³⁷ If he has no control over his wife's sexuality and no control over his children's legitimacy, who *is* he? And with the woman economically dependent on the husband, an illegitimate child of hers would have been seen as her 'stealing' from her husband, as expressed in both *Le Plaidoyer* and *Giftas*.

But Axel does not only fear competition from other men, and the problems this could bring in the form of illegitimate children. He also fears competition from other women. Maria displays lesbian erotic desires, and Axel displays an almost morbid jealousy of every woman, lady or maid, of every age, in her vicinity.

²³⁷ The problem of illegitimacy is treated in other works by Strindberg, the most notable one his drama *Fadren (The Father)*, where a father goes mad and dies when he believes his daughter to be illegitimate. In his novel *Svarta fanor* he calls it murder of the father when a woman exposes his child's illegitimacy. What Strindberg also very clearly shows in these texts (maybe unintentionally as his narrators are openly on the fathers' side), is how these mothers use the notion of illegitimacy as a final, desperate weapon in a society where mothers had no legal right to their own children. Strindberg's villainess characters are mothers who are severely threatened by being robbed of their children, for example in a divorce. They play out their only ace card in claiming that they alone know who the father of their children is.

4.6.5 Lesbianism around the *Fin de Siècle*

Lesbianism was ‘discovered’ around 1890 (this coincided with the emergence of the New Woman).²³⁸ Earlier, same-sex love between women had been accepted as ‘harmless’ female friendship, and even regarded as ‘a healthy preparation for heterosexual love and marriage’ (Ledger, pp. 123-25). While male homosexuality was criminal in Britain until the late 1950s, female homosexuality never was. The word ‘homosexual’ entered European discourse during the last third of the nineteenth century, even before the word ‘heterosexual’. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that homosexual behaviour and a consciously homosexual identity already had a long, rich, history. What was new from the turn of the century was, as well as the assignment of a gender to each individual, the assignment of a certain sexuality, ‘a binarized identity that was full of implications’.²³⁹ Foucault expresses this as a shift in European thought from viewing homosexuality as a matter of prohibited and isolated genital acts to viewing it as a matter of identity. Thus, one’s personality structure might mark one as a homosexual, maybe even in the absence of any genital activity at all (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 43).

A host of competing sociobiological ideologies and disciplines developed at the end of the nineteenth century, including social Darwinism, eugenics, criminology, and anthropology. In the general and accelerating efforts of medical professionals to define, codify and control all forms of sexuality, women’s sexuality could hardly remain unaffected, writes Martha Vicinus.²⁴⁰ Homosexuality was quickly labelled as deviant and pathological by sexologists, biologists and psychoanalysts: sexuality was now seen as the problematic foundation of human beings.²⁴¹ ‘The latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed an inordinately strong focus on sexuality and a deepening of hostility towards homosexuality’ writes Bjørby (p. 225). A woman, unwilling to marry or having traditionally ‘masculine’ interests such as studies or intellectual work would easily be suspected of being a lesbian, with the social consequences this brought with it.

By demanding sexual independence, women threatened the stable heterosexual order and male hegemony, sealed by the bourgeois marriage contract. Lesbianism was

²³⁸ Although there was a broadening awareness of lesbianism amongst intellectuals from the 1880s (Ledger, p. 126).

²³⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 2.

²⁴⁰ Martha Vicinus, ‘“They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong”: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity’, *Feminist Studies*, 18 (1992), 467-497 (p. 484-85).

²⁴¹ Some of the most well known authorities on sexuality were Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud.

seen by many as a threat against the social order and family institution, as a sign of societal degeneration. Homosexuality and its imagined results were mirrored and debated in Breakthrough literature and in the chastity debate.

Ledger points out that although same-sex friendship was a current motif in a good deal of New Woman fiction, most female writers of New Woman novels were supporters of heterosexual marriage and had little or no understanding of female sexual desire (Ledger, pp. 6, 54). It was New Woman figures in novels by *men* who were pathologised as sexual inverts. Male writers were more threatened by same-sex relationships between women than were their female counterparts (Ledger, pp. 5, 125, Bjørby, p. 228). Strindberg was one of the more vociferous critics of female homosexuality. His representation of lesbian women is dark and contemptuous, and obviously based on existing pseudo-scientific biological discourses hostile to women.²⁴² Strindberg's male characters are filled with fear and hatred of the women they suspect of lesbianism, and the lesbian characters are represented as monstrous and vampire-like. In *Le Plaidoyer* Axel reacts strongly and jealously to all his wife's female friends, always suspecting that a love/sexual relationship between her and them will develop. It is one of his greatest fears that his wife may secretly be a lesbian. Still, Strindberg's texts clearly show an ambivalence concerning heteronormativity; although he constantly advocates the traditional bourgeois marriage in his texts, between the lines he searches for other types of relationships, Stenport writes.²⁴³ In spite of his texts (with all their representations of unhappy marriages) arguing that there must be something wrong with current social patterns of relationships, they do not give any ideas of alternative solutions. Stenberg points out that in public debate it was the unmarried women, those who were not controlled by men, who were repeatedly exposed to attacks. Strindberg denied them all value and Brandes and others ridiculed those women who dared speak up in public. Women who did not have a heterosexual relationship were depicted as defective and pathological ('Sexualmoral...' p. 211).

The fact that the New Woman voluntarily rejected marriage for professional work, independence and intellectual activities was seen as unnatural and a threat against the 'natural' order, where women had a heterosexual relationship and a family. In

²⁴² Two such characters are mademoiselle David in *Le Plaidoyer* and Hanna Paj in *Svarta Fanor*. The Hanna Paj character was unpleasantly modelled on Ellen Key (Eva Borgström, 'Perversitetens hydra: En queerläsning av Svarta fanor' in *Det gäckande könet*, ed. by Cavallin & Stenport, pp. 247-273 (p. 259).

²⁴³ Anna Westerstahl Stenport, 'Inledning: Från kvinnohat till maskulinitetskris' in *Det gäckande könet: Strindberg och genusteori*, ed. by Cavallin & Stenport, pp. 7-15 (p 12).

renouncing this, the New Woman was seen as unnatural and pathological. As sexual instincts were seen as something unavoidable, it was thought that those not interested in a heterosexual relationship surely must be lesbians.

4.6.6 Lesbianism in *Le Plaidoyer*

Axel sees homosexuality as something monstrous, and this monstrosity is transferred to the features of the women that Maria shows an interest in:

[U]n type rousse, figure mâle, le nez recourbé et pendant, le menton gros, les yeux jaunes, les joues bouffies de boissons, poitrine plate, mains en crochus, le plus détestable que l'on puisse s'imaginer, le plus exécrable que voudrait rejeter un valet de ferme. [...] Je n'ai jamais vu de monstruosité pareille sous la forme humaine, et mes idées sur l'émancipation des femmes sont fixées pour l'avenir.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 495)

This representation of mademoiselle David is patched together of most prejudices about lesbians at the time: they were masculine, and so ugly that no man wanted them, which was the reason why they had become lesbians in the first place. Not only were their looks masculine, but also their habits; they smoked and drank alcohol. Worst of all, they were obsessed with feminism and ideas of women's emancipation – all due to their lack of a 'proper' heterosexual love life, and children. The female artists that Axel and Maria meet in Paris are 'emancipated' to the degree that they believe they are men's equals, the narrator contemptuously comments (p. 486). On top of that, they 'disguise' their sex through masculine behaviour (smoking, drinking, playing billiards and claiming to desire women erotically).

Axel's description of the monstrous lesbian, and his assurance that not even a clodhopper would want her is contradicted by the fact that Maria actually does want Mlle David, and her comment that she has a 'corps délicieux' (lovely body) (p. 492). The comment is forwarded to the reader through Axel, who recounts the conversation to prove Maria's 'pathology', but at the same time unwittingly reveals discourses that contradict his own, dominant ones.

In *Le Plaidoyer*, Maria's lesbian friends have to leave the small, conservative Swiss village where Axel and Maria reside, as the village people cannot accept their unconventional feminine behaviour. Axel's satisfaction with the lesbians' diminished physical space is evident. At the same time, it is clear that these unmarried women have

much larger access to space than Maria, who is married, and who has to stay where her husband puts her.

But Maria is an early representation of the New Woman, and when she makes her move out into public space, it is through a professional career.

4.6.7 The Actress: The Public Woman

Before Axel marries Maria, he encourages her to fulfil her professional dream and become an actress. When they have married he looks upon her movement into public space with different eyes:

Elle appartient au public, elle se farde, s'habille pour le public et elle est devenue par là la femme publique, qui finit par présenter la note pour tant et tant de coups.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 426)

As an actress, Maria has become a public woman. She has left the home, the very middle-class feminine space, and ventures to perform in front of the public, allowing anyone who wishes so to stare at her openly and to criticise her. As the image of the lesbian was visually distorted in Axel's eyes, so is the image of the woman he loves when she has become an actress.

Maria, encore gardant le rouge sur le joues, le noir autour des yeux [...] me déplaisait. Ce n'était plus la même mère-vierge que j'avais aimée, plutôt une cabotine, avec des mines effrontées, des manières communes, hâbleuse, étouffant les paroles d'autrui, entichée d'une fatuité outrageante. [...] Je lui trouve, dans les photographies, une physionomie commune, crue, effrontée, avec des traits de coquetterie féroce, des mines invitant, provoquant. [...] Les regards ont l'air de se noyer dans les regards d'un autre, qui n'est pas moi, car mon amour melangé de respect, de tendresse ne la caresse jamais de cette insolente volupté dont on allume des filles.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, pp. 417-18)

The madonna, whom he praised for her chaste beauty as long as she stayed in her home, has now, through entering public space, turned into a public show-off with vulgar, coarse, brazen physiognomy. The photo of her as an actress makes Axel associate her with a prostitute, as he imagines anyone looking at the photo voluptuously gazing at Maria as one might at a whore. By becoming an actress, Maria in Axel's eyes

has become a public woman. Per Stounbjerg writes that at a time when women should do anything to seem ‘natural’, the actress represented an identity produced and staged by herself. She was a spectacular public person, transgressing the family home and the simple, translucent nature of women (‘Offentlige...’, p. 31).²⁴⁴ According to the literary topos ‘the myth of the actress’, she is also promiscuous, a loose woman without steady liaisons (‘Offentlige...’, p. 29).

It is telling that when the author chose a profession for his early New Woman character, he chose the actress.

4.6.8 The New Woman in *Le Plaidoyer*

All the gender discourses in *Le Plaidoyer* express the fear that women might abandon their conventional roles as wives and mothers in the home for the role of the New Woman instead.

Maria’s wish to become an actress suits Axel fine as long as she is married to the Baron, but when she becomes Axel’s wife he does almost anything to keep her at home, away from public space. He goes as far as making her pregnant against her will.

Et il me reste que de provoquer une nouvelle grossesse afin de réveiller les instincts de mère. Elle entre en furies violentes, mais la situation embarrassante la redonne au foyer pour quelques mois.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 458)

The ‘cure’ against Maria’s professional aspirations is pregnancy, all according to dominant discourses about the New Woman and her striving for economic independence. This brings Maria back to the home for a few months, during which Axel is sincerely happy. With Maria back in the home he can again perceive her as the motherly Madonna instead of the public woman, the whore. *Le Plaidoyer* represents all middle-class women who are not married and living as housewives in their family home as suspect, at the very least.

Another discourse floating to the surface in *Le Plaidoyer* is the fear of lesbianism, which characterises the novel. Maria’s erotic desire for other women pops up again and again, regularly causing Axel to have their belongings packed up, and flee from Maria’s

²⁴⁴ Per Stounbjerg, ‘Offentlige kvinder: Lulu, Kristina og den moderne myte om skuespillerinden’, in *Modernismens kjønn*, ed. by Irene Iversen and Anne Birgitte Rønning (Oslo: Pax, 1996), pp. 25-41 (p. 31).

female acquaintances. The middle-class, adult women that Axel sees as competitors for his wife's favours are all feminists. In this manner, lesbianism and the striving for female emancipation are connected according to dominant discourses at the time.

On *Le Plaidoyer's* battlefield of discourses, sexuality is an immensely important factor. 'Correct' feminine sexuality is defined in detail, by represented in positive terms, but more frequently in negative terms by what it ought *not* to be. Positive feminine sexuality is here 'chaste', with motherhood as the goal, wholly heterosexual and in the service of the husband and patriarchy at large. Masculine sexuality is represented as dependant on feminine sexuality: it will adapt to what is available. If working-class women and paid love is all a man can get, his sexuality will be physical and 'dirty'. With the chaste love of an educated middle-class madonna, however, his desires will be pure and 'cleansed'.

Having presented and analysed some of the dominant gender discourses in *Le Plaidoyer*, I will now get back to the narrative voice. The narrative voice does not only represent the content of gender discourses to the readers. The construction of the narrative voice itself illustrates the discourses Axel tells us about.

4.7 The Male Hysterical Voice

The narrative voice of Axel changes character as the story moves on. In the first part of the book, where Axel and Maria are not yet married, and at the very beginning of their marriage, Axel has a certain distance to the story and a sense of humour, sometimes even directed at himself. As the story moves on, and Maria keeps resisting Axel's attempts to make her adapt to a more conservative feminine role, the narrative voice gets more and more distressed and dogmatic. The first part of the novel, mostly written in the past tense, is more stringent while external reality is given more space. The following three parts, which are shorter, are more taken up by discussions about women and internal representations. The fact that they are written in the present tense together with a very few spoken lines gives the impression of a faster pace where the narrator pours information over the reader while rushing on through the story.

4.7.1 A Lost Sense of Humour

In the first half of the novel, Axel cautiously expresses a dry and slightly sarcastic humour at times. This sense of humour is partly directed at himself, first in the role of

lovesick suitor, then as newly-wed husband. The pages about Axel competing with Maria's dog for her attention are actually grotesquely funny.

He depicts how the dog guards Maria's bedroom door so that he cannot enter, and how Maria has Axel served sinews and bones, while the dog gets steaks and chops in secret. Six years later, when Axel insists on the family's emigration to France, the dog (which is by now quite old), has to be put down. Axel solemnly describes how Maria returns from the city after having taken the dog away:

Et s'emparant d'un gros paquet d'un aspect insolite elle marche la marche funèbre au logis. Le cadavre était là ! Et l'enterrement m'était réservé. Le cercueil occupe un homme, la fosse deux, et me tenant à l'écart, je vais regarder les obsèques de l'assassiné. C'était édifiant. Maria en prières au bon Dieu pour la victime et pour le meurtrier, la population en rires, et une croix, la croix du saveur, qui m'a sauvé enfin d'un monstre.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 471)

Axel's six years of war with the small spaniel is over, and the passage demonstrates how he sarcastically and amusingly comments on the absurd funeral Maria arranges.

Axel swiftly blames Maria's anger at himself as vindictiveness because the dog had to be put down, whereas the subtext reveals that Maria is seriously upset at having to leave the country and go and live on the Continent against her will. One of the cracks in Axel's tale suddenly shows, as he allows Maria to reply to his question as to why she does not want to move abroad: '– C'est que tu me fais peur ! Je ne veux rester seul avec toi' ('Because you scare me! I don't want to be alone with you') (p. 468). While Axel as usual exploits her answer to prove her villainy, it opens up to another reading, fragments of Axel through Maria's eyes, where the reader can discern the dark shadow of Axel that he cannot always hide: the jealous, demanding, rigid patriarch and his difficult, depressive spells.

The travel abroad can be read as an escape from the advances of female emancipation in Sweden and Scandinavia. Fahlgren writes that the issue of women's emancipation literally followed men into their homes: the husband's power position was dependent on the subjugated wife (*Kvinnans...*, p. 20). As mentioned, the only time Axel feels secure and happy is when Maria is pregnant and tied to the home. By moving abroad, Axel makes sure that Maria can no longer work professionally, and he makes no effort to hide his contentment when they reach Germany, where female emancipation still seems to be relatively undeveloped:

Arrivés en Allemagne, le pays des soldats, ou le régime du patriarcat est encore en vigueur, Maria se sent très dépaysée avec ses bêtises sur les prétendus droit de la femme. Ici on vient d'interdire aux jeunes filles les cours de l'Université, ici la dot de la femme de l'officier est déposée au ministère de la guerre, à titre de fortune inaliénable de la famille, ici tous les emplois d'état sont réservés à l'homme, le pourvoyeur. [...] Et moi, en commerce intime avec les officiers, me recueille, adoptant les bonnes manières viriles par l'influence de l'accommodation, et le mâle se redresse après dix années d'emasculatation morale. [...] En liaison intime avec les dames de la maison, je m'habitue à prendre la parole, de sorte que Maria, peu sympathique à ces femmes, se trouve destituée.

(*Le Plaidoyer*, p. 504)

The passage says much about what Axel needs in order to feel truly masculine. He needs a patriarchal environment, where women accept a conservative feminine role, subjugated to and supportive towards men. Axel's use of the military as part of his strategy against women's emancipation was nothing new. The glorification of courage, hardness and manliness started when the feminist movement began, which was no coincidence, and continued until the First World War, writes Fahlgren (*Kvinnans...*, p. 20). Through informing the reader about the German laws, where women are not allowed a university education or government post, Axel underlines that it takes a societal structure that openly denies women certain rights, to establish and keep the relationship between the genders that he desires. The masculinity Axel needs is dependent on a patriarchal relationship between the genders and a conventional, subjugated femininity.

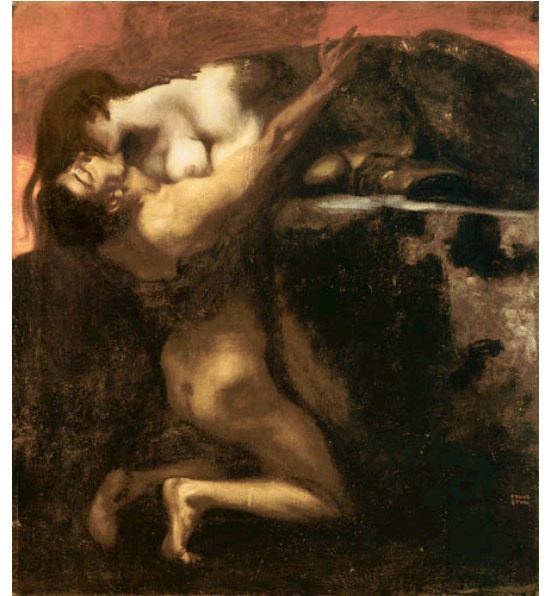
As the novel proceeds, Axel's sense of humour diminishes and finally disappears. The narrative pace increases, the events are quickly piled one upon the other, the last part of the tale told with a sort of breathlessness, where the narrator no longer takes his time to be amusing. Axel's increasing fear of his own madness and Maria's resistance leads to a narrative voice that gets more and more hysterical as the text proceeds. The narrator tries to subjugate and control the text and the events through expressing axioms or universal statements.

When Maria refuses to conform to the conventional femininity Axel needs in order to feel 'properly' masculine, he sometimes fears he is going mad. During their ten-year relationship, Scandinavian women's attempts at emancipation have accelerated. The pressure is on, both from a society that can no longer keep women in their homes, and

from inside Axel's own marriage. He can feel himself crumbling from the pressure, his masculine identity constructed as a reflection of a femininity that is rapidly changing.



Loss of masculine control, represented through sexually devouring females. Above, 'Samson and Delilah' (1902) by Max Liebermann, to the right, Franz von Stuck's 'The Kiss of the Sphinx' (1895).



4.7.2 The Axioms

The more Maria resists the conventional feminine role, the more hysterical the narrative voice gets. He tries to repudiate the changing gender order through the expression of dogmatic and derogatory axioms, such as the following one, an extreme statement even at this time:

Destituer l'homme, le remplacer par la femme, en remontant au matriarcat.

Detroniser le vrai maître de la création, qui a créé la civilisation, les bienfaits de la culture, le créateur des grandes pensées, des arts, des métiers, de tout, pour élever les sales bêtes des femmes, qui n'aient jamais pris part à l'œuvre civilisatrice qu'à titre d'exceptions futiles, c'était pour moi une provocation à mon sexe. Et à l'idée seule de voir arriver ces intelligences de l'âge de bronze, ces anthropomorphes, demi-singes, cette horde d'animaux malfaisants, le mâle se lève en moi.

(Le Plaidoyer, p 481)

Through his angry, rigid proclamations, the narrative voice tries to define and control women, but also the events and the story. It is obvious the story does not go the way

Axel hopes and expects; Maria will not conform, the feminist movement is progressing, and Axel just gets more and more desperate and fearful.

These statements can be seen as a way for the narrative voice to achieve authority. Lanser refers to these kinds of extrarepresentational acts²⁴⁵ as *overt authoriality*, and explains that these acts can be used to place the writer as a significant participant in contemporary debates (*Fictions...*, pp.16-17). This would, in my opinion, fit in well with Strindberg, who during most of his career struggled to become part of the literary establishment. The extrarepresentational acts, or maxim-isations can also be used by female (or ideologically opposed) writers to posit alternative textual ideologies.

Axel claims authority for his statements. He struggles to force the text to adapt to his view of the gender order, just as he tries to force Maria to do so. All through the text, the narrative voice tries to master the changing gender relationships in the world around him. He tries to turn time back, or at least slow it down, and with it the New Woman's encroachment on masculine domains.

I do not think one would find many statements of this type with a female narrative voice at the time. Axel's axioms are sweeping, political declarations, that can be brushed aside as extreme as they dismiss the whole female sex as rather useless, but they are nonetheless self-assertive claims to authority. A female narrator claiming public authority would have had to keep a much lower profile, because, as Lanser points out, during this historical period it was not so much voice in general as *public* voice that women were denied (*Fictions...*, p. 8). During the 1800s, discursive authority generally belonged to white, educated men of hegemonic ideology. 'One major constituent of narrative authority [...] is the extent to which a narrator's status conforms to this dominant social power', writes Lanser (*Fictions...*, p. 6). As mentioned earlier, a female voice speaking confidently of national politics or making self-assertive statements about anything outside her household, would have risked not being taken seriously.

The axiomatic, deprecating statements about women do not only represent Axel's trepidation through their language content. The narrative structure of *Le Plaidoyer* is part of the representation and of the content too. It passes from a slightly distant narrative voice with a sense of humour, recounting his courting Maria in Stockholm, to

²⁴⁵ Extrarepresentational acts can be reflections, judgements and generalisations about the world 'beyond' the fiction, direct addresses to the narratee, comments on the narrative process, allusions to other writers or texts. The extrarepresentational functions are strictly not necessary for telling the tale (Lanser, *Fictions...*, pp. 16-17).

the intense, angry and frightened Axel, accelerating the tempo during the second part of the book, launching constant attacks on women, his frame of mind mirrored in the family's constant moves on the Continent. The narrative voice itself is content through its changing structure.

The need to hit as hard against women as Axel does in the statement above, shows that they were considered a real threat, writes Fahlgren. She states that *Le Plaidoyer's* objective is to prove masculinity's superiority, but instead demonstrates its crisis (*Kvinnans...*, p. 72).

Thus, the narrative voice in *Le Plaidoyer* uses not only content, but also form as content as an invocation against the changing order and the arrival of the New Woman. And while struggling to revert the changing gender relationships and exploit dominant gender discourses to blacken the image of the New Woman, the novel at the same time actually represents what it is trying to suppress. However pessimistic the representation of the New Woman, a space is still prised open for her, confirming her existence.

4.8 The Reviews²⁴⁶

How did the Swedish critics respond to *Le Plaidoyer*? How did they interpret its transgressive early New Woman character, where Strindberg had completely ignored the noble, pure and self-sacrificing female character craved by nineteenth century readers?

The Swedish critics initially came into contact with the novel through its first German translation, which was published in 1893.²⁴⁷ The German reviewers' reactions were generally negative and depreciative, the critics reading it autobiographically and reacting against 'the revengefulness of a lovesick husband'.²⁴⁸

In Sweden, the critics kept rather silent about the publication of the novel in Germany, writes Rossholm, and the few who concerned themselves with the novel at all, repudiated it completely (p. 565). The only extensive review in the large newspapers was in *Aftonbladet*, where –n (pseud. for Georg Nordensvan) claimed that it was obvious that the novel was autobiographical and that Strindberg was telling his

²⁴⁶ In this section I have used Göran Rossholm's comments about the reviews in the *nationalupplaga* of *Le Plaidoyer*.

²⁴⁷ The first German translation, *Beichte eines Thoren* (1893), was done by an anonymous translator, identified as a Dr. Wilhelm Kämpf (Rossholm 1999, p. 556).

²⁴⁸ '[E]ines liebeskranken Jämmerlings von Ehemann', anonymous critic in *Die Gesellschaft* 10 January, 1894, quoted from Rossholm, pp. 564-65.

own story ‘lika lidelsefullt som ensidigt och utan tecken till hänsyn’ (fervently, one-sidedly and without consideration for others).²⁴⁹ The reviewer was horrified by the way the author exposed his friends and family:

[D]en oerhörda oblyghet, med hvilken hr Strindberg skildrar sina vänner och bekanta samt framdrager och fördjupar sig i förhållanden, som en människa med aldrig så litet takt, stolthet, ridderlighet och skamkänsla *aldrig* skulle kunna nedlåta sig till att blotta.

(*Aftonbladet* 15 June 1893, quoted from Rossholm, p 565)

Reading the novel autobiographically, –n assumed the story to be more or less true. He was appalled by ‘Strindberg’s’ exposure of his private life, and above all, of his former wife. The general discourse at the time prohibited a man from publicly attacking the honour of a woman, and a middle-class or upper-class woman such as Strindberg’s wife Siri von Essen must retain her reputation untarnished at any price. It would further have been the husband’s (even a former husband’s) duty to protect his wife, her reputation and honour instead of trying to ruin it. Where have Strindberg’s common sense and talent gone? asked –n, and refused to retell anything from the plot of the novel (Rossholm, pp. 565-66).

An anonymous review in *Dagens Nyheter* 15 June 1893 claimed that Strindberg’s admirers must wish *Le Plaidoyer* had never been written. There is no doubt, the reviewer stated, that the novel depicts Strindberg’s first marriage and puts the blame for its unsuccessfulness on the wife.²⁵⁰ *Dagens Nyheter*, like *Aftonbladet*, would not reveal anything of the plot. *Le Plaidoyer* had openly spoken of the unspeakable: sex, lesbianism, a marriage falling apart. The critics reacted by declaring that *they* would not speak of those things at all. This was their response to material they considered indecent.

The conservative *Vårt Land* quoted *Aftonbladet* and *Berliner Tageblatt*, and also refused to reveal anything of the contents of *Le Plaidoyer*, as ‘[k]ritiken har intet att skaffa med detta hopande af intima gemenheter, med detta brutala, föraktliga angrepp på en under dessa omständigheter värnlös qvinna’ (we critics will have nothing to do with this brutal, despicable attack on an, in this context, defenceless woman being overshadowed with malice).²⁵¹ The comment is constructed of words that could be

²⁴⁹ –n (Georg Nordensvan) in *Aftonbladet* 15 June 1893, quoted from Rossholm, p. 565.

²⁵⁰ *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 June 1893, quoted from Rossholm, p 566.

²⁵¹ *Vårt Land*, 13 and 16 June 1893, quoted from Rossholm, p. 567.

describing a rape. All the reviews used this kind of wording to depict what ‘Strindberg’ had done to ‘von Essen’, mirroring what the critics thought this was: the psychological rape of a woman. ‘Strindberg’ had deprived his wife of ten years, and the mother of his children, of her good name. The wording of the reviews can also be seen as mirroring *Le Plaidoyer*’s own prose: its hectic, naturalistic, openly sexual literary style, which was very unusual at the time.

The reviewers made no effort to moderate their irritation with Strindberg for publishing a book like *Le Plaidoyer*. *Vårt Land* stated that only madness on the part of the author behalf could explain ‘sådan otrolig smaklöshet, råhet och käringaktig pratsjuka’ (such unbelievably bad taste, crudity and old-womanish garrulousness) as displayed in the pages of the novel.

To sum up, it was obvious that the Swedish reviewers read the *Le Plaidoyer* autobiographically and reacted strongly against what they saw as Strindberg’s public revelations of his and his wife’s intimate private affairs. Axel the narrator was read as Strindberg the author. Some of the reviews were quotes from German newspapers, which had been very negative to the novel. It is possible that the Swedish reviewers were influenced by the depreciative tone in, for example, *Berliner Tagesblatt*, but I believe that those few Swedish critics that had read the novel and written a more extensive review agreed with the German reviewers.²⁵² The Swedish reviewers repudiated *Le Plaidoyer*, refusing to review it and to recount anything of its plot and events when it was first published in Germany. They were shocked, probably because what they saw as Strindberg’s autobiography broke against unspoken rules in its naturalistic literary style and the way it exposed ‘his wife’. They all took sides with ‘Strindberg’s wife’, whom they regretted had been the subject of such a horrible attack.

²⁵² When *Le Plaidoyer* was published in France two years later, however, the novel was generally positively received, with several important reviews (Rossholm, p. 588). Although the French reviewers, too, believed in the novel’s autobiographical nature, they judged *Le Plaidoyer* in a more objective and detached way, as literature, and not just as an attack by Strindberg on his wife. Without speculating upon any difference between the Scandinavian and French literary climate, one can at least comment that Strindberg and his wife were cultural celebrities in Sweden, while they were relatively unknown in France, and this fact probably contributed to the French critics’ relaxed attitude to Strindberg’s ‘autobiographical’ novel. Although the French reviewers too saw the novel as autobiographical, they treated it as literature and fiction instead of a personal scandal story, and analysed it with more detachment. They generously quoted from the novel, discussed the author and his background and commented on Strindberg’s misogyny, which they attributed to relative success of the Nordic feminists. The Maria character is more or less seen as a slut, who has herself to blame.

4.9 Summary

Written at a time when women demanded increased independence from men in organised forms and the New Woman started to encroach on traditionally masculine areas, Strindberg's novel *Le Plaidoyer d'un fou* can be characterised as a pained masculine outcry of fury and fear. The structure and literary technique of the text mirrors the desperate attempt to control the events and the plot by Axel, the autodiegetic narrator.

While *Le Plaidoyer* is intended as Naturalist 'evidence' of women's intellectual inferiority and unsuitability for the public sector, and promotes the only reasonable relationship between the genders as the one where women return to the role of homemaking 'angels', it unwittingly exposes much about gender discourses at the time. In the narrator's efforts to quench the New Woman and prevent her from stepping out of her home, he simultaneously unintentionally prises open a discursive space for her in contemporary literature. Not allowing women to speak in the novel, their side of the story still 'speaks' to the reader precisely through the silence the narrator imposes on them.

With the help of Susan S. Lanser's theory about narrative voice, where gender is seen as an important structuring factor, the narrator can be analysed and interpreted as both discursive content *and* form. The accelerating tempo of Axel's story, the diminishing sense of humour and the more and more frequent axiomatic, derogatory statements about women are all part of the literary technique and form used to try to ward off the New Woman. Axel behaves like a director, desperately trying to stage a reversal of the changing relationships between men and women.

An important key to narrative authority, according to Lanser, is whether the narrator can be constructed as what she calls a public voice. This is an example of where gender becomes a factor. It may have been difficult to supply a female narrator with a public voice at the time, as historically the literary narrative voice has been male (educated and white). In the construction of Axel, Strindberg chose the public voice, and moreover, constantly displayed Axel's masculinity and education to present him as credible and with authority.

The most dominant gender discourses discussed in this novel are the 'natural' inferiority of women, of mainly feminine sexuality and of lesbianism. With the help of

these discourses, the novel forms a detailed manual for the conventional femininity Axel advocates.

Le Plaidoyer is a text about conventional masculinity crumbling under the pressure of a new femininity – a text in which the contemporary binary poles between femininity and masculinity are clearly illustrated. Axel cannot obtain the conventional masculinity he desires without Maria adapting to a traditional femininity which functions as subjugated and supportive towards men. When Maria refuses to conform, Axel feels as if his masculine identity is dissolving and he might be going mad. Fahlgren writes that femininity could not be defined, but was necessary for men to be able to discern themselves (*Kvinnans...*, p. 83).

Axel's narrative voice in *Le Plaidoyer* is a site of crisis and contradiction as he struggles to silence the voice of all the women in the novel, while preaching about women's 'proper' place in society. I see the textual strategy as a wish to quench the early New Woman and reverse the changing relationship between men and women. However, the novel unwittingly exposes so much more, such as the need for legal reforms in favour of women and children and women's awakening professional ambitions and need for public space.

The struggle between Axel and Maria continues throughout the novel, and it is telling that it is never resolved. The ending of the novel is slightly different depending on which version one reads, but the endings have this in common: no one wins and no one loses, Maria never conforms and Axel never gets happy. Axel leaves the reader, not having got any closer to resolving the riddle about the elusive femininity he set out to unravel in order to construct the masculinity he needs.

5. Suffragism as Degeneration

The New Woman in Annie Quiding's *Fru Fanny* (1904)

The literary New Woman can be defined as the economically independent, intellectual, politically conscious, sexually emancipated, often single woman that surfaced in Western European, especially British, literature in the 1890s.²⁵³ Setting the standard for new norms of femininity and feminine behaviour, the New Woman was sometimes seen as a precursor and female hero, sometimes as an immoral and pernicious example. In the first years of Swedish suffragism,²⁵⁴ Annie Quiding (1869-1956) (later married Åkerhielm) published her popular style bestseller novel²⁵⁵ *Fru Fanny*.²⁵⁶ It uses evolutionist theory to advocate against the New Woman and the new feminine role where women saw themselves as individuals rather than as organic parts of a family. The eponymous title underlines this in connecting the word *fru* (Mrs) with the main character's first name, emphasizing her role as wife and mother in the first place.

Fru Fanny is an interesting example of a 'negative' New Woman novel where 'scientific' evolutionist discourses are used to promote a return to the traditional gender

²⁵³ One of the earliest, maybe the first, in Scandinavian literature was Laura Marholm's *Fru Lilly som ungmö, maka och moder: Interiörer ur ett lif* (1896). One of the most well known is Elin Wägner's *Pennskäftet* (1910; *Penwoman*).

²⁵⁴ The period of the suffragist movement in Sweden, the suffragist work was done between 1902, when the first local suffragist associations were founded and 1919. The first local associations were set up in response to a government Bill in Sweden which proposed that married men (or men over 40) should get two votes: one for themselves and one for their wives. It ended at the point of women gaining the right to vote in general elections (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 43).

²⁵⁵ *Fru Fanny* was a commercial success as published in three editions in a mere three months (A.G., 'Fru Fanny af Annie Quiding', *Dagny* 4 [1905], 93-95 [p. 93]). The first edition was printed in 8.300 copies (quite a large amount) (Stockholms-Tidningen, 7 December 1904, p. A4).

²⁵⁶ Annie Quiding, *Fru Fanny* (Stockholm: Gebers, 1904).

roles, where women were to stay in their homes without any direct political influence. Books like this can be described as ‘regressive utopias’ according to Claes Ahlund, where the dream is a restoration of traditional relationships, structures and virtues threatened by the modernisation of society (‘Krig...’, p. 98). Equality between the genders is put forward as degenerative for masculinity, catastrophic for the family institution and thus damaging to society. Fanny prefers dedicating her time to suffragist politics instead of tending to her family. Consequently, she loses both her child and husband. Still, there is an ambiguity in the novel, and the power struggle between Fanny and both the narrator and her husband Arnold is never resolved. The novel does not follow the ordinary pattern of containment of the heroine in a more conventional feminine role. Fanny avoids the narrator’s and her reviewers’ attempts at definition, something which made the critics protest against the representation. The reviews of *Fru Fanny* also contain interesting discourses about suffragism, which will be analysed further on in this work.

Although Annie Quiding-Åkerhielm had a strong public profile within ultra-conservative politics at the time, she and her books are largely forgotten today. She published about fifty works, mostly novels, but also debate books, works of history, poems and dramas. She made several translations from English into Swedish, while her own books were translated into several languages. She also worked professionally as a journalist.²⁵⁷ She received literary prizes²⁵⁸, and one reviewer stated that Quiding-Åkerhielm was one of the most read authors in Sweden at the time.²⁵⁹ Bokholm comments that it is surprising that Quiding-Åkerhielm was not included in the five volume literary history *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria*, probably because of her regressive ideals and disapproval of modernity and radical ideas about women’s emancipation (Bokholm, *I otakt...*, pp. 18, 126).

²⁵⁷ 1907-1912 Annie Åkerhielm worked for the conservative newspaper *Gefle-Posten* together with her husband, *friherre* (Baron) Dan Åkerhielm, where she delivered political commentary, literary reviews and later foreign commentary. They later moved to *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* in Stockholm, where Dan Åkerhielm worked until his death in 1931, and Annie Åkerhielm until her pension in 1936 (Bokholm, *I otakt...*, pp. 24-26). From 1913 Annie Åkerhielm was also a columnist in *Stockholms Dagblad* – the newspaper that was openly against the suffragist movement (Florin, p. 263).

²⁵⁸ In 1898 Annie Quiding-Åkerhielm won first prize in the *Idun* periodical’s novel competition for her debut novel, *Hvidehus*. Two years later she received the Swedish Academy’s gold medal for her poem *Bröderna* (Bokholm, *I otakt...*, p. 17).

²⁵⁹ Artur Möller, ‘Svenska prosatörer’ in *Ord & Bild* 1908:4, p. 235.

A handful of articles²⁶⁰ deal with Quiding-Åkerhielm's political views, such as Claes Ahlund's 'Krig och kultur i konservativ och radikal belysning' (2005), and Sif Bokholm's 'Svenska kanonkvinnor' (2005). Sif Bokholm's historical study *I otakt med tiden* (2008) includes an extensive discussion about Annie Åkerhielm's conservatism and contributions to the public debate in the press. Otherwise, not much has been written about Quiding-Åkerhielm and her works, including *Fru Fanny*, which still seems to be the best known of her about thirty-five novels. There is a short analysis about *Fru Fanny* in Bertil Björkenlid's *Kvinnokrav i manssamhälle* (1982), and one in Bibi Jonsson's article 'Annie Åkerhielm: Nazist och feminist?' (2002). From this perspective, I would argue that this is the first comprehensive analysis of *Fru Fanny*. I concentrate on the analysis of New Woman discourses and how they are treated in the novel, such as women's participation in politics, professional life and appropriation of public space. Reviewers at the time were highly critical towards *Fru Fanny*; both those reviewers in favour of female suffrage and the more conservative ones condemned the Fanny character as irresponsible and unconvincing. Her reputation has followed her into recent times in the literary histories.

Although, as I have explained in Chapter 1, my interest is in the texts and not in their authors' biographies, I cannot refrain from briefly commenting that several 'negative' New Woman novels, among those *Fru Fanny*, were authored by female writers who were successful public figures. Whilst they had the freedom to pursue creative interests rather than succumbing to procreative labour, they punish their New Women characters for *their* ambitions. Ann Ardis writes that women's resistance to other women's literary and political radicalism at the turn of the century is difficult to explain, and that we cannot deny that both women and men 'were acting as cultural custodians and "gatekeepers"'.²⁶¹

Fru Fanny has traditionally been read as a conservative author's criticism of suffragism and married middle-class women pursuing careers outside their home. In this chapter I analyse gender discourses in the novel whilst providing background information to those discourses. I furthermore examine the female protagonist's resistance to the novel's value universe, which creates ambiguities between the narrator and the protagonist, as well as tensions within the novel. I also present and analyse

²⁶⁰ See also Barbro Sollbe's 'Annie Åkerhielm: Med kulturkonservatism och bitterhet som drivkraft' in *Presshistorisk årsbok 2009*, pp. 7-25.

²⁶¹ Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 155.

discourses in the literary reviews of *Fru Fanny* which demonstrate both representations of general prejudices about suffragists as well as the contradictory views among critics. *Fru Fanny* received quite a few reviews; most of these were to some extent critical.²⁶²

As the novel is largely unknown today, a plot summary might be useful.

5.1 Short Plot Summary

The theme of the novel is whether married women have a right to self-fulfilment outside the home, and the impact on their families, and in the long term, on the wider society. Fanny is a young, attractive widow with a son, to whom she is rather indifferent. She marries a younger man, an academic called Arnold. Fanny is a ‘modern’ woman, engaged in suffragist politics, which Arnold initially accepts. However, as time passes and they have a baby daughter, Etty, he gets increasingly inimical to Fanny’s work, thinking she should instead dedicate her life to her family and his work.

Fanny is a working mother characterised as a New Woman: economically independent, with a prenuptial agreement in her new marriage and intensely engaged in her political career and her periodical. Unconcernedly, she moves about in public space in Stockholm. Her sexual emancipation is not evident in the novel, but can be ascribed to her passionately courting (and seducing) the much younger Arnold. Instead of being content with being a widow and mother, as Fanny’s conventionally feminine mother advocates, she catches the younger, sought-after bachelor Arnold right under the nose of young, unmarried women. ‘Det var hon som tog doktor Scheffer, sade de andra damerna’ (it was she who took Dr. Scheffer, said the other ladies) (p. 30). Fanny is described as ‘alltid glöd och lågor’ (passionate and smouldering) (p. 29) in need of ‘den erotik och stämningskult hon ville ha som ett narkotiskt medel’ (the sensual, erotic atmosphere she craved like narcotics) (p. 203). Her sexual desire is evident, although monogamous and directed toward her husband. It is Fanny who stands for sensuality, passion and activity in sexual matters, not Arnold, who is represented as dispassionate and uninterested in eroticism.

When Fanny travels to a suffragist congress in Copenhagen against Arnold’s wish, her daughter Etty, who has a cold, falls very ill and eventually dies. Later, Arnold asks Fanny to leave Stockholm and her work and travel with him to India for five years, as

²⁶² At least eight large reviews in the major newspapers, plus reviews in several journals and periodicals.

he intends to do research there. Fanny refuses, and the closure indicates the couple's separation.

5.2 The Narrator

The narrator in *Fru Fanny* is a rather distanced, sarcastic and sometimes personal commentator. It is an extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator, of which it is not possible to detect the gender. There is no doubt, as one reviewer points out, that its sympathy lies with Arnold²⁶³, but contrary to Axel in *Le Plaidoyer* it allows others than its own mouthpiece to speak up, have a voice and express opinions contradictory to its own. The different characters are allowed to unfold their opinions in an open, almost pedagogical way and to debate with each other without the narrator intervening or commenting. However, its benevolence towards Arnold while treating Fanny rather depreciatively at times exposes its preferences in favour of Arnold's conventional world view.

Although sometimes no focalisator can be detected, most of the novel is focalised through one of the characters. The narrator often uses a character focalisator whenever something complicated or emotional is represented. The Kurt character (Fanny's son) is intermittently used to depict the adults' strong reactions in an unreliable and limited way which describes events from a simplistic point of view, and leaves the interpretation to the reader. But in a few cases the narrator steps in, directly commenting and describing.

The relationship between Fanny and the narrator constitutes an ambiguous aspect of the novel, where the narrator's efforts to represent Fanny as shallow and lacking in intellectual independence are undermined by the protagonist's own political ambitions and determination to keep her independence, as opposed to the conventional family-organic dependence her husband insists on. The passage below is such an example, and one of the few examples where the narrator cannot refrain itself from making a personal comment:

Fanny måste vara medelpunkten för något. En liten nervös produkt af tidens uppjagade verksamhetsdrift, kunde hon inte lefva annat än i brådska, ifver och sinnesrörelse. När

²⁶³ '[D]en unga äkta mannen, den af författarinnan tydligen mest omhuldade gestalten och hennes eget språkrör' (A.G., '*Fru Fanny* af Annie Quiding', *Dagny* 4 (1905), 93-95 [p. 94]).

sorgetiden var slut stod hon som jakthund och darrade i kopplet – något skulle hon kasta sig i. Åtskilliga erfarenheter från hennes äktenskap, hvilka ännu förbittrade henne, gjorde att det blef gift kvinnas äganderätt, och därmed följde de öfriga punkterna på programmet. Nu var det kvinnans politiska rösträtt som var dagens brännande fråga.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 64)

The narrator makes a sly dig at Fanny in undermining her project by declaring her shallow and basically uninterested in the matter. Instead of being genuinely dedicated to feminist politics, the narrator claims, she just nervously needs something to occupy herself with. In several places her active, extrovert personality is negatively compared with the conventionally feminine figure of the calm, contented mother, sitting quietly darning socks. Fanny's ambition, spatial mobility and active mind are thus represented as lack in a woman. However, while trying to convince the reader that Fanny is not genuinely interested in politics, the narrator contradicts itself when informing us that Fanny has bitter personal experiences from her first marriage that made her take an interest in feminist politics. The narrator thus introduces a valid reason for Fanny's political commitment at the same time as it tries to convince the reader of her superficiality.

The struggle between Fanny and the narrator in the definition of Fanny's suffragist project is one of the prominent traits of the novel. It is not an openly-declared struggle such as that between Maria and Axel in *Le Plaidoyer*. This is a struggle where the narrator constantly tries to reduce and trivialise Fanny's work, while Fanny struggles on unawares, displaying and declaring a fervour and passion for her work throughout the novel. It is a passion that finally makes her prepared to give up the man she loves for the sake of her vocation. Unable to have changed Fanny's mind during the course of the narrative, the narrator withdraws with a bleak and ambiguous closure where neither of the two main characters is a winner.

Fanny thus consistently resists the values that are central to the novel and the narrator, and thereby exposes internal contradictions within the novel itself. She represents a reverse discourse to the novel's 'official' one. Using the concept of *reverse discourse* on homosexuality, Foucault explains how it began to speak on its own behalf, demanding its legitimacy, 'often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (Foucault, *Sexuality 1*, p. 101). Fanny and the other feminists in the novel oppose Arnold and the narrator through deploying a variety

of strategies such as adopting the same discourses as anti-feminism, but ‘re-making’ them for their own purpose. One example is ‘naturalness’, where the feminists appropriate the word ‘natural’ in claiming that it is natural for women to have intellectual and political interests. As Foucault points out, discourses can circulate from one strategy to another without changing their form, and the same discourses can be employed for different purposes (*Sexuality I*, p. 102).

Following Foucault’s reasoning about subjectivity as produced within surrounding discourses, the Fanny and Arnold characters can be split into two different representations of human nature. Whilst Arnold represents the traditional, rational, self-central humanist, Fanny can be seen as a modern, fluid subjectivity, constructed through discourses that surround her (represented, for example, through the way she is influenced by Maj Wallerstedt’s theories). There is no doubt about which representation of human nature the narrator advocates. The representation of Fanny as sometimes fluttery and girlish and sometimes purposeful and determined made the reviewers react. They probably perceived her personality span as inconsistent, especially in the conservative, liberal human universe of the novel.

As highlighted, Fanny’s resistance results in a strange doubleness of the novel. It both promotes a traditional, dependent, immobile femininity, whilst simultaneously opening up space for the New Woman through its battered but invincible female protagonist. Fanny does not only resist the novel’s values, she is allowed to get away with it, albeit with some serious losses. The closure is particularly interesting in that she is not firmly conventionalised as might be expected of this type of popular novel.

5.3 The Closure

In an essay about the reconstruction of masculinity in New Woman fiction, Gail Cunningham claims that the ‘incidence of death or despair amongst fictional New Women is extraordinarily high’.²⁶⁴ Female New Woman novelists, she states, allowed their protagonists to break down in the end, and they almost invariably created fictional closures in which their New Woman figures were either killed or re-conventionalised. For those New Women who do survive, ‘a positive ending is purchased at the expense of principle’ (p. 95). Cunningham seems mainly to be speaking of highbrow New

²⁶⁴ Gail Cunningham, ‘“He-Notes”: *Reconstructing Masculinity*’, in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Richardson and Willis, pp. 94-106 (p. 95).

Woman novels, judging from the examples she provides. In popular, commercial New Woman fiction, to which group *Fru Fanny* belongs, ‘a heroine who is “political and highly educated” is almost sure to come to a bad end unless she abandons her socio-political and intellectual activities in favour of a conventional wifely role’, writes Chris Willis.²⁶⁵ Willis agrees with Cunningham that the New Woman cannot be allowed the conventional happy ending and still keep her principles intact. The recurring message that is conveyed throughout popular New Woman fiction is that if the New Woman is to enter a happy relationship with a man she must be conventionalised into a more traditionally feminine role (Willis, pp. 57-58). This points to a low confidence in men’s tolerance of intellectual and politically interested women at the *fin de siècle*.

The closure is one aspect of *Fru Fanny*’s ambiguity. It is not the common conventional approach in New Woman novels, as Fanny neither dies nor becomes contained within conventional femininity by giving up her work to follow Arnold to India. Instead, she flatly resists Arnold’s and the narrator’s attempts to make her retire into a more conventional role, and decides to stay in Stockholm and continue her work, despite the risk of losing the man she passionately loves.

The reviewers did not uncritically accept this unconventional closure. They simply did not find it convincing that Fanny chooses her work instead of her beloved Arnold. It is difficult to know whether this is because the closure does not follow the usual pattern, or that there was no space within existing gender discourses for a behaviour like Fanny’s. ‘Så onaturlig maka är hon’ (That’s how unnatural a wife she is), wrote G-g N. (Georg Nordensvan) in *Dagens Nyheter*, agreeing with the basic values of the novel that women should subordinate themselves to their husbands’ needs and wishes. ‘Det är ju solklart att fru Fanny ej skulle uppgifva någonting genom att ge kvinnornas rösträtt på båten och i stället ägna sig åt att sy knappar i [Arnolds] byxor i Indien’ (It is as clear as daylight that Mrs Fanny would not give up anything by chucking suffragism and instead sew buttons into Arnold’s trousers in India), G-g N. sarcastically stated.²⁶⁶

Fanny is a fictional construct, ‘a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth century women’s movement’ (Ledger, p. 1). But the New Woman was not

²⁶⁵ Chris Willis, “‘Heaven defend me from political or highly-educated women!’: Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption’ in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, ed by Richardson and Willis, pp. 53-65 (p. 53).

²⁶⁶ G-g N., *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 November 1904, p. A2.

only fictional; she existed alongside her prototype in real life.²⁶⁷ As the Fanny character is based on the New Woman, I next provide a brief presentation of the New Woman concept.

5.4 The New Woman in Fact and Fiction

The symbolic figure of the New Woman almost simultaneously became a concept across Europe during the late 1800s (Ledger, p. 27).²⁶⁸ Ledger defines the New Woman as someone with a multiple identity: ‘a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet;’ but also a fictional construct (p. 1). Birgitta Holm characterised the New Woman as primarily financially, socially, legally, emotionally and erotically independent.²⁶⁹

The New Woman was controversial. ‘Janus-like, she is both a scandalous throw back to primeval states, but also the harbinger of change, and the model for the new, autonomous individual’ writes McDonagh (p. 10). By making claims that encroached on traditionally masculine areas of life, the New Woman was often seen as an evolutionary regression, which had slowly and finely tuned masculinity and femininity into separate spheres of activity. At the same time, her activity in traditionally masculine fields initiated societal change. The essentialist feminist Laura Marholm, who believed women should stick to their ‘feminine’ qualities and leave masculine areas of life to men, noted disapprovingly about the New Women:

They do all kinds of things, they study and write books without number, they collect money for various objects, they pass examinations and take degrees, they hold meetings and give lectures, they start societies, and there was never a time when women lived a more public life than at present.

(Marholm, p. 183)

²⁶⁷ By this I do not mean that we should see New Woman literature as a mere reflection of ‘real’ women. New Woman literature was discursively reflective *and* constructive. The fictive New Woman influenced people in real life, as Witt-Brattström points out (*Dekadensens...*, p. 212).

²⁶⁸ Sally Ledger shows how the concept exists in British press and novels from about 1890 and has its real breakthrough around 1900: in Scandinavia the ‘New Woman’ became a concept a few years later.

²⁶⁹ Birgitta Holm, ‘Edith Södergran och den nya kvinnan’, *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap*, 4 (1990) 57-64, ‘Den största rörelse världen har sett: Den kvinnliga rösten’, in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. III*, ed. by Jensen and others, pp. 133-144 and ‘Det tredje könet’, in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria vol. III*, ed. by Jensen and others, pp. 276-291.

Gender was an unstable category at the *fin de siècle*, and the New Woman tried to renegotiate the gender boundaries through reverse discourses and the creation of new ones, as described by Foucault.²⁷⁰ Her behaviour, way of dressing and appropriation of public space (formerly exclusively masculine) were seen by many as provocative transgressions. This drew virulent attacks on the New Woman figure, both by political commentators and literary critics in the press. The crumbling foundations of traditional gender identities in combination with the high profile of the feminist movements gave rise to backlash reactions against the New Woman and feminism.

The New Woman novel exploded as a genre at the turn of the nineteenth century, taking off in England in the 1890s, and Ledger claims the New Woman figure was ‘utterly central to the literary culture of the *fin-de-siècle* years’ (p. 1). Witt-Brattström writes that New Woman literature ‘claimed to speak the truth about women, the war of the sexes, and the death of Victorian double standards’.²⁷¹ She points to several important aspects of New Woman writing, such as women’s change from male-defined objects to self-defined subjects, ‘the turning upside down of the erotic contract’, the ‘new, fearless, and desiring gaze upon the male as sexual object/partner’, the ‘notion of sisterly affection [and] the beginning of a female bonding’, urban settings and the female right to public space (Witt-Brattström, *The New...*, p. 4). Ann Ardis pinpoints three important questions in New Woman literature:

First, what happens to the New Woman herself as she ventures out into the public world? Second, what happens to the nuclear family when women choose careers other than marriage and motherhood? And finally, what happens to the social system as a whole when women enter the workplace in significant numbers for the first time, disrupting further an economic system already struggling with the problems associated with industrialization?

(Ardis, p. 21)

She comments that some of the New Woman’s defenders refuted ‘the culturally ratified opposition between procreativity and creativity, motherhood and all manner of nonbiological labour’ (p. 21). But more often, as in the case of *Fru Fanny*, the New Woman’s critics built their case on one of the aforementioned issues. *Fru Fanny*

²⁷⁰ Using the example of the homosexual, Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* argues that the appearance of a dominant discourse invokes one or more reverse ones, and makes it possible for hitherto suppressed voices to articulate themselves (*Sexuality I*, p. 101).

²⁷¹ Ebba Witt-Brattström, ‘Introduction: The New Woman Specter in Modernist Aesthetics’ in *The New Woman and the Aesthetic Opening*, ed. by Witt-Brattström, p. 4.

concentrates on the second question, predicting a dull future for the families of married New Women.

Often the New Woman novel was in favour of its protagonist; promoting equality for women, trying to reverse antifeminist discourses and radicalise gender politics, but there are also many examples when the genre has been used against them, to undermine emancipation for women, as exemplified by *Fru Fanny*. ‘For while the New Women often pictured themselves as warriors against degenerative decline, others perceived them to be symptoms of that very decline’, writes McDonagh (p. 12). Commercial New Woman fiction often came in the form of detective and romantic novels which featured New Woman protagonists, and these works reached a wider and more varied audience than the highbrow novels (Willis, pp. 63-64). ‘The New Woman of commercialized popular literature was a far cry from her sensitive, suffering sisters in the polemic fiction of the best-known New Woman novelists’, Willis comments (p. 53). As popular fiction usually contains its heroines within traditional femininity, one might assume that most of the popular New Women fiction did the same.

In summary, Fanny is a typical popular literature New Woman character, although the novel does not have the typical closure of this type of work. This is one of the ambiguities in the novel that provoked a reaction among critics at the time. They did not find it convincing that Fanny chose her vocation instead of love. Further, Fanny’s beauty and interest in fashion went against the reviewers’ prejudices about suffragists. These points will be further elaborated in the next section.

5.5 Suffragist Discourses

Suffragism was the third step in first wave feminism, which saw women joining the movement in higher numbers than ever before.²⁷² At the beginning of the twentieth century a great variety of discourses about the female suffragist flourished, and Fanny does not comply with those discourses, as will be shown. She rather conforms to the picture of the real life suffragist, as described by Florin in *Kvinnor får röst*.

One of the stereotypes in the representation of suffragists was that they were ugly, mannish and humourless bores, generally unattractive. Anti-feminist Swedish writer

²⁷² The first step was economic legal and civil rights for women such as married women’s right to manage their own financial assets and the right to an education. The second step contained moral questions such as the problems with prostitution and alcoholism (Björkenlid, p. 27).

and artist Albert Engström expressed this opinion openly in his comic paper *Strix*, where he both wrote and published political caricature cartoons. Women demanding the vote were represented as ugly, old and infertile, with little or no sex appeal. Behind this line of reasoning was the idea that women were fundamentally sexual beings, so a woman having had her basic sexual and reproductive needs fulfilled would not engage in feminist politics. Only those ‘left over’, the old maids, too unattractive to have been offered marriage by any man, would be interested in increasing feminine societal power. Active heterosexuality and parenthood was, according to the Engström discourse, what prevented women from lapsing into feminism and suffragism (Björkenlid, pp. 16-18).



Albert Engström caricature of feminist meeting in Strix 15.1.1908, where a fröken (miss) Lesbin speaks up (the name implicating she is a lesbian): ‘No wonder some of us are unmarried. Statistics show that the same amount of baby boys and girls are born. However, some boys die young, and therefore we should not complain, but reason like I do: my husband died as a child!’

Willis claims that in popular New Woman fiction, the heroine is typically young, rich and beautiful (p. 58). Pretty, dressing in an exquisitely feminine way and a married mother, Fanny suits the popular fiction image well. She defies all the stereotypical ideas about suffragists, which prompted loud protests among reviewers. As the central theme

of *Fru Fanny* is whether married women have a right to self-fulfilment outside the home or not, its protagonist must be married for the narrative to work. This, in turn, fits the prevailing discourse that married women could not be unattractive.



Albert Engström caricature of suffragist meeting in Strix 1.5.1907, underlining both the suffragists' unattractiveness and unsatisfied erotic desire. The ugly suffragist says: 'Ladies! Feminism advances. In Fredrika Bremer's time a young woman could not look at a young man's naked foot without risking her good name and reputation. Now we may look at his knee. And just wait 'til we get the vote!'

If the Fanny character did not match the typical prejudices about female suffragists, then there is a character in the novel who does: Julia von Stein, who immediately can be recognised as belonging to the notorious 'third gender'²⁷³.

Där var inte mycket af kvinna kvar hos henne. En lång smal figur, kortklippt hår, kyliga ögon bakom binoceln; klädd var hon i kavaj och slät filthatt och en kort, svart klädeskjol.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 168)

²⁷³ The 'third gender' meant individuals who were considered to be neither women nor men. The 'third gender' may be understood in relation to the individual's biological sex, gender role, gender identity, or sexual orientation, such as a hermaphrodite, a neuter or a homosexual.

Arnold uses the old power technique of defeminising Julia von Stein by thinking disdainfully that she is not a ‘proper woman’. She is represented as masculine, unattractive and an old maid. Apart from a suffragist, she could be the model of a lesbian according to discourses of the time. The text informs us that she has *become* this way; that she was once more feminine. Implicitly, feminist politics and staying single makes a woman masculine. The Julia von Stein sort of representation was part of the fear that the stable gender identities would dissolve if women went into politics – they would turn into a third sex, become manly, grow stubble and lose their sexual identity. In caricatures the suffragist women were portrayed as masculine, as hermaphrodites or lesbians (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 55).

Julia herself claims to have lost interest in eroticism. She plays on the existential fear of men, as she argues modern women do not need them:

Ni skapa bara konflikter för oss, göra att det ställes en dubbel fordran på vårt lif och våra krafter, som ingen människa kan fylla. Att en modern kvinna gifter sig, det är bara den rena erotiken.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 168)

Julia von Stein here delivers what is intended as a devastating critique on behalf of married women: they had to work twice as hard as men if they wanted a profession, as on top of that they had to supervise the household (even if they had maids). Given the value universe of the novel, this can be interpreted as an appeal to married women not to work or fulfil ambitions that would take them away from their wifely duties of overseeing household work.

In Julia’s opinion, modern women should fill their lives with scholarly and artistic activity, and a husband would be a hindrance to pursuing a career as his wish would be for his wife to toil in his household. ‘[Fanny] kunde hellre ha skaffat sig en papegoja’ ([Fanny] might rather have got herself a parrot), she says about Arnold (p. 84). Julia von Stein demonstrates a dry humour in replying to Arnold’s question whether she has ever felt the need of a strong and protective man in helping run her publicist business:

Tack, doktor Scheffer. Skaffa mig någon som stoppar mina strumpor och kantar mina klädningar! *Det* är hvad den moderna kvinnan behöfver; jag talar ur bitter erfarenhet. Mina

tidningsaffärer skall jag nog sköta själf.

(*Fru Fanny*, pp. 168-69)

The darning of socks, which in *Fru Fanny* (and in other novels, for example *Rikka Gan*) is strongly connected to conventional, (and desirable) femininity, is here rejected by Julia von Stein. In fact, it is as if the person who might be recruited to darn Julia's socks and hem her dresses might well be a man, while she runs her newspaper business on her own. She thus implies she would not mind overturning the gender roles completely. She certainly belongs to the third gender: a masculine soul in a feminine body.

An interesting part of the novel is a scene from a suffragist meeting. Liberal feminism is here represented by the grand old lady Augusta Torsell, 'kvinnosakens mångåriga och vördade ledarinna' (the respected leader of the women's movement for many years) (p. 64). Although sympathetically depicted, Augusta Torsell is still represented as something of an old-fashioned dinosaur:

Det var det flydda århundradets äkta liberalism som satt där lifslevvande; ren och svärmisk, fast öfvertygad om välsignelsen af sina reformer och om möjligheten att vinna allt utan att förlora något, och med den "gamla goda tidens" hela blinda tro i arf, om än länkad i andra banor.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 67)

Her attitude, that women can both engage in politics and manage their households, that you can win everything without losing anything, is contradicted both by the representation of Fanny and Maj Wallerstedt, the Ellen Key caricature. In Fanny's case, she is simply a typical example of the stressed and exhausted working mother, struggling to manage her household tasks and her work at the same time: '[k]änslan af plikter som hon icke medhann växte ibland nästan till fysiskt kvalm' (the sensation of duties that she had no time for sometimes grew to a feeling of physical sickness) (p. 95). In the case of Maj Wallerstedt, she preaches women's right to irrationality as opposed to Augusta Torsell's life-long work to change the image of women to that of rational beings:

Det är just den dunkla naturkraften i kvinnans väsen, impulsiv, intuitiv, bisarr, som ska gjuta sig föryngrande och berusande genom samhällets alla porer, frigörande inte bara henne själf utan allt i hennes väg!

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 72)

Maj Wallerstedt talks about dissolving the home, as it suffocates individuality and absorbs female energy, which should rather be used for the common good of society (p. 74). She does not believe that women can have it all: ‘Ni vill politisk och social frihet för kvinnan och nekar henne den personliga friheten!’ (You want political and social freedom for women, and then deny them personal freedom!) (p. 76). In the argument that takes place between the liberal and radical, essentialist wings, with the narrator watching in amusement without intervening, it is a ‘little woman from the countryside’ that is recruited as the novel’s mouthpiece: ‘”Och – barnen?” utbrast hon’ (‘And the children?’ she cried out) (p. 74). In the heat of the battle, it will be the little country woman who reminds everyone of those dependent, fragile beings most of them are responsible for as mothers, those little humans who would be lost and destroyed without their mothers. The narrator allows the suffragists their intellectual discussion, and then throws in the bombshell that will remind them of their biological destiny. Badinter sums up the dominant discourse of the time: ‘Yes, women’s working made the child its little victim; yes, the absence of the mother in the home was the cause of infinite ills and particularly the break-up of the family’ (p. 245). Again, it is women’s ‘necessary choice between biological and cultural labour, procreativity and creativity’ (Ardis, p. 94).

The narrator describes both the radical and the liberal suffragist wings and their actions with slightly sarcastic amusement. The suffragists are sometimes represented as quarrelsome and scheming, which Florin supports historically. The association’s leaders often had to turn out locally to sort out problems of a personal nature: ‘[f]olk flyttade, betalade inte, rapporterade inte, sammankallade inte, hade inte tid, hade inte ork, blev osams’ (people moved, did not pay, did not report, did not summon, were too busy, were too tired, disagreed) (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 134).

The caricature portrait of Ellen Key, disguised as the radical, essentialist feminist character Maj Wallerstedt, is immediately recognised by all the reviewers. Maj is depicted as a catlike person (which implies her being unreliable and calculating), ‘ögonen nästan slutna, så att man knappast såg något av dem’ (p. 68). ‘The eyes almost

closed' may refer to Key disdainfully being called 'prophetess' by people resenting her ambitions as philosopher, but it can also be a tool for the narrator to inform us that she is figuratively blind, for example to the Truth. In spite of the narrator's somewhat caricaturist representations of the suffragists, it depicts them as intelligent and warm-hearted and lets them speak up and explain their opinions without interrupting or commenting.

The reviewers were, as mentioned, largely critical towards *Fru Fanny*, and their reviews give an interesting insight into dominating discourses of the time. Here, four areas within the reviews will be pinpointed: *Fru Fanny's* conservatism, the representation of Fanny, the representation of the suffragists and the novel's popular fiction style.

5.5.1 '[E]n stark konservativ, för att inte säga reaktionär läggning'²⁷⁴

Most of the reviewers, even the most traditional ones, point out that *Fru Fanny* advocates a return to traditional gender roles that are outmoded and that its author represents conservative ideals. The signature M.C. in *Aftonbladet*, presumably female and pro-suffrage, is scandalised by the gender views in the novel and certain they will meet opposition:

Det vore heller icke gärna möjligt annat. Visserligen torde den särskilt af manliga recensenter blifva lofsjungen som ingen av författarinnans föregående romaner. Men harmonien i denna manliga kör kommer dock att störas af en och annan kvinnlig röst.

(M.C., *Aftonbladet*)

M.C. expected that male reviewers would applaud *Fru Fanny's* conservative gender views, and she threatened with women reviewers disturbing the 'harmonies of the male chorus'. M.C. may have been right about the male reviewers; in *Dagens Nyheter*, G-g N. wrote:

Alla som afsky emancipationsdamer och deras patentfjolleri och moderna åsikter öfver hufvud skola mottaga boken med glädje och tacksamhet och där finna det förlösande ordet uttaladt om kvinnans uppgift och rätta plats i lifvet. Här få de läsa om hur det går med

²⁷⁴ (A strongly conservative, not to say reactionary direction.) M.C., 'Konst och litteratur', *Aftonbladet*, 9 November 1904, p. B1.

äktenskapet och med barnen, när maken och modern har andra intressen vid sidan af de husmoderliga.

(G-g N., *Dagens Nyheter*)

G-g N. detested 'emancipation ladies' and their modern views, and was pleased with the book, which in his view advocated a woman's true place in life, giving an adequate picture of what happens if wives/mothers dare have other interests than household ones. However, he cannot refrain from ironically commenting on the novel's address that '[d]et är nästan som om man har hört det förut' (it is almost as if one has heard it before), joining the long list of reviewers complaining that *Fru Fanny* is a rehash of 'old stuff'.

However, the presumably male reviewer –pt– of *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* does not agree with G-g N. He writes:

Den höga tanke förf. har om männen såsom de födda herskarne, som ensamma ha rätt att hafva någon lifsuppgift i det offentliga, medan qvinnan hänvisas till hemmet uteslutande, der hon ska tjena man och barn, kan ju icke annat än kännas rätt smickrande för ett manligt hjerta. Och såsom allmän sats kan det helt visst försvaras, att den gifta qvinnan bör i första rummet sköta sitt hem. Men det gäller om alla sådana allmänna satser att berättigade undantag derifrån kunna bli lika talrika, som de fall regeln innesluter. Och en annan fråga är den om herskardöden. Man torde kanske kunna komma öfverens om, att om man vill ställa upp ideal har den frågan ingen plats. Ty då ska hemmet byggas på den ömsesidiga kärleken och uppoffringen makarne emellan och ej på en mer eller mindre doktrinär teori eller sats.²⁷⁵

Although pointing out that, in general, married women should accept their duty to manage their households, signature –pt– states that there will always be exceptions to the rule. He appears to be taken aback by the novel's doctrine that men are the born and natural rulers, and women are to obey. Instead, he advocates a comradesly marriage, where the spouses share decision-making and responsibility.

M.C. in *Aftonbladet* indignantly sums up the novel with the words that Arnold's and the author's ideal of a wife's legal position can best be compared with those of a notorious seventeenth-century bishop, who listed the wife as part of a husband's personal property.

²⁷⁵ – pt –, 'Fru Fanny. Roman af Annie Quiding', *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 3 December 1904, p. A1.

5.5.2 'Det är just icke de vanliga attributen för en kvinnosakskvinna'²⁷⁶

An interesting cluster of discourses in the reviews is the reviewers' opinions of the suffragist movement and the feminists. In general they claimed that the novel gives an unconvincing and flawed representation of Fanny as a leading feminist, but their views of the representation of other suffragist characters and the women's movement as a whole differed.

The reading public at the time was often unsympathetic to the suffragist movement. Although in its infancy, it was a natural extension of a feminist movement which had been a strong feature in Swedish society for a couple of decades. The feminist movement fought for improvements in the legal rights of women by trying to create an image of women as rational beings. Florin explains:

[The suffragists] utmanade de traditionella politiska strukturerna bara genom sin existens som företrädare för politisk rösträtt. De aktiva kvinnorna ville förändra staten – den manliga institution som i hundratals år hade reglerat könens förhållande rättsligt, påverkat arbetsdelningen i samhället och gjort kvinnor beroende av äktenskapet som försörjningsform. De ville omvärdera kvinnors relation till staten för att de skulle slippa vara bihang till männen [...]. Det låg maktanspråk bakom ansträngningarna. [...] Att få rösta i politiska val var rent konkret att "få röst", att uttrycka sin mening som medborgare gentemot stat och samhälle. Detta krav upplevdes som mycket provocerande.

(Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 16)

By demanding a new relationship with the state, women were at the same time demanding a new relationship with men; to be no longer be dependent on or controlled by them. This demanded significant legal and political changes which many people saw as very provocative and frightening. Women's suffrage had strong opponents, especially among conservative individuals in the upper and middle classes. Politics had, until then, always been a male privilege, and the suffragists stirred up strong feelings, as the connection between the state, politics and masculinity was seen as a 'natural' gender order which could not be altered without devastating consequences. It took time and persuasiveness to change such a way of thinking (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 22).

The periodical *Dagny* was published by the Fredrika Bremer Association between 1886 and 1913,²⁷⁷ and was the mouthpiece of the Swedish women's suffrage movement. One of its tasks was to promote the image of women as rational and

²⁷⁶ (These are not the usual attributes of a feminist.) M.C., *Aftonbladet*.

sensible beings, well able to vote responsibly. Naturally, its reviewer A.G. saw *Fru Fanny*, with its anti-suffrage views and caricatures of the feminist movement, unsympathetically. She spent most of her review on defending the feminist movement against Quiding's attack and correcting Quiding's views.

[*Fru Fanny*] visar en beklagansvärd obekantskap med representanterna för den nutidsföreteelse, som den vill skildra. Ty lyckligtvis är "fru Fanny" ingen "typisk personlighet" för vår svenska kvinnorörelse. Det skulle i så fall stå illa till med den rörelsens framtid. [...] [D]et arbetet kräver starka, varma och helgjutna personligheter, människor, för hvilka pliktuppfyllelse är lifvets högsta mening. Sådana människor frestas ej heller att för fjärmare plikter glömma de närmaste liggande.

(A.G., *Dagny*, pp. 94-95)

A.G. claimed that the novel does not represent the suffragist movement and its members correctly. *Fru Fanny* simply does not know what it is talking about. Instead of shallow personalities like Fanny's, the movement consisted of 'warm and harmonious personalities'. A.G. and her feminist colleagues needed to be both cunning and diplomatic to win universal suffrage. They needed to convince men that women were well to accept political responsibility without abandoning their traditional feminine duties. Men had to be coaxed into giving women the vote. Politically, it was important for A.G. to emphasise that women of the movement would never neglect their families and homes. She fully realised that men would only be inclined to grant women the right to vote by believing that women would still fulfil their traditional duties. Sarcastically, she accused the Fanny character of not doing this:

Fru Fanny, den moderna kvinnorörelsens representant, drages ju genom sina intressen allt mera från hemmet; hon kan varken finna tid till att göra upp ordentliga matsedlar för familjens middagar eller att hjälpa sin lille son Kurt med hans läxor eller att intressera sig för sin unge, bildsköne mans studier.

(A.G., *Dagny*, pp. 93-94)

²⁷⁷ Since then it has been published as *Hertha*.

Fru Fanny's representation of the suffragists' lives and activities is quite accurate according to Florin.²⁷⁸ She describes the phenomenal amount of work put in by both the leaders and grassroots in the suffragist movement (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 137). In real life, the suffragists were rather overworked and did not have much time for domestic life. A.G., however, would not acknowledge this fact for strategic reasons. The whole suffragist project was possible only because it was permeated with an incredible respect for and willingness to put in hard work. Florin underlines this through statistics showing that around 40.000 speeches were given just by the Swedish organisation LKPR (*Kvinnor...*, pp. 137, 149).

A.G. also commented on the evolutionist views in the novel, represented through Arnold. Her sarcastic comment was that Arnold '[t]rots sin ungdom [...] alltid [har] en färdig dom tillhands öfver alla lifvets stora spörsmål; kvinnofrågan t. ex. affärdas med den enkla och uttrycksfulla förklaringen: rasdegeneration' (in spite of his young age always has a judgement ready for all the big questions in life. The woman question, for example, is brushed aside as 'race degeneration') (A.G., p. 94). As a feminist, A.G. reacted against such concepts as evolutionism and other determinisms.

A.G. further mentioned Fanny's journey to Copenhagen, and the subsequent fact that she is punished with the death of her child. A.G. must have been well aware of all the travels a suffragist had to undertake. Florin reports that the leaders of the suffragist movement travelled extensively and alone, mostly to make speeches, but also to conferences and meetings, both within the country and abroad (*Kvinnor...*, pp. 157-64). Still, unlike some of the other reviewers, A.G. did not protest against the implied cause-and-effect between the unauthorised journey and Etty's death.

A.G. immediately identified the representation of the Maj Wallerstedt character:

Den s.k. Ellen Key-riktningen har sin representant i en figur, som nog skulle värka starkare, om den ej vore fullt så mycket karrikatyr. Som den nu är, är den värkligen allt för skrattretande för att kunna tagas på fullt allvar.

(A.G., *Dagny*, p. 94)

²⁷⁸ In *Kvinnor får röst*, Florin maps out the work, travels, speeches and family lives of six prominent Swedish suffragists. She describes their overwhelming workload, their struggle to combine politics and family life, their challenges to dominating discourses on femininity and their strong passion for feminist politics.

She saw the caricature of Ellen Key ‘really too ludicrous to be taken seriously’; naturally she, as a reviewer in *Dagny*, would object to caricatures of feminists. However, she praised the representation of the traditional liberal feminism in the novel, through the Augusta Torsell character, as ‘värdig och sympatisk’ (dignified and sympathetic).

As a contrast to A.G.’s critical view of the feminist representations in the novel, we have signature C.D.W.’s (Carl Gustaf af Wirsén) review in the conservative *Vårt Land*, which is one of the very few positive reviews.²⁷⁹ C.D.W. did not protest against the representation of Fanny as unrealistic. He found the book entertaining, and the representation of the Julia von Stein character ‘obetingat komisk’ (unquestioningly comical), and assured his readers that such characters actually do exist for real. He also identified the caricature of Ellen Key:

[V]i måste le, då vi höra de kända floskler om den dunkla naturgrunden i kvinnans väsen, om det impulsiva och rusande i hennes satser, om hennes “etiska frigjordhet” och om den moraliska anarkiens heliga rätt.

(C.D.W., *Vårt Land*)

Signature –pt– in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* thought that the representations of the suffragists and their meetings and negotiations were ‘mycket väl gjord’ (very well done):

Man kan ej peka på något bestämdt, som innebär öfverdrift eller karrikatyr, utan det hela tyckes objektivt och opartiskt hållet, och dock ligger deröfver en fläkt av persiflage med stor komisk verkan. Förf. anser tydligen hela detta qvinnosaksarbete såsom blott en sport för sysslösa hjärnor, men också en sport, som kan bli farlig för hem och samhälle, när den förvridit tillräckligt många hjärnor.

(–pt–, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*)

What –pt– saw is the seemingly generous readiness of the narrator to allow different voices to speak up and put forward their causes. At the same time, the narrator’s distanced amusement undermines this generosity by presenting the suffragists’ discussions as resembling a squabble. –pt– identified the Augusta Torsell character as

²⁷⁹ C.D.W., *Vårt Land*, 25 November 1904, p. 2.

representing the traditional, liberal feminism and Maj Wallerstedt as ‘hvilken talar med Ellen Keys tunga’ (speaking with Ellen Key’s tongue).

M.C. in *Aftonbladet*, however, was less willing to accept *Fru Fanny’s* representations of the members of the women’s movement. She wrote:

Hjältinnan, fru Fanny, som skall representera kvinnorörelsen, verkar allt igenom så föga trovärdig och så onaturlig, att läsaren aldrig kan känna sig öfvertygad om allvaret af hennes sträfvanden och åsikter.

(M.C., *Aftonbladet*)

M.C. partly based her opinion on Fanny’s elegant appearance. ‘Det är just inte de vanliga attributen för en kvinnosakskvinna’ (these are not the usual attributes of a feminist), she refers to Fanny’s silk dresses, laced blouses, pretty petticoats and elegant shoes. M.C. simply did not believe that a feminist actively engaged in the suffragist movement could dress so elegantly and in such a feminine way. But there M.C. was wrong. Florin describes how the feminists of the movement were careful to do exactly that; dress elegantly, in a feminine way and always *à la mode*, to avoid being stereotyped as ‘masculine’ (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 152). But M.C. also bases her doubts on Fanny’s lively and sensual character:

[D]enna lilla, ytligt fåfänga, sensuellt anlagda kvinna, som hänger sin unge fästman om halsen och nästan kväfver honom med sina passionerade kyssar [...] – kan verkligen en opartisk läsare tro, att denna kvinna skulle kunna vara en af de ledande personerna i den svenska kvinnorörelse, hvilken hittills åtminstone uppträdt så djupt allvarligt, så målmedvetet, så fritt från all humbug!

(M.C., *Aftonbladet*)

In M.C.’s opinion, a feminist had to show more seriousness in character and less sensual passion than Fanny. Obviously M.C. was sympathetic towards the women’s movement, and wished to promote their public image as serious and hardworking.²⁸⁰

G-g N. in *Dagens Nyheter* also doubts the authenticity of the Fanny character: ‘[Quiding] har gjort det lätt för sig genom att framställa sin Fru Fanny sådan att ingen läsare tror på dennas s.k. lifsuppgift’ (Quiding has made it easy for herself by

²⁸⁰ In general, the liberal and social democrat newspapers were pro female suffragism, while the conservative were against it.

representing Fanny in such a way that no reader will believe in her so-called vocation). G-g N. too complains about Fanny's elegance in dress, and that her personality is too lively and capricious:

Mot den kvinnliga intelligensen i Sverige är fröken Quiding afgjordt onådig då hon målar ut en af dess ledande andar som en nolla. Hurudan ska inte kören vara, då solisterna äro fru Fanny och denna Maj Hvardhohheter, som ju är en ren karikatyr? En dam, som har sina skrufvar i behåll, finns det dock i kvinnoakslägrer, och det är naturligtvis en åldrig dam, den vithåriga tant Torsell, som representerar 1800-talets liberalism i fråga om kvinnans rättigheter gentemot det nya seklets papegojor.

(G-g N., *Dagens Nyheter*)

Again, the reviewer recognised the caricatures, and he found Fanny too shallow for a suffragist, calling her a 'little nobody'. Contradicting himself, he both criticised the Maj Wallerstedt character as unrealistic and at the same time recognised her as a caricature, implicating her as fully possible in real life. However, G-g N. was favourably disposed towards Augusta Torsell, whom he used to point out his aversion to 'the parrots' of modern, essential feminism.

B.H.B. in *Ord & Bild* calls Fanny 'en liten lolla och nolla, nyckfull, hysterisk, toalettupptagen, utan ryggrad i något hon säger och gör, och läsaren tro inte ett ögonblick på den ledareställning, som hon påstås intaga bland sina kämpande medsystrar' (a little nobody, capricious, hysterical, only interested in her looks and without backbone; the reader does not for a moment believe in the leading position she is said to take among her struggling sisters).²⁸¹ He thus joins in the chorus of reviewers who all point to the incompatibility of Fanny with the suffragist movement. She is not sufficiently badly dressed and serious enough to warrant credibility.

Signature Jacqueline in *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, who claimed to be an expert on suffragists and the movement, thought the Fanny character was 'misslyckad' (unsuccessful). 'Ingen, som på något så när nära håll följt kvinnorörelsen och sökt få blick på de kvinnor, som leda den, kan i Fru Fanny känna igen en af dem' (no one, who has followed the women's movement and its leaders closely, can recognise Fanny in any one of them), she wrote.²⁸² Further, she is critical of the movement itself:

²⁸¹ B.H.B., 'Ur bokmarknaden', *Ord & Bild* (1905:2), pp. 127-28.

²⁸² Jacqueline, 'Annie Quidings julbok', *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 20 December 1904, p. B1.

Tidpunkten är väl vald för att gissla kvinnorörelsen. Den har under senare tiden förlorat icke få vänner och rätt mycket anseende. [---] Det anses icke längre riktigt öfverensstämmande med god ton att vara kvinnosaks kvinna. Det har gått därhän, att det rent af kommit något misskrediterande öfver namnet. Detta har skett, sedan rörelsen efter att ha varit riktad mot formen riktat sig mot sak. Så länge det endast var kvinnans ställning i yttre hänseende, det gällde, hennes rätt att sjelf bestämma öfver sin förmögenhet och dylikt, då ansågs rörelsen ännu gå an. Den har sedan flyttats öfver på ett så att säga inre plan. Striden gäller numera hennes rätt att bestämma öfver sin egen person. Den gäller framför allt frågan om, hvar den sedliga grund bör förläggas, på hvilken samlivet mellan man och kvinna skall byggas.

(Jacqueline, *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*)

Jacqueline complained that an element of morality had entered the 'woman question'. Originally, it had only discussed women's material rights, such as their right to manage their own financial assets. Now the debate had moved on to defining the moral base for relationships between the genders. Jacqueline goes on to comment on the struggle between the traditional, liberal section and the Ellen Key section which is represented in the novel. Ellen Key represented a radical feminism which promoted the idea that a loving relationship as more important than formal marriage. This was seen as immoral by the public, and in *Fru Fanny* such ideas are branded through Arnold's strong reactions against them. Jacqueline thus promotes traditional-liberal feminism in her review, and warns against Ellen Key's ideas.

5.5.3 'Så onaturlig maka är hon'²⁸³

One of the reasons why M.C. in *Aftonbladet* did not find Fanny convincing as a suffragist is the following:

[D]å hon som änka vid 32 års ålder gripes af en passionerad förälskelse till en betydligt yngre man [...] verkar det orimligt och onaturligt, att hon malgré tout fortsätter sitt arbete inom kvinnorörelsen, att hon ägnar den sina bästa krafter, för dess skull uppför sin husliga trefnad, sin äktenskapliga lycka, och att hon till slut i valet mellan denna sin verksamhet och sin man, väljer den förra och underkastar sig en skilsmässa på årtal, ja, kanske på lifstid från den lidelsefullt älskade mannen.

(M.C., *Aftonbladet*)

²⁸³ (That's how unnatural a wife she is.) G-g N., *Dagens Nyheter*.

M.C. was as surprised as the narrator at Fanny's stubbornness and insistence on what she sees as her vocation. Why would the happily married, sensual Fanny wish to continue her work within the suffragist movement instead of spending all her energy on her handsome husband and her family? Why should she refuse to meet the demands from Arnold to give up her work and live only for his?

One of the prejudices about feminists was that it was the lack of sensual/sexual satisfaction that made them struggle for women's emancipation. This is mirrored in –pt–'s review in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, where he mused that Arnold does not seem to be in love with Fanny, 'och då får man väl ursäkta, att hon kastar sig på qvinnofrågan' (and then she may be excused for throwing herself at the woman question). Indeed, without true heterosexual love and sex, what can be expected from women?

G-g N. in *Dagens Nyheter* agreed with –pt–. He reasoned that as Fanny seems so much in love with her husband, why would she bother with the suffragist movement, and even choose it before Arnold in the end? 'Så onaturlig maka är hon' (That's how unnatural a wife she is), G-g N. complains.

These statements by the reviewers reveal a discourse where feminism and suffragism were seen as pre-occupations for women that had not been fortunate enough to obtain women's 'proper' and 'natural' vocation in life; to be a wife and mother. The reviewers simply did not find it probable that an attractive, heterosexual and happily married woman like Fanny would have any other vocation in life than her family. Feminism, they reasoned, was for unattractive, unmarried, sexually dissatisfied women or maybe lesbians. The driving force for a feminist was dissatisfaction, and a woman like Fanny, married to the man she wants and a mother, could hardly be dissatisfied.

5.5.4 '[B]oken [...] kräver [ej] någon särdeles stor hjärnansträngning'²⁸⁴

Practically all reviewers agreed that *Fru Fanny* was not a serious, artistic work. Their criticism of style and character psychology was generally sharp and often sarcastic. It is interesting to see the male reviewers' supercilious attitude towards the book as a work by a female author. 'Damroman' (ladies' novel) (G-g N. in *Dagens Nyheter*) had already been used for decades as a depreciatory statement about books written by women. As mentioned, the finest compliment a woman writer could get at the time was that she wrote like a man. The fact that *Fru Fanny* treats a 'feminine' topic such as suffragism probably also contributed to the male reviewers' dismissing of the novel

²⁸⁴ (The book does not really require any brain effort) A.G., 'Litteratur', *Dagny* 4 (1905), 93-95 (p. 93).

through belittling comments. As B.H.B. in *Ord & Bild* commented: ‘Diverse interiörer från damdiskussionerna är pjollriga och tröttsamma för en manlig läsare’ (Various ladies’ discussions are boring and tiresome for a male reader), and added that the novel is characterised by ‘dilettantmässighet’ (amateurishness) and ‘damskrifveri’ (ladies’ literary style) (B.H.B., p. 128). He saw feminist politics as rather unimportant, and definitely nothing that concerned men. He made fun of *Fru Fanny’s* conservative and anti-feminist values:

[Fru Fanny] vill vara en stridshandske, slungad med en djärf och skön armrörelse i kvinnosakskvinnornas myllrande läger. Ett spjut som ska såra och döda. Ett väckarrop: Hallå, mina damer! Det var bättre som det var förr [...]. Kvinnan ska vara kvinna, och hon blir det säkrare i hemmet än på diskussionsmötena. Hon ska vara snäll mot sin man och inte försumma honom och låta honom vänta på soppan.

(B.H.B., *Ord & Bild*, p. 128)

The imagery, taken from a war camp, may refer to the suffragists’ own use of war metaphors in their struggle (Florin, pp. 139-40). (Annie Quiding-Åkerhielm’s engagement in pro-war politics through the press had not begun at that time.) The reviewer here took a position where he was ironic about feminist politics, but still did not agree with Quiding’s anti-suffragism. He placed himself above the whole ‘woman question’ and virtually declined all interest in the novel. Was this an attempt to preserve his own masculinity, or was he simply tired of ‘the woman question’, which he claimed to be ‘gammalt’ (old)?

Notwithstanding the critical responses prompting long and detailed reviews, the novel was treated with slight contempt and a sarcastic sense of humour by nearly all the reviewers. None of them discussed women’s right to the vote, instead most comments concern the theme of the book; whether married women should engage in activities apart from their household. All gave their opinions on whether *Fru Fanny’s* representation of the suffragists and the women’s movement was correct or not, and whilst most did not think it was, a couple defended the movement for strategic reasons. Most had preconceived opinions about what a suffragist was about, and the caricature of Ellen Key and what the Augusta Torsell character represented were instantly recognised and understood by all.

As discussed, the preconceptions about what suffragists ‘should’ be like were strong. A further concept metaphorically perforated by preconceptions was that of

motherliness, which is frequently used in the novel to underline Fanny's 'improper' femininity.

5.6 The Bad Working Mother

The Breakthrough obsession with motherhood, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, reduces Fanny to a 'bad mother', since her absorption in politics makes her a rather detached mother figure. Meanwhile, Arnold is sympathetically portrayed as a devoted and interested parent, not only to his own biological daughter, but also to Kurt from Fanny's former marriage. It is Kurt, Fanny's own son, who is frequently set to judge his mother harshly as not being a 'riktig mamma' (proper mother). On the one hand, the use of Fanny's own child for this criticism of course gives it some weight in exposing the child's sense of being abandoned. On the other hand, Kurt is not a completely dependable witness: he reveals himself as selfish, thinking of his mother as a kind of object, only there for his needs, someone he would like to control. This gives the discourse about motherliness a sort of double exposure: what Kurt explicitly expresses by his need for his mother to be waiting and at hand for him at all times is a dominant discourse at the time about the self-sacrificing mother. However, the selfish *manner* in which he expresses it makes the reader doubt that this is the only reasonable way to see a mother.

As the example of a perfect mother Kurt instead proposes his friends' Gunnar's and Erik's mother, who sits by the window darning socks all day, and who always has time for her boys and their homework (pp. 7-8). The traditional, passive, self-sacrificing, immobile mother (the Angel in the House) ideal is thus explicitly promoted in the novel at the expense of the active, intellectual, self-fulfilling New Woman who buzzes around in public space. Ledger argues that 'the New Woman was frequently constructed in discourse as a bad mother, as a breeder of a degenerate "race"' (p. 69).²⁸⁵ The representation of 'proper', feminine, healing motherliness, where the mother sits calmly at home, knitting or sewing, spreading peace and quiet around her, also exists in the other novels analysed here. This desirable motherliness is often used as an invocation or profiling against representations of 'bad' mothers in the texts.

²⁸⁵ This discourse was used in the follow-up novel of *Fru Fanny*, *Fru Fannys son*, published the year after *Fru Fanny*, about Fanny's son Kurt, who does not do well in life.

Fanny's lack of motherliness is depicted by means of a technique where the narrator never lets us see Fanny spend any time with her children. In fact, there are only two scenes in the novel where Fanny and Kurt interact, and both those scenes are conflicts where Kurt is unhappy, angry and not 'behaving well'. There are only two scenes where Fanny and Etty interact; in one of them Fanny takes the child from a young girl of whom she is jealous, and in the other Fanny is sitting by her dying daughter, deeply regretting that she left the child to go to the suffragist congress in Copenhagen. According to Badinter, Fanny is a typical 'selfish mother':

[The selfish mother] loves her child a little, but not to the point of sacrificing herself for him. She cares for him in accordance with her own desires, not in accordance with his real needs. [...] [H]er unworthiness lay less in her harshness than in her inability to provide her children with the upbringing they needed. This woman [...] would be variously referred to as the "selfish", "thoughtless", or "negligent" woman.

(Badinter, p. 242)

An underlying theme in the novel is that motherliness is a biological function. No other woman, and certainly not the father, can take the biological mother's place. In the part of the novel where Fanny goes to Copenhagen and Etty falls ill, it is repeatedly shown how essential the mother (even such an inadequate mother as Fanny) is to the family, and how nothing works if the mother is away:

a) Etty falls ill due to the carelessness of the nanny, who is not sufficiently checked while Fanny is away.

b) When the nanny breaks down and no nurse is available, the sick child's father retires into his study and cries instead of attending to his daughter. He is in no way criticised for this in the text.

c) It is the little boy Kurt who acts and fetches Gunnar's and Erik's mother.

However:

Gunnars och Eriks mamma gjorde nog hvad hon kunde. Men det stod inte i hennes makt att "älska Etty kvar i lifvet", som hon hade gjort med Erik [when he was seriously ill]. Det kan man bara med sitt eget barn.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 194)

Biological motherhood is here explicitly underlined. Only the biological mother can save her child, because only her emotions for the child are strong enough to snatch it back from the arms of Death. Only Fanny could have saved Etty, but she was not there. She was away from her family and her home, fulfilling her own needs whilst neglecting the needs of her child. Her absence, travel and claim of public space are unauthorised, as it is against the wishes of her husband. The accusation that Fanny caused Etty's death is not contradicted in the text, not even by Fanny herself.

A mother has almost mythical dimensions here: she is the Great Mother who should love her children so dearly and be so physically and emotionally close to them that she can call them back from death. In this part of the novel it is explicitly stated how a good mother should act: she stays in her home and lives for her children, to whom she devotes her time and love. This is something Arnold expects from Fanny, and to which she refuses to succumb.

Fanny needs to be a mother for the narrative to work. In a society where 'proper woman' equals 'mother', this is the textual strategy to pinpoint the weakness of the New Woman, where she is bound to be most severely criticised. In Fanny's refusal to be a self-sacrificing mother, she proves the 'improperness' of the New Woman she represents. The whole plot construction, where Fanny repeatedly breaks the discursive rules of femininity with devastating results for herself and her family, is a critique of the New Woman. The New Woman is represented as masculinised and too rational to love 'properly'; she can no longer reach her inner reserves of 'natural' female love and warmth. Fanny's inability to be conventionally feminine is what brings on the crisis in her life, and when Etty falls ill she suddenly laments:

O, om hon aldrig hade rest! Om hon aldrig hade varit skild från Etty! Det var ju icke möjligt annat än att det skulle stått i hennes makt att rädda den lilla varelse, som var kött af hennes kött och blod af hennes blod – om blott icke de tusende fina små trådar af osynligt samband, som borde ha funnits emellan dem, blifvit avskurna – systematiskt afskurna ända från början.

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 199)

Fanny recognises and accepts the biological ideology of 'the thousand fine threads' (also mentioned by Axel in *Le Plaidoyer*). Fanny was 'naturally' close to her child, but through her unmotherliness she has cut those organic threads of mutual dependence. Now it is too late to save her child.

This realisation, however, does nothing to restrict Fanny within a more conventional femininity after Etty's death; rather, her development is towards being even more hardworking, independent and emancipated. Not even when she is threatened with divorce by Arnold does she comply. She makes a painful calculation of how her life would become if she was to give up her work and only live through Arnold: 'bara han, bara hans intressen – adoptivbarn, som hon med bitterhet i hjärtat skulle söka älska, sedan hon för deras skull dödat sina egna!' (only him, only his interests; like stepchildren whom she would have to try and love with a bitter heart, after she had killed her own children for their sake!) (p. 243). Here, Arnold's and her own work are metaphorically compared with children, giving the impression that Fanny's work is her *real* child, instead of her human ones. Fanny's insistence on her vocation instead of her husband was incomprehensible for many at the time, as the reviews show. The New Woman was seen as a threat to societal values.

5.7 The Fear of the Unfeminine

The New Woman was something entirely new to bourgeois society at the *fin de siècle*. Her participation in the public cultural or political sphere defied traditional femininity in several ways. It was difficult to reconcile the tension between the artist's connotation with masculinity and activity with a femininity that insisted on the opposite: passivity and self-sacrifice. The same applied to the female politician, as Florin describes in *Kvinnor får röst*. A woman standing up in public and debating political issues triggered strong reactions as this was an activity firmly in the masculine domain until this point in time. This gave rise to the cliché of the feminist or New Woman as militant, strong, loud and unfeminine, everything that a 'proper' woman was not supposed to be.

The New Woman filled many supporters of the traditional gender roles with fear: she was accused of ignoring important discursive pillars of (patriarchal) society like marriage, heterosexuality and motherhood because of her independence of men and her unconventional version of femininity. She was seen as a threat to both traditional masculinity and femininity. 'The elusive quality of the New Woman of the *fin de siècle* clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently homogenous culture of Victorianism [...] All that was certain was that she was dangerous, a threat to the status quo', writes Ledger (p. 11).

The attacks on the New Woman could be rather severe. She was seen as a threat to the human race, both because of her intellectual activities (a source of infertility according to medical science at the time) and her resistance to marriage and family. Her intellectual and economic independence of men gave rise to suspicions of sexual ‘abnormality’ (lesbianism) (Ledger, p. 124).²⁸⁶ She was also seen as ‘degenerating’ men and masculinity, used as one of the main arguments against the New Woman in *Fru Fanny*. As traditional masculinity was dependent on conventional femininity, every diversion from such femininity was seen as a threat: conventional masculinity used femininity as the Other, with its position at the other end of the binary gender pole, to position itself and its traditional qualities such as rationality, intellectualism, activity, spatial mobility *et cetera*. The New Woman’s movement into traditionally masculine areas was seen by many as transgression and appropriation of exclusively masculine qualities and parts of life.

In *Fru Fanny*, masculinity is heavily dependent on women keeping their place on the gender binaries. Women overstepping traditional gender boundaries are explicitly held responsible for the ‘degeneration’ of men. For masculinity to remain intact and for women to be able to love and respect men, the following conditions must be fulfilled, according to the novel:

- 1) Women must stay in their place, appointed to them by evolution, and not transgress into any masculine territory.
- 2) Men must have the freedom to follow their vocation in life, and do what they ‘have to do’.
- 3) Men must be the masters of their family and have control of all financial assets, including the wife’s.

The discourses about these matters that dominated around the *fin de siècle* are represented and incorporated in *Fru Fanny* as part of its promotion of a return to conventional gender roles.

²⁸⁶ In the sexologists’ version, female homosexuality was abnormal, something that originated in women because they rejected the conventional feminine role. Lesbian women were believed to reject that role as they were not ‘proper’ women. Their emotions were upside down; instead of being passive they were active, instead of being content with staying at home they looked for success in the public sphere. And instead of loving men they loved other women (C. Lindén, p. 138).

5.7.1 Antifeminist Evolution Theory

The new ideas of Darwinism and evolution theory would be a powerful tool in the hands of those who were convinced that nature intended women to be first and foremost wives and mothers, and that their social and political subversion was the result of those ‘natural’ positions.²⁸⁷ These antifeminists expected women to accept their subjugation as a fact, reducing women to distinct social roles.

Biological theories of sexual difference [...] have a history as long as the social and biological sciences themselves and appeal to biological differences between women and men, both observable and imagined, to explain the naturalness and inevitability of our different social status and functions, particularly at times when women have fought for change.

(Weedon, pp. 123-24)

Antifeminists leaning against evolution theory saw feminists and their questioning of the traditional gender roles as a real threat against future human development, believing that challenges to the established gender order would lead to the unavoidable regression of the human race. In order for society as a whole to develop, women had to accept the *status quo*, as male development demanded female immobility.²⁸⁸ This attitude is one of the main arguments against New Women in *Fru Fanny*. Here evolution theory is used as a cogent argument for the opinion that for every step women take forward, men must take a step back. Women have to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of men and the common good of (patriarchal) society. Instead of pursuing a career or engaging in politics, women ought to save their energy for their vital roles as wives and mothers, otherwise the human race is threatened by extinction. The works of Strindberg are full of axiomatic statements about the need for both genders to stay in their ‘biologically destined’ places. Strindberg was not an unusual male intellectual of his time; many were influenced by misogynist thinkers.

²⁸⁷ Antifeminists ignored the fact that Darwin himself brought the topic of men’s and women’s qualities up for discussion, saying that evolution had long promoted characteristic ‘masculine’ traits like intelligence, courage and leadership and ‘feminine’ ones like intuition, emotion and caring instincts, but that these traits were not definitive but determined by society. Darwin claimed they were already diminishing through the new roles and values in a society where old ‘masculine’ qualities like courage and physical strength were losing their importance (Qvist, *Konsten...*, p. 181).

²⁸⁸ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge [Mass.] and London: Harvard University Press, 1995) p. 155.

Paul Möbius wrote a highly influential and much-reprinted essay bluntly called *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (1898: *On the Physiological Debility of Woman*). Möbius argued that women, as opposed to men, were feeble-minded by nature, and based his ideas on a mishmash of ‘scientific evidence’, such as craniology, opinions by biologists and studies by misogynists Lombroso and Ferrero (Dijkstra, p. 172). Möbius claimed that women’s innate mental debility was a necessary aspect of their biological function as primarily reproductive beings.

Otto Weininger published *Geschlecht und Charakter* (*Sex and Character*) in 1903, which, like Möbius’s book, almost immediately became required reading among the intellectuals of the time.²⁸⁹ ‘Leaning on the weighty experience of his twenty-three years’, as Dijkstra sarcastically puts it (p. 357), Weininger had made an organised grab bag of notions taken from Plato, Schopenhauer, Kant, Darwin, Spencer, the social Darwinists, the virulent misogynists of *Mercure de France* and last, but certainly not least, Freud, ‘who had read and admired a version of Weininger’s manuscript even before its publication’. Antifeminist books like these can be seen as responses to the progress of women’s emancipation and a result of the fear of the ‘feminisation’ of culture and society at the *fin de siècle*. ‘Weininger is certainly an eminent exponent of masculine protest. His anti-feminist diatribes confirm the close connection between the fear of the feminine and a crisis of masculinity’, comments Witt-Brattström (*The New...*, p. 8). When women moved into the cultural, political and professional spheres and the dichotomisation of the genders became less pronounced, traditionally patriarchal masculinity began to crumble.

In her study *Den mörka kontinenten* (1994) Karin Johannisson describes how science as a reaction to the women’s movement alienates the female body and mind as the Other to legitimise the old, conventional relationship between the sexes. Science and medicine dealing with the feminine were struggling to control the New Woman. When women claimed to be as rational as men and consequently argued, for example, that they should be educated the same way, science answered by ‘proving’ that a woman’s brain was smaller and inferior. Dijkstra accuses the sexologists of the time – that is the biologists, sociologists and anthropologists who focused on the sex roles of the human species (and whom, he claims, might best be given the generic title of ‘bio-sexists’) – as being of ‘crucial importance in building a pseudo-scientific foundation for

²⁸⁹ *Sex and Character* was the ‘hidden Bible of male modernism, influencing major intellectuals such as Strindberg, Wittgenstein, Joyce, Kafka, Musil, Lawrence, etc.’ writes Witt-Brattström (*The New...*, p. 2).

the antifeminist attitudes prevailing around 1900' (Dijkstra, p. 163-64). Both *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny* are heavily influenced by evolution theory, used by the male protagonists in an antifeminist way in their attempts to thwart the New Woman.

At the end of *Fru Fanny*, when Fanny is given the ultimatum by Arnold, the dialogue between the two spouses contains the most revealing conflict in the novel. The narrator tactfully leaves the conflict to Arnold and Fanny, refusing to judge or agree with any of the combatants. There is no authorial commentary and no attempt on the narrator's part to mediate or package the argument for the readers' benefit. In the setting of this argument, the New Woman Fanny is removed from her urban Stockholm to a wild, remote beach in Skåne in southern Sweden. Here, in this ancient, rural place, her husband confronts her with his demands of her surrender to essentialist biologist evolutionist ideas:

“Är du min hustru eller är du det inte?”

”Din hustru – Hvad vill det säga?”

”Att där jag är, där skall du vara.”

Hon sprang upp och stod framför honom flämtande efter andan.

”Nej, det där – det där låter då nästan som en röst ur grafven! – Och mitt arbete hemma i Stockholm? Min tidskrift?”

“Kasta det där skräpet öfverbord.”

”Arnold, hur vågar du?”

”Det är på tiden. Det har redan kostat oss Etty. Akta dig, innan det kostar mer.”

”Arnold, förstår du hur du förolämpar mig? Förstår du att du talar om – allt hvad jag lefver för?”

”Lef då för mig och mitt arbete.”

[...] Hon gick upprörd några steg bortåt och tillbaka igen.

”Nå, det var inte litet begärdt, det må jag säga! Gode Gud!”

”Nej, det är inte litet – men det ska inte heller vara litet. Mellan man och kvinna skall det vara allt eller intet. En kvinna skall lefva en mans lif eller hålla sig ur hans väg.” [...]

Fanny kunde nästan inte tala, inte finna ord.

”Och det ska vara jag som genast står färdig att kasta bort mitt lifsarbete vid första vink, och du som utan att fråga har rätt att behålla ditt – bara därför att du är man och jag är kvinna! Kan du säga något annat rimligt skäl?”

”Nej, det behöfs inget annat.[...] [V]år plikt ligger utåt i världen och er inåt i hemmet. [...] Jag tviflar inte på att ni kunna göra vårt arbete. Men hvem ska göra ert?”

”Vårt?” sa Fanny förvirrad.

”Ja, ert, det ni öfverge – och som inte kan vara ogjordt.”

”Hvarför skulle vi inte kunna göra båda delarne?”

Arnold skrattade och Fanny tyckte hans skratt var sårande.

(*Fru Fanny*, pp. 238-40)

Fanny, although allowed to speak her mind, is in an inferior position, struggling to defend herself while Arnold is using ‘rational’ arguments, controlling the conversation. The argument is used to sum up the value universe of the novel. Arnold here explicitly states that it is Fanny’s insistence on working in politics that has killed Etty, and threatens her that they may now lose more than their child, if she does not comply with his wishes. He then states that women’s place is in the home, while men’s is in the public sphere. He claims there is specific work that only women can do, and rhetorically asks Fanny who will do it, if women refuse. Arnold then continues by unfolding evolutionist arguments:

“[M]annen är född till herre, och där han inte är det är han en ömklighet, som ni med eller mot er vilja förakta.”

”Åh, det är inte sant!”

”Är det inte!”

”Ja, det vill säga, ni ha i alla tider gjort er till herrar och vi ha hjälpt till genom vår blinda underkastelse!”

”Hvarken ni eller vi; det ligger i mänsklighetens struktur. Men du som alla revolutionära är blind för utvecklingens organiska sammanhang.”

”Men kvinnorörelsen? – Har den inte kommit med naturnödvändighet, har den inte organiskt sammanhang –”

Fanny var eld och lågor.

”Jo. Det är rasdegeneration.”

”Seså, kommer du med det nu också! Det mest cyniska, det mest förhatliga påstående jag vet!”

Han stod framför henne med korslagda armar.

”Se dig om i världen. Kvinnorna utvecklas kanske, men männen försämras. Hur många kunna verkligen kallas *män*? Karaktärssvaga, ömkliga, gosselika!”

(*Fru Fanny*, pp. 241-42)

The arguments Arnold uses here are fundamentally the same ones as those used today by the masculinist movement²⁹⁰; women should sacrifice themselves and make no progress, as keeping things the way they are is consistent with ‘natural’ order. It follows that if women progress, men will degenerate. Men are the born rulers, it is part of ‘the human organic structure’, Arnold claims. As a revolutionary individual, Fanny is blind to the argument that ‘natural’ structures govern human life. When Fanny tries to put forward that the women’s movement has grown organically out of a need, Arnold brushes it off with the word ‘rasdegeneration’ (race degeneration), stating that women develop at men’s expense. Felski writes that evolutionary theories ‘drew on entropic models to argue that the progress of society required the retarded development of women, who needed to conserve their energy for their vital role as mothers of the race’ (p. 155). Arnold believes there is not enough room for *both* men and women to develop – if women develop, men must deteriorate. He has arrived to the point where he perceives a definite choice between his wife’s continued development and his own masculinity; to choose the latter constitutes a moral societal obligation.

In effect, Arnold perceives his wife’s work as undermining his masculinity. He is right of course – the kind of masculinity Arnold advocates is exactly what Fanny and the feminist movement are posing a challenge to, as their cause can only be achieved by men relinquishing their power over women and society. The whole point of her political work within the suffragist movement is to change women’s lives by giving them a voice in political life. To achieve this, women need to be accepted by men as responsible citizens who will no longer be formally dependent on their husbands in political and societal matters.

5.8 The Breakthrough Wife

In Chapter 3 I discussed how motherhood during the Breakthrough was discursively surrounded by a net of expectations. The period’s obsession with motherhood is one of the pillars in the construction of *Fru Fanny*, the other one, intertwined with the mother role, is the concept of the wife. *Fru Fanny* is intensely occupied with discourses about how a wife ought and ought not to behave, and how both family and society depended

²⁹⁰ A common theme is that to maintain the ‘natural order’, men’s control over the public sphere must be restored, and women should confine themselves to the role of reproducers. See for example Richard Dawkin’s *The Selfish Gene* (1976), Ben Greenstein’s *The Fragile Male* (1993) and Robert Bly’s *Iron Man* (1990).

on ‘correct’ wifely behaviour. Marriage, as Anna Cavallin writes, was central to the nineteenth-century middle-class identity project.²⁹¹

As in the rest of Europe, and as opposed to Fanny’s and Arnold’s situation, Scandinavian bourgeois marriages were asymmetric alliances. A Scandinavian *unmarried* woman was by the end of the nineteenth century a legal adult, in charge of her own financial assets and allowed to decide herself if, and whom, she would marry. If she *did* choose to marry, however, she immediately became her husband’s dependant. He would control her finances and be legally in charge of, and responsible for, their children. There would also normally be an age difference between the spouses of the bourgeois class, as the husband could not marry until he had a large enough income to finance a home and support a wife, children and at least one servant. Ellen Key was against large age differences in marriage, and did not recommend any woman under the age of twenty to marry (Key, *Livslinjer*, p. 117). But the truth is that most women could not choose. In reality, marriage was most middle-class women’s only hope of financially supporting themselves, and caring for their family was accepted by many as a meaningful occupation. Ahlström claims that

Den inbrytande penningåldern [hade] skapat en kyligare atmosfär kring giftermålens ingående. De ekonomiska hänsynen i dessa angelägenheter hade visserligen traditionell hävd men de fick nu en ny och brutalare karaktär av kontant köpslagan som i många fall obarmhärtigt skrämde unga, ovetande kvinnor in i äktenskapstragedier utan skilsmässoutvägar.

(Ahlström, p. 161)

The new ideas about the individual’s rights, where the woman should be allowed to choose her marriage partner out of love, were in conflict with the new economic necessities, where there was severe competition between the young unmarried women for the single middle-class men, and where the families could no longer afford to keep unmarried female relatives in their households. Young women with their virginity intact and no ‘past’ might hope to be favourably married. This is depicted in many literary works of the time, where insensitive parents, for economic reasons, force their young daughters into unhappy marriages.

²⁹¹ Anna Cavallin, ‘Den fångslade kroppen: Äktenskapet som disciplinär institution’, in *Det gäckande könet*, ed. by Cavallin & Westerståhl Stenport, pp. 169-194 (p. 169).

Fanny and Arnold marry out of love and not out of necessity. Their marriage starts out with every chance of succeeding, and still ends with separation. While the usual course in the popular novel goes via different complications in the lovers' relationship and ends with marriage, *Fru Fanny* inverts this course. The novel starts with a happy marriage and travels towards a break-up via increasing complications in the relationship. This is due to Fanny's resistance against taking on the normative wifely and motherly roles.

The maternal role was seen as the most important one for women at the time, but in the middle classes it was imperatively linked to that of the wife's. Hence, the role of the wife was seen as women's second main function. That women should, if possible, get married instead of voluntarily staying unmarried was the general opinion. Unlike men, women could only fulfil their lives by marrying; it was women's duty to marry if they could.²⁹² It was certainly not commonly held that a man had to marry to reach *his* full potential. A man did not need a heterosexual relationship to lead a full life and become fulfilled as a person. When applied to the supposed need for a heterosexual love life, this can be explained by men's ability to access sex without being married, but concerning the so-called need for parenthood, obviously this 'instinct' did not apply to men, who did not need to become parents in order to develop their personality normally.

The psychological demands on the wife were empathy and insight into the husband's needs, and interest in his work. Arnold wants his wife to live only for and through him: '[h]an hade föreställt sig att en intellektuellt bildad kvinna som hon skulle intressera sig för hans idéer [...] Men Fanny hade sina egna intressen' (he had imagined that an intellectual woman like her would take an interest in his work. But Fanny had her own interests) (p. 106). Fanny having interests of her own is what slowly alienates the spouses from each other. Arnold feels cheated of the wife he expected when marrying; Fanny cannot offer the expected support for his work.

The primary goal of the majority of single-sex girls' schools in Scandinavia was to teach girls to become 'good wives' to their husbands. According to C. Lindén, this meant to inculcate in the girls that the dominant position of the husband must never be questioned and that the duty of the wife was to make his life easy and comfortable (p.

²⁹² Sally Ledger describes how British women at the time were seen as a sort of commodity for men: the view of the establishment was that the women 'surplus', instead of having an education and employment opportunities, should be shipped off to the colonies to become wives of British men there (Ledger, p. 66), a proposition supported by Key (*Livslinjer*, p. 179).

51). Kyle comments that books providing advice and guidance to young women served the purpose of impressing onto their readers that women's love should be of the Biblical kind, which does not ask for anything, but endures and forgives everything (p. 44). '[T]he cult of self-sacrifice in women was often understood in Christian terms, as an act done for the sake of others, intended to provide us all with the hope of redemption', writes Moi (*Henrik Ibsen...*, p. 186). Key objected to the self-sacrificial ideal, and saw husband and wife as equal partners, respecting each other: 'Det gamla hustruidealet – att lyda, tåla, tåla och blunda – var djupt fientligt mot det fulla förverkligandet av äktenskapet' (The old wifely ideal – to obey, shut up, accept and look away – was deeply damaging to true marital fulfilment) (*Missbrukad...*, p. 140).

Kyle takes the view, that it was the married woman's weak financial position which was the basis of her subordination in marriage and her reduced value in society (p. 48). This weak financial position played a part in girls' schools and advice books attempting to impress sacrificial duty, privation, self-denial and subjugation onto the wife. This asymmetry was based on the man's maintenance obligation – his income gave him the right to his wife's tenderness and love. It is this conventionally patriarchal discourse that underlies Arnold's expectations of Fanny. But his and Fanny's relationship is different, as they are economically equal (in fact, Fanny is more financially solid than her husband). Fanny does not have to contribute to the marriage in the traditionally feminine way. She has her maintenance through her own means, and can go ahead with her own interests – like a man. It is her insistence on doing this, and the novel's construction of the couple's economy that contributes to the break-up of her marriage. Arnold cannot fulfil his desired masculine role when not being in full control of wife and economy.

Scandinavian women who married during the second half of the nineteenth century won certain rights, such as social standing, the right to sexuality and to give birth. At the same time, a woman lost her economic assets to her husband and became his dependant. In comparison, an unmarried woman enjoyed a more independent status than a married woman during the second half of the nineteenth century. When looking at the total picture of women's civil status at the time, including legal and civil implications, the following comparative pattern can, as Wirmark remarks, be discerned: being unmarried was bad, it was better to be married, but best was to be a widow (p. 171).

A prenuptial agreement was possible, but unusual. Fanny's prenuptial agreement and economic independence is a thorn in the flesh to Arnold, who in spite of Fanny's fortune has vowed to pay half of all their costs. But Fanny's economic independence brings her an emotional and psychological equality with Arnold. As she is not being kept by him, she can act more freely. This relationship, however, is in the novel pinpointed as one of the reasons for the couple's estrangement.

5.8.1 'Hälften af allt'²⁹³

Arnold has no control over either Fanny's financial assets or her physical whereabouts. In fact, Fanny owns the Stockholm house they live in, which further diminishes Arnold's masculinity in his own eyes. In order to feel like a 'proper' man, Arnold needs to own and control all the family's financial assets, and to be its supreme decision-maker.

Nu föreföll det honom som om han sålt sig. Han skulle aldrig få ett hem som verkligen vore hans – moraliskt och rättsligt hans. Aldrig ett hem där hans grundsatser och åskådning voro den regerande makten, en härd där han verkligen satt som herre och husfader. ”Hälften av allt”; det var han själf som hade dikterat det, och det var just hvad han ägde. Han såg tudelningens märke på hvarje föremål han vidrörde. Hela hans ställning var half.

(*Fru Fanny*, pp. 104-5)

Sharing financial assets and power in the household with his wife makes Arnold feel like only half a man. To fulfill his ambition of masculinity he needs to be 'herre och husfader', an expression for the traditional, all-powerful patriarch. Arnold firmly believes that only the type of man who dominates and controls his household is respected by others. Fanny's brother-in-law Bengt, who nearly commits suicide in his desperation to be economically independent of his wife's family, is used as an illustration of what happens if this process of de-masculinisation goes far enough. Arnold displays the same syndrome as Axel in *Le Plaidoyer*, not feeling manly enough when his wife does not display conventional femininity. The novel is littered with derogatory statements about men who are not in total control of their families' finances: 'kreatur' (live stock) (p. 39), 'vingklippt' (wing-clipped) (p. 45), 'onyttig dekoration' (useless decoration) (p. 55).

²⁹³ (Half of everything.) *Fru Fanny*

Bibi Jonsson argues that it is not Fanny's suffragism that finally alienates her from Arnold, in spite of Arnold's hostility towards her work. Instead, claims Jonsson, it is the economical inequality in their marriage which makes it fail (Jonsson, pp. 238-39). It is, Jonsson argues, a *kamratäktenskap* (a marriage between equals) which is being promoted. Although the novel is ambiguous, and there clearly is a struggle between the protagonist and the suffragists on one side and the narrator and Arnold on the other, I still cannot agree with Jonsson. An equal relationship between the two spouses would not have been more likely if the spouses had been more economically equal, as this is not what the Arnold character or the central values of the novel aim to promote. The 'official' aim of the novel is nothing less than a return to traditional patriarchy, with men in total control of women and children, although, it must be admitted, this aim is undermined by, for example, the Fanny character.

5.9 'Att lefva sitt eget lif'²⁹⁴

Arnold talks about individual freedom and the importance of a meaningful profession – but only for men. 'Hvar människa kan göra något som ingen annan kan. Man har inte rätt att undandraga världen sitt lifsarbete' (Every human being can do something no one else can do. One has an obligation to contribute with one's vocation) (p. 155). But what he demands of Fanny is exactly that she does not pursue *her* vocation. Work and self-fulfilment are essential to Arnold, but he only considers these aspects of life important for men: '[D]et som verkligen är lifvet för en man, det är hans arbete. [...] Vill du att jag för din skulle gå i grafven utan att ha hunnit med mitt?' (What is important in life for a man, is his work. Do you want me to be buried without having done mine?) (pp. 233-34). Again, 'being buried without having done one's work' is exactly what he demands of his wife. Of women he demands total self-sacrifice and dependency on men; otherwise the male half of the human race will degenerate. He considers it natural that women sacrifice themselves for men so that men can hang on to a traditional masculinity.

Fanny, however, has exactly the same attitude to her work as Arnold – she cannot do without it. She feels indispensable for the political collective rather than her family. Florin comments that suffragism and political agitation was the big adventure for some, and the meaning of life for others (*Kvinnor...*, p. 140). She explains that 'suffragist life

²⁹⁴ (To live one's own life.) *Fru Fanny*

had a special dimension, difficult for an outsider to understand; an identity where one represented something more than oneself, a spirituality which was political instead of religious' (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 281). This political spirituality, so central in the suffragist work, is something that the narrator and the reviewers deny as female 'egoism', but which Fanny explains:

Men det var detta att vara någon, att betyda något inom en framstående krets, att ha en spännande och omväxlande verksamhet, där hon var den ordnande och bestämmande kraften. Det var den mångåriga vanan att lefva sitt eget lif, som gjorde till en omöjlighet själfva tanken på att lefva en annans. Och var det inte detta som i främsta rummet ålåg en människa med modern ansvarskänsla: att lefva sitt eget lif, lefva sin personlighet fullt ut?

(*Fru Fanny*, p. 248)

The passage shows that Fanny is asking the same things from her professional life as Arnold, and that it means just as much to her. Still, the values of the novel, along with the reviewers, reject her ambitions as selfish as she is a woman. It can be argued that Fanny's desire of self-fulfillment is in keeping with the bourgeois ideology of individualism. But, as Ardis points out, the New Woman's claim to the right of self-fulfillment can be seen as a challenge to the tradition of liberal humanism: women articulating specific needs and desires

challenge not only the bourgeois Victorian social order's prescription of "correct" female behavior but also the pattern of thinking in hierarchically organized binary oppositions that pits men against women, "good" women against "fallen" ones, the middle class against the working class, and European against non-European cultures.

(Ardis, p. 27)

In my reading Ardis is saying that in reality, and in spite of the interest in the position of women, the bourgeois 'individual freedom project' only concerned men. Men felt that for them to be able to compete with other men, women needed to keep in their places and loyally support men's position, instead of suddenly appointing themselves as 'human' and starting to demand human rights for themselves. Moreover, men saw the New Women entering the labour market as serious competition. Given that Fanny's work constitutes such an important part of the novel, I will next provide a short introduction to women in the labour market at the time.

5.9.1 Needing to Make a Living

Middle-class women had started to move into the labour market in larger numbers in the 1870's, and the New Woman of the 1890's was a self-supporting professional. The middle-class woman simply needed to be able to support herself if she could not marry. Through a changing economy and changing demographics, both finding a husband and being supported as single by male relatives was becoming more difficult. The decline in marriage frequency contributed to pushing the middle-class woman into the labour market. The 'surplus' of women in the cities depended on in-migration of women from the countryside, an excessive mortality among men and the fact that more men than women emigrated (Matović, p.72, Blom & Sogner, p. 148).²⁹⁵ More women than men left the countryside; an effect of this was a lack of working women in the countryside at the *fin de siècle*, while the working population of the cities had a large majority of



'The Artist's Wife' (1888). Oda Krohg poses self-confidently for her husband, Christian Krohg. Her posture and way of gazing straight back at the observer was quite new when portraying women in art.



Working women. 'The Milliner's Shop' (1883-85) by James Tissot.

²⁹⁵ 'Without a husband women had no one to keep them or to enable them to reproduce legitimate children; unmarried women were thus surplus to social/reproductive requirements' (Anglique Richardson & Chris Willis, 'Introduction' in *The New Woman in Fact and in Fiction*, ed. by Richardson & Willis, pp. 1-38 (p. 4).

women (Qvist, *Konsten...*, p. 102). These facts did not concern the middle classes in the same way as the working and artisan classes. For the middle classes it was instead mainly a changing economy with lower wages that made it difficult for men to support a family until they had reached a certain age – many could never afford to marry at all.

Despite initial resistance, it was slowly accepted that women needed an education. Single women had to be able to support themselves if there was no prospect of marriage, whilst it was considered useful for married women in order to raise and educate their children as well as intellectually supporting their husbands (Boëthius, pp. 14-16). During the Breakthrough there were discourses both for and against higher education for women. People who were against education often used arguments based on science of the time: women were not intelligent enough, the fertility of women who used their intellect would be diminished and damaged, it was against women's nature *et cetera*. There were also those who, for practical reasons, thought that, as women were destined to become wives and mothers, an education would be wasted on them. As middle-class women were expected to leave their work as soon as they got married, it was also considered a waste to provide a woman with too much education. Many advice books from the period express the view that a woman's real vocation was marriage, but if she was unfortunate enough to have to support herself, regrettably she would need some sort of education.²⁹⁶

The idea that women should leave their work as soon as they got married had implications for those that wanted to continue pursuing a career, such as Fanny. There are many novels from the period, not only *Fru Fanny* and *Le Plaidoyer*, which discuss the conflicting choice some women had to make between love/marriage and work. Especially women who felt their work was their vocation in life, such as writers, artists, politicians and entrepreneurs felt the conflict strongly. This is exemplified in the closures of novels treating the topic; they are often ambiguous, as described by Eva Heggstad in *Fången och fri*.

The gender contract did not allow middle-class women to do just any work - their occupation had to be a *socially acceptable* one. It was barely becoming tolerable that some middle-class women were obliged to work in order to support themselves. The general opinion at the time was that women should work with tasks where their motherly and nourishing qualities would be of use, and that they should thankfully

²⁹⁶ See for example Mathilda Langlet's *På egen hand: En bok för unga flickor* (1889), and Gunhild Kyle's article on discourses in advice books, 'Genrebilder av kvinnor: En studie i sekelskiftets borgerliga familjehierarkier' *Historisk tidskrift*, 1 (1987), 35-58.

accept the low wages they were offered (about two thirds of the men's) without complaining (Qvist, *Konsten...*, p. 134).²⁹⁷ Middle-class women had to find professions in which they would not have to give up their 'femininity'. Socially accepted jobs were, for example, nurse, midwife, clerk and teacher.²⁹⁸ Middle-class women also worked in trade and in the telephone/telegraph companies.²⁹⁹ Teaching was the most common profession for women, especially teaching infants.³⁰⁰ This was a new sector where middle-class women could make a socially acceptable living. The elementary school project would not have been possible without a large number of female teachers working for very low wages. The female teachers, who came from the middle classes, were more competent than the male teachers, who came from the rural classes. There is no doubt that working in politics, like Fanny, hardly qualified as 'acceptably feminine' at the time. The transgression into a hitherto exclusively masculine arena as well as the frequent public exposure prevented that.

Women working outside the home had to enter and occupy public space, which was controversial at the time. Fanny's unauthorised appropriation of public space is one of the main reasons why she is alienated from her family, and the reason for her

²⁹⁷ The female labour force of both the working and the middle classes was paid less than the male for the same work and production, and would remain so until far into the twentieth century. Not until 1919 did Swedish LO promote the same wages for the same work, and not until in 1939 did Swedish women civil servants get it. Private industry would find ways to avoid it for several decades yet. See for example Yvonne Hirdman, *Med kluven tunga: LO och genusordningen* and Gunnar Qvist, 'LO och kvinnorna på arbetsmarknaden' in *Konsten att blifva en god flicka*, pp. 135-162 about Swedish women's struggle for equality in the labour market. For Danish women's ditto, see Berg, Frost & Jensen, pp. 291-361. Wages were not based on the value of what was produced, but on the cost of reproduction. These were considered lower for women than for men. Women were viewed as a labour reserve. The married woman was seen to have her reproduction secured through her husband, and she only needed to earn the 'extras' for the family's needs. The unmarried woman was seen as having no family to support, so she only needed to earn enough for herself (Widerberg, p. 58). In actual fact, it was not unusual for single women to have families to support, they were also frequently burdened with student loans as their education, as contrary to the men's, was not free (Berg, Frost & Jensen, p. 332). Even if the women were married, the men within the working and lower middle classes rarely earned enough to keep the family – two wages were needed. It would take long into the twentieth century for Scandinavian women to finally, after much struggle, achieve equal wages in theory.

²⁹⁸ The ideology about suitable professions for middle class women must have contrasted sharply with the living and working conditions of most women: namely those of the working classes. 'Proletariatets kvinnor hänvisades knappast till olika industrier eller näringsgrenar beroende på sina "vårdande och bildande" egenskaper', comments Widerberg (p. 43). It was as if these women did not exist in the debates, literature and lawmaking of the time.

²⁹⁹ The sector of civil servants and clerks grew, and middle class women were popular as they had the right educational background and commanded lower wages. As an example, in Sweden there were about 44 000 civil servants and clerks in the 1870s (mostly men), in 1920 there were 287 000 (Florin, 'Kvinnliga tjänstemän i manliga institutioner' in *Kvinnohistoria*, ed. by Hirdman, pp. 136-152 (p. 136f).

³⁰⁰ However, Danish women were not allowed to teach maths and physics before 1894, as women were not seen as capable of abstract thinking, and that this might ruin their 'feminine nature' (Berg, Frost & Jensen, p. 329).

daughter's death. Before unfolding this further, I would like to give a background to the thinking around women and public space at the time.

5.10 Women in Public Space

The new literary settings were urban, Witt-Brattström points out, 'which made it possible to describe how the public space opens itself up to (is taken over by, many men felt) professional women, be they clerks, teachers, journalists, authors, scientists, students or plainly *flâneuses*' (Witt-Brattström, *The New...*, p. 4). Until this point, the public sphere had belonged almost exclusively to men. Changes started coming around the end of the nineteenth century, when women's professional work and shopping trips gave them entrance to physical public space, while their writing and political activities made them publish themselves in imaginary public space.

Women did not only threaten men's traditional domination of public space; by entering it, they threatened masculinity itself. By occupying space both in the streets and public debate in the arts and the press, women displaced the very meanings of public space (Ledger, p. 150). During the early 1800s private space (the home) was synonymous with the feminine and public space with the masculine. Men have long used dichotomies like these to position themselves in relation to women and construct masculinity. The New Woman stepping out into public life de-masculinised the public sphere, and thus changed one of the contemporary bases for masculinity and femininity. The split into a public and private sphere did not only work as a barrier for the middle-class woman, a boundary beyond which she was not supposed to move, it also *defined* the genders: to *be* a woman, to have an acceptable femininity, one should not cross the border into the public sphere. This would rob her of her femininity, make her masculine, for which keeping out of the public sphere was a prerequisite. Pollock comments: '[...] the separation of the spheres for women and men on to the division of public and private [...] aided the production of the gendered social identities' (p. 96).

The urban environment was gender-compartmentalised, dictating that middle-class women should stay in their homes while men could move about the city freely. Florin describes the effect publicly-speaking women suffragists had on the Swedish public in the beginning of the twentieth century. The reactions against them were sometimes strong, and the suffragists always had to think about dressing in a feminine way to avoid being called masculine. As public space had belonged to men up to that point,

many people would perceive a publicly speaking woman with unnatural masculinity (Florin, *Kvinnor...*, p. 152). In both *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny*, one of the major ‘sins’ of the female protagonists is moving about freely in public space, while both novels underline that a woman’s place is in the home.

Train companies and department stores quickly realised the consumer potential in women and installed special conveniences for them, such as ladies’ toilets and lounges, which made it easier for women to move about in public space and to travel. For example, ladies’ compartments in trains promoted women’s emancipation, Florin points out, making it possible for middle-class women to travel alone without being assaulted or stared at (*Kvinnor...*, p. 157). The Scandinavian suffragists travelled extensively around the country, alone, to make speeches.

5.10.1 The *Flâneuse*

Women in public space did not have the right to look – the gaze there still belonged to men, which derived from the traditionally male right to public space. Griselda Pollock writes that the *flâneur* ‘symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arenas of the city [...], consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze’ (p. 94). The *flâneur* was male, and Janet Wolff claims there is no female equivalent; there were not and could not be female *flâneuses*.³⁰¹ It was men who had the right to look and stare: in women such behaviour would have been seen as indecent, a sexual invitation. But by the *fin de siècle*, as male monopoly on public space started to change, all the ‘women [...] pouring into the public spaces of the modern city in ever-increasing numbers’, were bound to look and stare (Ledger, p. 155). But as they were easily exposed to sexual harassment it is hardly likely that they would have lingered about long enough to become *flâneuses*, Ledger admits (p. 158).

However, in her study on *flâneuses*, *Litterære viganter* (2003), Norwegian Tone Selboe criticises the general picture constructed by literary historians that the *flâneur* is exclusively male, and claims that the Norwegian novels she analyses show that the *flâneur* has not been as one-sidedly male as the history of modernity wants us to believe.

That the classic nineteenth century *flâneur* generally was a man, as Wolff claims, is not a controversial statement according to Selboe (p. 211). But this does not mean that

³⁰¹ Janet Wolff, ‘The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity’, *Theory Culture and Society*, 2 (1985) 37-48.

the *flâneuse* did not exist, and she analyses both Norwegian and Anglo-American female writers to prove her point. Norwegian writer Camilla Collett witnessed in 1879 that, although in Kristiania's streets women were no longer frequently accosted, 'den ubehagelige følelsen av å være lovlig vilt ganske enkelt fordi hun beveger seg på gata alene, består' (the unpleasant feeling of being fair game remains, simply because of walking in the street) (Selboe, p. 51). Collett's critique of Kristiania connects the right to walk with the right to exist: to be called civilised a people must allow their women to walk about freely without assaulting them (Selboe, p. 52).

Pollock comments on the connection between the gaze and male sexuality: the gaze was the symbol of masculine sexuality, it belonged to a masculine person who had the right to look and objectify, to 'look, appraise and possess' (Pollock, p. 112). When a woman looked, revealing a sexuality where she openly desired and wished to possess, it was scandalous. Women 'did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch [...] They are positioned as the *object*' (Pollock, p. 100). Not only was it unfeminine to look, it was a threat to the middle-class women's respectability to be looked *at* in certain ways. This is closely connected to the few public spaces she was allowed to occupy, and with whom. Showing up in the wrong place at the wrong time without the escort of a (male) family member could soil her reputation.

5.10.2 Fanny in Public Space

As a result of her political activities, Fanny rushes around Stockholm, day and evening, hardly even having time to show up for dinner (not to mention forgetting to consult the housekeeper about the menu, which provokes severe criticism from her son). Arnold does not approve, and it in the end it will be the appropriation of public space that does not rightfully belong to Fanny to which Etty's death is attributed. Nor is Fanny allowed to use her time for her own interests: 'Isynnerhet sedan Etty kom hade det blifvit svårt; han [Arnold] så gott som fordrade att hon skulle lefva endast för Etty. Han var svartsjuk på allt som drog hennes tankar från barnet' (Especially since Etty arrived, Arnold practically demanded that she live only for Etty. He was jealous of everything that distracted her thoughts from the child) (p. 170). Because of Fanny's spatial and temporal transgression, when she is not where she should be (in the home) and does not spend her time on her family only, her child will die and her husband will set his ultimatum.

Fanny also travels without her husband – abroad, to a suffragist congress in Copenhagen. At the turn of the twentieth century, for a middle-class woman to travel abroad alone was very unusual. However, Fanny’s travel to Copenhagen without giving ‘due’ regard to her little daughter’s cold and her husband’s explicit resistance makes her even more different from the conventional woman. This shows that Fanny does not exclusively exist for her family, and that she does not put them in first place. Fanny travels without her husband to Copenhagen, which means she uses a space that does not properly belong to women at this time. Furthermore, she takes possession of a time which does not properly belong to her; a time in which her husband has ordered her to stay at home and tend to her sick child. The novel uses simultaneity of time and space – her trip, her dying child – to throw her life into crisis.

‘Taking the train to Copenhagen’ also had a hidden meaning at the time. This was what an upper or middle-class woman could do if she wished to divorce her husband. The trip to Copenhagen was a formal step to get a divorce quickly and easily. Westerståhl Stenport explains that ‘running away’ to Copenhagen was standard practice for Swedish middle- and upper-class women for attaining divorce. ‘This procedure was expensive but expedient, precluding the mandatory one-year of separate habitation between the spouses that was the only way to gain a divorce’ in Sweden (Stenport, *Making...*, pp. 168-69). In *Le Plaidoyer* this is Maria’s strategy to get a divorce from her first husband. This means that the expression ‘taking the train to Copenhagen’ had negative, almost indecent, connotations. Although Fanny was not leaving her family for good, ‘women leaving their families clearly pose a threat to societal norms’ (Stenport, *Making...*, p. 169).

Following Arnold’s reaction to Fanny’s spatial mobility, and to Fanny using her time for other priorities than being a wife and mother, the novel promotes a femininity with Gunnar’s and Erik’s mother as the good example: a femininity where the woman sits at home by the window darning socks, watching the world go by outside, waiting to be of assistance to her husband and children.

5.11 Summary

Annie Quiding’s bestseller novel *Fru Fanny* was intended to oppose the figure of the New Woman, with her economic independence, political interest and sexual emancipation. The novel promotes a return to a more conventional femininity, where

women stay in their homes and spend all their energy on tending to their families. The ideal is immobility, self-sacrifice and no direct political or economical influence for women.

The New Woman in the novel is represented as a severe threat to the nuclear family, and in the long run, to society as a whole. It is mainly her failures as a nurturing mother and encouraging wife that are pinpointed. The Breakthrough obsession with motherhood, its polarisation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers, and its discourses firmly connecting motherhood and biology, discouraged married women from working professionally or having any interests apart from their families and households. The same goes for the wifely function. A wife should take an interest in her husband’s work and use her energy to support him instead of pursuing her own interests. A societal background to these discourses was competition in the labour market. Another aspect of the New Woman was her entrance into public space, both physical and imaginary, which, until the Breakthrough, had belonged almost exclusively to the masculine sphere. Public spaces were flooded with women towards the turn of the century, which resulted in a backlash towards female emancipation among sections of society.

In *Fru Fanny* evolutionist and biological theories of the time are used to try to check the New Woman. The protagonist Fanny, a New Woman engaged in suffragist politics who moves about freely in public space, is severely punished for transgressing the boundaries of traditional femininity through losing her child. Her husband Arnold threatens her with divorce if she does not succumb to his wish of following him to India for several years, in an effort to make her dedicate her energy to his work instead. It is Arnold, representing the values of the novel, who uses evolutionist theory in the discourse he represents. This represents the view that the genders are fixed on a binary pole; if women progress, men must ‘degenerate’. It is therefore the responsibility of women to stay in their conventional positions and not transgress into the traditionally masculine areas of professional work, politics or public space.

Fanny resists Arnold’s ultimatum, choosing a life with suffragist politics, but without the man she loves. She stubbornly refuses to comply with both her husband’s explicit and the narrator’s more implicit demands, giving the novel a streak of ambiguity and revealing its inner tensions. That a popular novel would allow its protagonist a closure where she escapes confinement into conventional femininity is unusual.

An interesting aspect of the novel is the reviews it received. Throughout the reviews, some of the discourses and stereotypical ideas about suffragists are made explicit. The reviews are generally critical towards the popular literary style of the novel and its representation of Fanny, which they found unconvincing, as Fanny is depicted as attractive and happily married. The critics also expressed the view that a sexually satisfied woman who is a parent had no reason to become engaged in suffragist activities. Most of them agreed that a woman's political interest arose out of lack, and was the domain of unattractive and mannish old maids. Furthermore, they argued that a beautiful and elegantly dressed woman such as Fanny did not fit in with the suffragist stereotype (in which, as for example Florin's historical research shows, they were wrong).

Fanny's refusal towards the end of the novel to be contained by conventional femininity gives *Fru Fanny* an unusual ambiguity and makes it unsettling for the reader. This was a departure from the approach embraced by most popular New Woman novels at the time.

As in *Le Plaidoyer*, the plot in *Fru Fanny* explicitly advocates a return to the conventional womanly role. However, like *Le Plaidoyer*, it unwittingly opens up space for just the feminine role it is trying to suppress. In *Fru Fanny* that is the role of an independent, determined New Woman, standing her ground in spite of the personal costs.

6. Conclusion

The Pillars of Breakthrough Femininity

This thesis started off as a study of villainess characters in Modern Breakthrough novels. It soon became evident, however, that ‘villainess’ is a far too one-dimensional description for these multi-dimensional and thought-provoking female characters. Which traits do they have in common? The answer is transgression. They transgressed gender boundaries of their time, upsetting critics, censorial authorities and their own narrators. The thesis shows how literature of the time represented and introduced new forms of femininity, often in the form of ambiguous female characters, and often to the disapproval of the critics.

In *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny* the textual space is used to contest the New Woman and women’s legal, civil and political advances in society. In both of these ‘conservative’ novels a return to more conventional gender roles is advocated. They are also based on values that strongly believe in gender dichotomy: that a ‘balanced’ relationship between men and women is dependent on each gender sticking to its binary pole. If one gender should start moving towards the other, this would cause disorder, disruption and destruction in the gender relationships, it was thought. Masculinity is thus represented as dependent on conventional femininity, on women not making demands for political influence or leaving their homes. If conventional femininity is not provided, but instead contested by the New Woman, conventional masculinity starts to change, and the result is presented as ‘degenerated’ masculinity. The conventional gender order, where women had no political influence, few legal and civil rights and no access to public space, is thus defended, and the New Woman presented as a threat

towards masculinity, the family institution and society as a whole in *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny*. Both novels promote the arguments that women should stick to their immobile, passive and conventionally feminine positions. To a modern reader it seems to be mostly for the sake of the men in the novels, whose masculinity crumbles when not having the desired conventional femininity to profile itself against. Both novels close with divorce as a warning when the female characters refuse to comply to men's demands. It is explicitly expressed in *Fru Fanny* and implicitly in *Le Plaidoyer*, that if women progress, men regress. Women should refrain from being active in politics or trying to support themselves economically, as this endangers the male sex.

While the two novels mentioned are characterised by a longing for the 'good old times', when women were women and men were men, *Haabløse Slægter* and *Rikka Gan* are novels with radical representations of gender. *Haabløse Slægter* undermines the concept of gender dichotomy by allowing its more or less queer characters to slide along the gender scale as they please. Male and female characters take on each other's traits and act in ways that are unconventionally masculine and feminine. The text thus deconstructs the conventional definitions of accepted gender behaviour and refuses to connect sexual desire and activity with the biological body, undermining heterosexual normativity.

Rikka Gan also protests against existing gender roles. Its representation of women as men's economically dependent, sexual slaves, caught in a humiliating gender trap where only married women are allowed to reproduce living children, is a devastating critique of one of Breakthrough society's weakest points. Using the literary style of decadence, *Rikka Gan* turns it against itself in criticising male decadence's derogatory representation of the feminine. *Rikka Gan* instead upgrades the feminine to an essentialist female deity, wing-clipped by masculine subversion of and sexual violence against women.

Which, then, seem to be the key tenets of normative Breakthrough femininity? The novels in this study indicate they are non-sexuality, the non-appropriation of public space and motherliness. All four novels make use of these three pillars in promoting, constructing or deconstructing conventional femininity.

6.1 Not Just Procreation: Feminine Erotic Desire

The novels analysed here achieve different goals with their representations of the main female characters. In *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny* the female protagonists are represented as wicked and irresponsible and as bad examples, in *Haabløse Slægter* and *Rikka Gan* as more expansive and radical. Although *Haabløse Slægter*'s representations of transgressive females are negative, it too contributes to increasing the scope of what a woman could be. Whether positively or negatively represented, these female protagonists transgress conventional Breakthrough femininity.

One way of transgressing normative femininity was displaying erotic desire. As discussed, normative feminine sexuality was viewed as non-existent, possibly existing for reproductive purposes only. All of the novels' female protagonists overstep this boundary in showing varying forms of erotic desire.

The Eva and Kamilla characters in *Haabløse Slægter* are sexually emancipated women who sleep with young boys, and who have no interest in reproducing. Especially Eva is represented as a predator with vampire-like qualities, displaying an erotic desire that is not firmly connected to the male body, showing both lesbian and paedophile traits. Not only Eva, but all four main characters in *Haabløse Slægter* resist heteronormativity, repudiating the idea/notion of staying in their assigned positions on the binary gender pole. This makes them very radical characters for their time, expanding the gender/sexuality concept. It also made them highly suspect, objectionable and scandalous to the critics and censorship authorities.

Unusually for a woman during the Breakthrough, Rikka in *Rikka Gan* is allowed a strong erotic desire. She seduces Aga, and her gaze at and appraisal of the male body were quite new in literature at the time. Rikka is not represented as having any interest in reproduction, as her relationship with Aga is illegitimate, but she reproduces anyway. *Rikka Gan* balances on a fine thread in preserving its readers' sympathy for a female character who has both a strong sexual desire and an illegitimate love life, and murders her own children. In succeeding in this, it expands the notion of the concept 'woman' and what a woman could be.

In *Le Plaidoyer*, the narrator Axel is horrified by Maria, who expresses erotic desire for both men and women. He even complains when it is directed at him in the marital bed, finding it 'indecent' to exist at all, looking for the chaste madonna as an ideal. The novel explicitly treats lesbian sexual desire, which is represented as 'unnatural',

connected to the New Woman and a threat to masculinity and the family institution. Over all, *Le Plaidoyer* discusses sexuality at length, and makes it clear that there are two kinds of women and two kinds of sexuality: the physical, ‘dirty’ sexuality of the working class woman and the ‘chaste’ sexuality of the middle class woman. Masculine sexuality is represented as simply mirroring which type of feminine sexuality is available. The novel is practically a manual in desired feminine behaviour; any deviation from the heteronormative middle-class model is harshly judged as ‘un-normal’. Still, the novel represents both hetero- and homosexual erotic desire in explicit, Naturalist terms. While condemning anything but the conventional, chaste ‘Angel of the House’ feminine sexuality as unnatural, it still opens up a textual space for a more liberated sexuality in women.

In *Fru Fanny* we find yet another emancipated New Woman protagonist. It is evident that Fanny is very much in love with and passionate about her young husband. The reader is told that it is Fanny (who is a widow with a child, and thus sexually experienced) who courts and wins Arnold. Fanny shows feminine erotic desire while being uninterested in procreation. When she gets pregnant she is surprised and irritated rather than happy. The examples from *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny* show that the sexually emancipated New Woman did not only display a feminine erotic desire that was unconnected to procreation, contrary to dominant discourses. *Le Plaidoyer* and *Haabløse Slægter* show that the New Woman’s sexual desire could also be unconnected to the masculine body; that it could have lesbian traits.

All four novels represent non-normative feminine sexuality, and whether unwittingly or not, they helped to colour in the white spaces on the map of feminine erotic desire.

6.2 Feminine Transgression into Public Space

Another important pillar of conventional femininity was women’s willingness to stay in the home. The transgression of women into public space, whether physical or imaginary; to work professionally, work in politics or publish is very disturbing for the husbands in *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny*, and something that strongly contributes to their marital break-ups. The unwillingness of the female protagonists in *Haabløse Slægter* and *Rikka Gan* to confine themselves to the home is not put forward so

blatantly as a lack as in *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny*, but is subtly used to underline their unusual femininity and unruly sexual desires.

Eva in *Haabløse Slægter* is a woman outside male control. She is a widow, answers to no man and does what she pleases, which renders her suspect. Her habit of travelling and moving around the city is profiled against the ‘decent’ women in the novel, who never leave their home unless necessary. Meanwhile, Eva openly drives around in her carriage and goes to the theatre with her young lovers. Eva’s appropriation of public space is part of the novel’s strategy in making her an ambiguous, unconventionally feminine character.

Rikka in *Rikka Gan* does not appropriate public space, as the novel is set in the rural countryside. This does not mean that she stays in her home. She is often represented out in the open, even wandering about at night. In this way her unconventional femininity and ‘homelessness’ is underlined. Nobody owns Rikka; no one can order her to stay inside. Although forced to submit to prostitution, her wild heart and restlessness force her to take action and to try and control her own life and fate.

In *Le Plaidoyer*, Maria’s wish to work professionally as an actress is a constant thorn in the side to Axel. He makes her pregnant to keep her confined in the home for at least a few months at a time. The actress’s profession can be seen as doubly public, with her not only using physical space, but also exposing herself in imaginary space, making herself accessible to the criticism and judgement of anyone who watches. Axel feels that Maria can be compared to a prostitute, selling herself to anyone who cares to pay for a theatre ticket. Axel’s feelings were by no means unusual at the time: a woman appearing in any public space could easily be mistaken for a prostitute. In *Le Plaidoyer*, Axel the narrator uses Maria’s transgression into public space to try to prove her villainy. Maria’s travels with theatre companies and her going out with friends in the evenings are used to underline her lack of conventional femininity.

In *Fru Fanny*, the feminine transgression into public space is made the reason for the death of Fanny’s child and the estrangement from her husband. Here, the New Woman’s transition into urban space is equated with the loss of her family, for which she no longer has the time required of conventional femininity. Fanny does not only appropriate physical public space in that she rushes around Stockholm day and evening working in suffragist politics, but the appropriation of imaginary space through her publishing and her entrance into the traditionally male sphere of politics enhance her

resistance to being confined in her home. While pregnant and forced to succumb, she is irritated, bored and longs to be back in politics, outside the home. This is the novel where the opposition against women's venturing outside their homes is most explicit: the novel contests the notion that married women have a right to do anything but tend to their families. Fanny's journey to Copenhagen, not sanctioned by her husband, will be her downfall; her child dies as a punishment while she is away, and after a time she and her husband will split up. In *Fru Fanny* the spatial transgression of women is used as an explicit warning.

6.3 The Compulsory Motherliness

The most important indicator of femininity in the four novels seems to be motherhood. It was (and seems to remain), the litmus test of how 'properly' a woman was gendered. The female character who did not put her children first in a self-negating way, or who did not like children in a motherly way, is instantly condemned in the two conservative novels, *Le Plaidoyer* and *Fru Fanny*. In the two more radical novels, *Haabløse Slægter* and *Rikka Gan*, more ambiguous forms of motherhood can be discerned, not always used to condemn the female protagonists and their lack of conventional femininity, but rather to explore other forms of femininity and societal problems.

Starting with *Fru Fanny* and *Le Plaidoyer*, the main female characters' evident lack of interest in their children, and their tendencies to put their own interests before those of their families, carry the plot in these novels. Both novels use evolutionist, essentialist theories to press their point; women's unwillingness to reproduce and to stay in their homes to tend to their off-spring full-time is a threat to the family institution, society and in the long run, the whole human race.

In *Le Plaidoyer* the representation of the mother and the self-sacrificing madonna melt together into a single concept. Here, middle-class feminine sexuality is so closely connected to chaste motherhood that Axel feels incestuous about having intercourse with Maria. The novel expresses a deep, religious awe of motherhood. Maria does not want any children at all, since she would like to devote all her time to her acting career. Her disinterest appals Axel, who first tricks her into pregnancies, and then seeks a more conventional motherliness in Maria than she is prepared to give.

Fanny shows enough lack of interest in her children to make her a traditional villainess. What may make the reader sympathetic towards her, after all, is her passion

for her work and the fact that Arnold throws his weight about too much in commanding her to leave everything for his sake or lose him. Fanny constantly puts her work before her family. This active, dashing character is strongly profiled against a 'good' mother in the novel, who sits quietly darning socks, waiting to be of use to her children.

Eva in *Haabløse Slægter* uses motherliness as a mask to attract and seduce young boys. They come to her looking for comfort, and she devours them, like a spider catching its prey. *Haabløse Slægter* thus turns the notion of motherliness upside down, perverts it and deconstructs it. Eva performs an evil motherliness, sexual and with vampire qualities; she can be seen as the phallic mother devouring men and masculinity. Even the 'good' mother in the novel, William's own mother, is ambiguous: there is an incestuous streak in her and William's relationship. *Haabløse Slægter* can therefore be said to explore several non-normative variations of motherhood.

In *Rikka Gan*, the concept of motherhood is used to deliver a devastating societal critique. While *Fru Fanny* accuses women of destroying men through their emancipation aspirations, *Rikka Gan* accuses men of ruining women (and children) through an 'unnatural' society where men plunder and misuse feminine sexuality and fertility. Patriarchal laws, where only married women are legally allowed a sexuality and to reproduce living children without being severely punished, are harshly criticised. Rikka manages to have a sex life, get away with the infanticide of her own children and keep the sympathy of the readers. Engaging the readers' sympathy for Rikka is partly done by placing the reliable, trustworthy Bailiff character on her side and partly to present her as a 'natural', 'original' woman, unfortunate enough to be prostituted by Aga, hopelessly fluttering in the restrictive net of unfair gender laws. Pathologic motherhood is here used as a terrible warning; this is what happens when men abuse and misuse women.

6.4 The Textual Strategies and Techniques

The novels analysed in this thesis display a range of different textual techniques for representing the gender discourses they discuss and promote. It seems to me that the two novels that do not represent dominant discourses, but instead put forward more radical ideas about gender and the transgression of femininity (*Haabløse Slægter* and *Rikka Gan*), do this through 'hidden' techniques, where nothing is said outright.

In *Haabløse Slægter* this is achieved through the four main characters gender-transgressive performance, where hetero-normality and conventionally ‘correct’ feminine behaviour is dissolved. *Haabløse Slægter* is an early Decadence novel, where typical decadence traits are used to represent the feminine in a derogatory way. In spite of this, the book opens up for new forms of transgressive femininity.

In *Rikka Gan*, this same decadence literary style is used for the opposite; to elevate the feminine. Here, decadence is turned against itself to demonstrate the shortcomings of patriarchy. In this novel, gaps and silences are used to represent the unspeakable. What cannot be represented explicitly is left unsaid, for the reader to fill in.

Le Plaidoyer is characterised by its dominant and self-assertive autodiegetic narrator. When starting out, Axel has both a sense of humour and a certain distance to himself. As the story proceeds, however, and female emancipation enhances, the narrative voice gets more and more hysterical, increasing the tempo, losing its sense of humour and starting to make rigid statements in the forms of derogatory axioms about the inferiority of women. Thus, as Susan S. Lanser would express it, content is form.

The narrative voice resembles that of the Arnold character in *Fru Fanny*. He too lapses into axiomatic statements about the ‘natural’ states of the genders when his wife refuses to conform into the conventional, passive femininity he demands. Fanny leaves both her husband and narrator genuinely upset when insisting on her New Woman behaviour.

Both *Haabløse Slægter* and *Le Plaidoyer* were prosecuted for ‘indecent’, as well as practically crushed by contemporary critics. *Fru Fanny* too was utterly disliked by the literary reviewers. Although they were more appreciative about *Rikka Gan*, its author Ragnhild Jølsen was met with suspicion for having written a work where a knowledge about sexuality was evident. I think the critics’ and censorial authorities’ reactions show that these novels represented something new, something they did not approve of, but could not express: a discursive shift within gender discourses.

6.5 A Pan-Scandinavian Outlook on Breakthrough Gender Discourses

Although historical and conceptual changes relating to gender during the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough have been discussed by several scholars, the present study is the first to focus on literary gender transgression in a pan-Scandinavian context, its textual

strategies and how the characters were perceived at the time. By drawing on poststructuralism, with the use of Michel Foucault's theory, I examine gender discourses in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. By analysing how they were employed in radical and conservative novels, I can present a pan-Scandinavian overview showing that gender discourses were much alike within this geographical area.

Further, my study lays bare the skeleton of normative Breakthrough femininity, what can be called the dominant discourse on femininity at the time: a non-existing sexual desire, feminine immobility/containment in the home and an imperative, self-sacrificing motherliness. It also shows how the transgression of these normative boundaries is used in the novels, when presenting their views on what femininity is, should be or could be. Whether a novel promotes a return to conventional gender roles or a development of existing ones, it was mainly these three areas of femininity that were being employed as discursive weapons or concepts to deconstruct. The discursive field of gender can thus be seen as a battlefield, where transgressions are either used in a positive way, to expand the discursive field, or in a negative way, to restrict and conventionalise notions of gender.

Whichever the political ambitions concerning gender in the novels, my study shows how general societal and literary developments influenced individual attempts to promote certain gender roles. In the struggle to endorse more conventional gender roles, the explicitly conservative novels end up by representing, and thereby providing, cognitive space for the New Woman. The built-in ambiguity between the value universe and the resisting protagonists in the conservative novels exposes discursive tensions within them. The more radical novels, on the other hand, employ different literary strategies to preserve the readers' sympathy for or interest in their gender-ambiguous characters while actively striving to expand the discursive gender boundaries.

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