

**Zeitschrift:** Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Skandinavische Studien  
**Band:** 21 (1991)

**Artikel:** The Life and Writings of Laura Marholm  
**Autor:** Brantly, Susan  
**Kapitel:** Growing up in Riga : 1854-1885  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-858349>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 24.05.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Growing up in Riga: 1854–1885

By 1854, Livonia, or what is now Latvia, had been formally under Russian rule for over 130 years. Nevertheless, most of the land and the political power was still controlled by a minority of German-speaking nobles. Social reform was slow in coming to Latvia, and although serfdom was legally abolished by the Russian Agrarian Law in 1861, vestiges of feudal organization remained current in Latvia for many years after that.<sup>1</sup> Russia's chief interest in Latvia was the capital, Riga, an old Hanseatic seaport and a strategically important gateway to the Baltic Sea. In 1854, Russia, England and France became involved in the Crimean War, and on May 1, Laura Katarina Mohr was born to the sound of gunfire from the British fleet as it blockaded the harbor of Riga.<sup>2</sup>

Marholm's father, Fredrik Wilhelm Theodor Mohr (August 30, 1820–May 5, 1915), was a sea captain with roots in Denmark. Mohr was a well respected name in Denmark and Norway. In later years, Marholm liked to boast that she was related to Conrad Mohr, German consul in Bergen and friend to Kaiser Wilhelm, as well as August Mohr, chamberlain to the Norwegian king. In actual fact, Marholm shared a common great-grandfather with these two important men, a distinction which she shared with hundreds of other members of the prolific Mohr clan.<sup>3</sup>

Fredrik Mohr was born in Nykjøbing, Denmark, and travelled as a young man to America, where he stayed for 15½ years. Upon his return to Denmark, he took a first officer's examination and went to sea as a captain. During his travels he

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> At the time, two calendars were in use in Latvia: the Julian Calendar and the Gregorian Calendar, which is the calendar in common use today. Laura Marholm was born on April 19th, according to the Julian Calendar and May 1st according to our current calendar. The Julian Calendar was abandoned in Russia shortly after the "October" (actually November) Revolution in 1917. The fact of this dual calendar will also explain the double dates in references to letters written in Riga and the *St. Petersburger Zeitung*.

<sup>3</sup> Anthon Mohr Wiesener, *Slegten Mohr fra Bevern* (Bergen: John Griegs Bogtrykkeri, 1909).

met and married Amalie Roeder (November 13, 1823–October 1897). In 1866, Fredrik Mohr gave up the sea and became a harbor official in Riga.<sup>4</sup>

Amalie Roeder was one of the five children of Andreas Roeder and Dorothea Brun. Amalie was “eine geborene Rigenserin,” whose father had emigrated to Riga from Göttingen.<sup>5</sup> During Marholm’s childhood, the Roeder side of the family exerted the dominant cultural influence: “Mein Vater in Riga hatte mich nicht näher in den dänisch-norwegischen Familienstammbaum eingeweiht, weil meine Mutter streng ‘auf das Deutsche’ hielt. Und mein Vater, das läßt sich nicht leugnen, stand unter ihrem deutschen Pantoffel.”<sup>6</sup> The marriage was evidently not a particularly happy union, and Marholm was their only child.

For the first twelve years of Marholm’s life, her father was often at sea, and even when he finally settled down in Riga, he would frequently spend the evenings away from home at the house of his brother who also lived in Riga. In her later autobiographical writings, Marholm did not remember her father kindly. She writes that when he was home he would brim with criticism: “Mama gab zuviel Geld aus und Fratzl sollte aus dem Hause, sich ihr Brod [sic] selbst verdienen. Da nun Mama die Sparsamkeit selbst und Fratzl erst zwölf Jahr alt war, so waren das wirklich ungerechte Forderungen.”<sup>7</sup> Although this characterization seems exaggerated, it may be somewhat justified. In the few preserved letters to Marholm from her father, a critical tone is clearly detectable and a frequent topic is money: “Vær nu sparsam [sic] min Laura thi neppe er jeg i stand til i længere Tid at kunde sende dig noget af Betydenhed [sic].”<sup>8</sup> In a family where each of the members had a strong will, Fredrik Mohr’s primary sense of power lay in the fact that he controlled the family finances, which may explain why he was so obsessed with the issue. Fredrik Mohr was not poor; he simply did not like spending money. Ola Hansson once characterized his father-in-law at a family gathering in terms of his voice: “Sie [die Stimme] wußte nicht recht, wie sie sich benehmen sollte; sie verhielt sich abwartend, nicht recht zufrieden, weder mit mir, noch mit sich selbst, noch mit der übrigen Welt, aber auch darin nicht ganz entschieden.”<sup>9</sup> After the death of Marholm’s mother in 1897, communication became sparse between father and daughter, and in 1911, Fredrik Mohr, through the English Consul in Riga, refused to give Marholm his current address, breaking contact with her completely.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Laura Mohr to Franz Brümmer, 22 April/5 May 1883.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Marholm, “St. Annaplatz,” *Der Tag*, 13 March 1903.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Marholm, “Das Amulet,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 25 December 1902. In the series of autobiographical sketches that Marholm published in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, she refers to herself as “Mohrenfratz” or “Fratzl.”

<sup>8</sup> Fredrik Mohr to Laura Marholm, 10 November 1891. “Be thrifty, my Laura, because I will not be in a position to send you anything of significance for a long time.”

<sup>9</sup> Ola Hansson, “Der gestohlene Schwiegervater,” *Die Zukunft*, 33 (1900), p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> A. Woodhouse to Laura Marholm, 1 May 1911.

Marholm's relationship with her mother was somewhat more complicated, since in her daily life, Marholm was very much under her mother's influence. The figure of her mother appears often in both Marholm's autobiographical and fictional writing. Amalie was an unhappy woman, who dominated her family through her moodiness: "die Mama regierte ihr kleines Reich nach streng absolutistischen Grundsätzen."<sup>11</sup> Later, Marholm understood that her role in the house was to compensate her mother for the inadequacies of her father. Amalie was jealous of Marholm's social contacts and often demanded that her daughter spend long and dreary hours by her side. As Marholm writes of one of the mother figures in her fiction, "'Ich lebe nur für mein Kind,' pflegte Mama gewöhnlich mit gereizter Stimme zu sagen. Und: 'Das ist ein schlechtes Kind, das nicht für seine Mutter lebt!'"<sup>12</sup>

No doubt, Marholm had her own mother in mind when she wrote the following speech for Karla Bührung:

Hat deine Mutter dich nicht abgerichtet, wie meine Mutter mich, zur Dienstinne ihrer Eigensucht, zum Prügelkind ihrer üblen Launen, zum Affen ihrer Zärtlichkeit? hat sie dich nicht eingesperrt in die heiße, ungelüftete Stube, wenn draußen der Frühling lachte, bei dummen Handarbeiten? Und dir die frische, schöne Luft verbittert durch den Putz, in den sie dich steckte, wenn sie dich ausgehen ließ? hat [sic] sie nicht alle deine jungen Hoffnungen vergiftet mit der Galle ihrer eigenen Lebensenttäuschungen, und deinen guten, frohen, unbewußten Glauben an dich selbst geknickt durch Sticheleien auf deine Häßlichkeit . . .<sup>13</sup>

Marholm was no beauty, and it was generally held by her family that she would never marry. At that time, girls who were not likely to marry were expected to make themselves useful. Marholm became a competent seamstress and spent hours on end darning socks in her mother's company.<sup>14</sup> Marholm writes of herself and a penniless cousin that they belonged to the category of young girls, "von denen man zwar gern entgegennahm, was sie leisten konnten, für die man aber gar nichts that."<sup>15</sup>

Marholm's refuge from her dismal environment was the library of her wealthy, childless aunt, Katharina Meijssel, sister to Marholm's mother:

<sup>11</sup> Marholm, "Das Amulet."

<sup>12</sup> Laura Marholm, "Die Tochter," *Schweizerische Rundschau*, 6 (1896), p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Marholm, *Karla Bührung* (Paris, Leipzig, München: Albert Langen, 1895), p. 52. Compare this speech with Marholm's portrayals of her mother in "Die kleine Fanny," *Buch der Toten* (Mainz: Verlag Franz Kirchheim, 1900), and "Im Bann," *Der Weg nach Altötting und andere Novellen* (Mainz: Verlag Franz Kirchheim, 1900).

<sup>14</sup> Apparently, the habit of darning socks never left Marholm. Compare the characterizations of Marholm by Max Dauthendey, *Ein Herz im Lärm der Welt* (München: Albert Langen, 1933), p. 74, and by Frida Strindberg, *Strindberg och hans andra hustru*, vol. 1, trans. Karin Boye (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1933), p. 44. Both mention the fact that Marholm was eternally darning socks.

<sup>15</sup> Marholm, "Die kleine Fanny," p. 78.

Mein Ecksitz war im Schlafzimmer auf Onkels eisernem Geldkasten. Dort sass ich, weltlich weltabgewandt, und verschlang Gutzkow. Die romantische Tante, die in der Leihbibliothek abonniert war, die einzige in der ganzen Familie, die las, hatte einen ästhetischen Instinct für schöne Kleider und beunruhigende Bücher, und so war Gutzkow unter die Philister gerathen. Tantes damalige Lectüre glaubten Mutter und Vater, in diesem Punkt enig, im Interesse meiner sittlichen Entwicklung mir verbieten zu müssen; es war daher immer ein unsicheres und daher doppelt spannendes Vergnügen, Gutzkow zu verschlingen; es hatte nicht soviel zu bedeuten, daß ich ausgescholten werden konnte, aber es bedeutete einen unerträglichen, anwidernden Sonntag, wenn mir das Buch weggenommen wurde. So verschlang ich auf der eisernen und eisigen Geldkiste "Die Ritter vom Geist" und den "Zauberer von Rom", immer mit einem Ohr hinaushorchend, ob nicht Jemand [sic] auf der Entdeckungsreise nach mir war, hastig und angestrengt concentrirt den Inhalt in mich aufsaugend und so kam es, daß Gutzkow einer meiner stärksten Erinnerungseindrücke wurde.<sup>16</sup>

Gutzkow's influence evidently remained with Marholm for some time to come. In later years, Minna Cauer presented Marholm as the direct heir to Gutzkow's views on women and "Sinneslust."<sup>17</sup>

Marholm's parents also considered Goethe's *Faust* especially dangerous reading, and so they hid the work in an old trunk in the cellar. When she accidentally stumbled across the book, Marholm decided to memorize central portions "um ein für alle Mal im ungestörten Besitz des Wesentlichen zu sein."<sup>18</sup> For the rest of her life, Marholm identified the "eternal feminine" with the self-sacrifice embodied by Gretchen. In addition to the classics, Goethe and Schiller, other favorite authors from her youth included Paul Heyse and Gottfried Keller.

Marholm was a covert autodidact. Although she attended local schools and even received a teaching certificate, women's education at the time typically withheld more than it explained. The books Marholm read in secret gave, by comparison, much more than her school lessons. Because of this inadequate instruction, Marholm developed a great mistrust of institutionalized education. She once claimed proudly that she was "ohne Universitätsbildung und ohne Respekt vor ihr."<sup>19</sup> On another occasion, she wrote, "Ich habe ja selbst eine sorgfältige deutsche Erziehung genossen und ich vergelte es den Schulräumen, in denen ich gesessen, und der Stadt, in der ich aufgewachsen, mit meinem aufrichtigsten Abscheu."<sup>20</sup> Since what she was taught coincided so poorly with what she discovered herself, these experiences developed in Marholm a strong re-

<sup>16</sup> Laura Marholm, "Vom alten 'Jungen Deutschland,'" *Nord und Süd*, 65 (1893), pp. 200–201.

<sup>17</sup> Minna Cauer, *Die Frau im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verlag Siegfried Cronbach, 1898), p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> Marholm, "Die kleine Fanny," p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Marholm, "Zur Frauenfrage: Die beiden Seiten der Medaille," *Freie Bühne*, 1 (1890), p. 586.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Marholm, "Stimmung auf und außer dem Theater," *Freie Bühne*, 3 (1892), p. 324.

spect for the powers of individual judgment and no respect at all for prevailing dogma.

As she grew older and a “remainder” on the Riga marriage market, Marholm was allowed more freedom in her reading, and she engaged in detailed studies of Latvian history. Out of her interest in the property reductions imposed on the Latvian nobility by Charles XI grew her first historical drama *Johann Reinhold Patkul*. Marholm took the pseudonym Leonhard Marholm, “da mein Vater seinen Familiennamen nicht an meine jugendlichen Schreibereien riskieren wollte.”<sup>21</sup> A male pseudonym also brought with it other advantages, since, as Marholm later pointed out to Arne Garborg: “Kvindelig Produktion bliver jo paa mange Steder anset som Kontrabande i Tyskland.”<sup>22</sup>

Marholm perhaps best summed up her motives for beginning to write in terms of her alter-ego, Mohrenfratz:

Sie schrieb ja gar nicht aus Eitelkeit, nicht einmal aus Trieb – sie schrieb blos [sic] aus Nothwehr. Denn es war ihr zu eng in dieser Stadt, in diesem Land, unter den Flügeln ihrer Eltern. Sie wollte hinaus, sich ausdehnen, sich umschauen, – leben! Und sie hatte keinen anderen Schlüssel zur Welt da draußen, als ihren lebhaften Beobachtungssinn und ihre Fähigkeit, sich auszudrücken.<sup>23</sup>

In another context, she explained that she turned to writing since it was easier for her than learning how to cook.<sup>24</sup>

Marholm’s literary debut was a tremendous local success. The first part of *Johann Reinhold Patkul* was subtitled “Gertrud Lindenster,” and was approved by the Russian censors for publication, but not for performance. This was perhaps due to the sensitive issue of political rebellion which lies at the center of the play’s action. “Gertrud Lindenster” is based upon the intrigues surrounding Patkul’s spokespersonship on behalf of the Latvian nobility against the reductions of Charles XI, his sentencing to death, and his escape from Sweden.

As the subtitle indicates, however, the focal point of the play is Gertrud Lindenster. Gertrud is a figure whom Marholm has found in the historical sources, but she has transformed her into her own image of ideal womanhood.<sup>25</sup> Patkul is the impulsive hero and Gertrud is the sensible girl who tempers his rough edges. When Patkul threatens to ruin his own cause by assaulting Räuter, Gertrud stops him. When he is determined to rot in prison out of spite for Charles XI, Gertrud

<sup>21</sup> Marholm, “Die kleine Fanny,” p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 18 November 1888. “In many places, feminine works are considered contraband in Germany.”

<sup>23</sup> Laura Marholm, “Die schiefe Nase. Theaternovelle,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 30 January, 3 and 6 February 1901.

<sup>24</sup> Marholm, “Die kleine Fanny,” p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> As my historical authority on the facts surrounding the life of Patkul, I have consulted: Yella Erdmann, *Der livländische Staatsmann Johann Reinhold von Patkul* (Berlin: Haude & Spenerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1970).



convinces him that he can best serve Latvia by escaping and continuing the struggle elsewhere. Patkul appreciates this quality in Gertrud: “Dank, Dank, da Sie sich nicht gescheut, dem Rohen/Den eignen edlen Sinn zu öffnen . . .”<sup>26</sup> The relationship between Patkul and Gertrud is an enactment of the age-old idea that woman is meant to bring out the nobler qualities of man. Furthermore, Gertrud is willing to sacrifice life and limb for the man she loves. By agreeing to marry Hastfer so that Patkul can escape from prison, Gertrud places her love’s happiness before her own and puts her own life in jeopardy.

Marholm’s treatment of Gertrud’s character in this first literary attempt becomes especially significant when one takes into account two comments made by Marholm much later in life: “I räntmästaredottern Gertrud Lindens- stern skildrade jag som tjuguårig flicka min uppfattning om kvinnans självbe- stämmelse, ingripande i politiken och självuppoftning.”<sup>27</sup> In the German version of this essay, the reference to “Gertrud Lindens- stern” reads: “‘Gertrud Linden- stern’ – in der ich mich selbst zeichnete . . .”<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the first comment, at this early stage in her development, Mar- holm believed that men were the active agents in history and that women should influence events through their men. Gertrud Lindens- stern embodies the ideal woman: smart, sensible, supportive and willing to sacrifice everything for the one she loves. She lives not for herself, but for the sake of someone else. The Gertrud-type is the fabled woman behind every great man. This is essentially the same view of women that Marholm will put forward 16 years later in *Das Buch der Frauen* and *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter*, causing an uproar in the women’s movement. This attitude will also help to shed light on some aspects of Mar- holm’s marriage to Ola Hansson.

To understand the second comment, one might look forward in time to Gabriele Reuter’s excellent novel, *Aus guter Familie*, which describes the upbringing of young women of the bourgeoisie from Marholm’s generation. In her late teens, the protagonist, Agathe Heidling, develops a passion for the darkly attractive persona of Lord Byron and dreams of being able to sacrifice everything for him. This fantasy of a great love breaking into a young girl’s color- less existence and giving her the chance to show the world what she is made of essentially describes the plot of “Gertrud Lindens- stern.” When Marholm writes that she portrayed herself in the figure of Gertrud Lindens- stern, she is perhaps admitting the same sort of fantasy that enlivened the existence of Agathe Heid- ling. Marholm knew that she possessed considerable intellectual gifts and

<sup>26</sup> Leonhard Marholm, *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, Theil I: “Gertrud Lindens- stern” (Riga: Verlag F. Deubner, 1878), p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Laura Marholm, “Kvinnornas valrätt,” *Folkets Dagblad Politiken*, 31 January 1919. “In the treasurer’s daughter, Gertrud Lindens- stern, I depicted, as a 20-year-old girl, my understanding of women’s autonomy, intervention in politics and self-sacrifice.”

<sup>28</sup> Laura Marholm, “Zum Wahlrecht der Frauen,” manuscript in Lunds Universitetsbi- bliotek.

strength of character, but she was waiting for a man to enable her to demonstrate these qualities.

"Gertrud Lindenster" appeared a few weeks before Christmas 1878, and by Christmas it was sold out, "ein bis dahin in der guten Stadt Riga noch nicht dagewesener literarischer Erfolg."<sup>29</sup> This success at the tender age of 24 brought about a change of status for Marholm: "In dem Jahre war das junge unbekannte Mädchen eine locale Berühmtheit geworden."<sup>30</sup>

Marholm suggested one reason why she was granted such immediate attention: "Sie wurde einfach in dem literaturlosen Lande, wo der Zufall sie hatte geboren werden lassen, ein Unicum."<sup>31</sup> She was particularly celebrated in aristocratic circles and described the phenomenon in a letter to Georg Brandes:

Als mir zum ersten Mal die geistige Armut meiner Umgebung, die Öde eines inhaltlosen Daseins, zugleich mit dem Angstgefühl darin zu Grunde zu gehen, zum Bewußtsein kam, schaffte ich mir Befreiung und – ich glaube wenigstens, es hing so zusammen – schrieb ein baltisches Drama, "Patkul". Der Stoff war mein Glück. Ich wurde in unsere sog. ästhetischen und ein paar adeligen Kreise gezogen und wie ein seltener Schoßhund herumgezeigt. Mir gefiel das anfangs sehr. Ich merkte nicht gleich, daß man nicht nur *mit* mir Vorstellungen, daß man auch mir welche gab. Man fühlte sich als Stoff, den ich zur Verherrlichung des Vaterlandes behandeln konnte – man zeigte sich, wie man gesehen zu werden wünschte, ganz ideal.<sup>32</sup>

The members of the aristocratic circles that Marholm frequented postured for her so that they might be included in her next patriotic drama. However, these aristocratic fans seem not to have noticed the criticism of the German nobility inherent in the tale of Patkul's betrayal.

Even though she won the flattery of her hometown, she could not win the approval of her parents. Marholm describes their reaction to her sudden success with bitter irony: "Sie bewahrten sich vollkommen rein von dem Laster der Eltern-Eitelkeit. Sie waren nicht [. . .] im geringsten stolz auf ihre Tochter . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Riga awaited the completion of the second part of *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, "Patkul's Tod," with interest, and Marholm was encouraged to publish excerpts from her work in progress in *Baltische Monatsschrift*.<sup>34</sup> This second part of Marholm's historical drama deals with the intrigues of the Saxon court when Friedrich August, Elector of Saxony, also known as August II, King of Poland, surrendered Patkul to Charles XII as part of their peace agreement.

<sup>29</sup> Laura Marholm, "Dreimal," *Die Zukunft*, 40 (1902), p. 530.

<sup>30</sup> Marholm, "Die kleine Fanny," p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Marholm, "Das Amulet."

<sup>32</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 1/19 June 1885.

<sup>33</sup> Marholm, "Das Amulet."

<sup>34</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Scenen aus einem Trauerspiel 'Patkul's Tod,'" *Baltische Monatsschrift*, 26 (1878/79), pp. 179–196.



For this play, Marholm seems to have used as her sources not only the documents available to her in the Riga library, but also Karl Gutzkow's drama, *Patkul. Ein politisches Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen*. Even more so than in "Gertrud Lindenberg," however, Marholm has employed her own imagination and, in the process, reveals a great deal about her personal value system at the time. Although "Patkul's Tod" is supposed to be the tragedy of Patkul, the women in the play repeatedly steal the scene.

Marholm puts two women in Patkul's life: Anna, whose real interest in Patkul lies in his wealth and status in court, and Hedwig, Patkul's sister and the faithful supporter of his interests. The real Anna Einsiedel is a rather colorless figure in the history books, but Marholm has created out of Patkul's betrothed a vain, ambitious and fickle woman. The figure of Patkul's loyal sister Hedwig has no roots in reality whatsoever, but she steps into the role left by the demise of Gertrud. The contrast between the noble Hedwig and the selfish Anna is a central feature of the play.

Anna is not interested in politics, although it is the profession of her future husband. She only becomes interested in politics when her own prosperity is threatened. Anna's first interest is her own comfort and status, and she betrays Patkul because of "Weiberschwäche und Weibereitelkeit."<sup>35</sup> Patkul's fickle fiancée cannot endure misfortune or accept responsibility, and so, when her machinations result in a life-or-death crisis for Patkul, Anna flees from the dire situation she has created and distracts herself at a party. Hedwig, on the other hand, follows political developments with interest since what concerns her brother concerns her. Hedwig's first priority is her personal loyalty, and when Patkul is arrested, she enters the camp of Charles XII and begs on her knees for her brother. From Marholm's perspective, the figure of Anna represents the epitome of feminine failings; Hedwig is a tower of feminine strength.

Early in the play, Patkul explains to Anna:

Nicht um Dein Geld, noch um des äußern Scheins  
Gebrechlichkeit – um Deines tiefsten Innern  
Verborg'nen Werth hab ich geworben, Weib:  
Wir selber kennen unsre Seele nicht,  
Bis des entscheidungsschweren Augenblicks  
Gewaltige Erschütt'rung sie entbindet.  
Dann strömt es aus und reißt uns mit sich fort.  
Wir wissen nicht, wie wir dazu gekommen,  
Wir fühlen nur, daß nichts uns halten kann.  
Das ist der Wendepunkt im Menschenleben.<sup>36</sup>

Money, status, and beauty are but transitory, so the real worth of a person lies in his inner qualities. These qualities come to the fore in times of need. Gertrud

<sup>35</sup> Leonhard Marholm, *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, Theil II: "Patkul's Tod" (Riga: Verlag F. Deubner, 1880), p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Lindenstern responds to her decisive moment as a heroine. Anna Einsiedel fails. Hedwig remains faithful in adversity. Between the lines, we may detect the sentiments of a woman burning to prove her mettle, but frustrated by the need to wait for the man who might call upon her to do so.

Another theme in "Patkul's Tod" is the confusion of duty and desire, "Pflicht und Willen." Patkul is all too ready to annul his political duties for the sake of this private desires. Anna accuses him: "Ha, Pflicht und wieder Pflicht! Der Mantel, den/Du über jede That der Willkür breitest/Und Deine Pflicht umgehst!"<sup>37</sup> Yet, Anna's adherence to duty is not without self-interest either. She preaches to Patkul of his obligations to Friedrich August only because this duty conforms with her desires. The theme of hiding one's desires under the mantle of duty appears again in Marholm's novella "Im Dienste zweier Herren."<sup>38</sup> In that lengthy tale, David Hilchen must choose between siding with the political majority, represented by his future father-in-law, or with the forces of liberalism, represented by his childhood friend Martin Giese. David chooses the path that will mean the most for his own personal success and deserts his friend Martin who is eventually executed. From the narrator's point of view, David has made the wrong choice and ultimately comes to a bad end. In Marholm's moral universe, it is a crime to adhere to societal norms simply because it is the path of least resistance. Or, correspondingly, an individual such as Patkul may break with societal expectations if his moral conscience demands it of him, but not if his motive is purely self-interest. Such attitudes as these made Marholm highly receptive to the works of Ibsen and Brandes, which she read later.

Though *Johann Reinhold Patkul* is meant to be a political-historical drama, the personal dimensions of the play tend to overwhelm the action. In several passages, Marholm makes it clear that she has done her historical research, but these scenes lack the dramatic vitality of the personal relationships in the play. A number of her characters appear somewhat flat or idealized: Gertrud is too good and Hastfer is too evil. Such flaws can be accounted for by the inexperience of the playwright. Marholm's public in Riga, however, did not seem to mind these failings. When "Patkul's Tod" was published in 1880, it was also well received. Shortly thereafter, however, Marholm's publishing company declared bankruptcy so she was not paid a penny in royalties.<sup>39</sup>

At about this time, a significant incident took place in Marholm's life: her first love. Marholm is somewhat coy about divulging the details, but the central features of the episode are worth relating. In her autobiographical novel, *Frau Lilly als Jungfrau, Gattin und Mutter*, the object of her affections is named Dr. Unterholz, and in a novella entitled "Nur die Stimme," he bears the name Dr. Brand.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>38</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Im Dienste zweier Herren," *Rigascher Almanach für 1882* (Riga: W. F. Häker, 1882).

<sup>39</sup> Marholm, "Die schiefe Nase."

In both cases, he is co-editor of a work entitled *Monumenta Germaniae*. For her intended autobiography, “Mohrenfratz,” Marholm took the novella “Nur die Stimme,” crossed out references to Fräulein Haller and replaced them with Mohrenfratz. From the common details of these narratives, one can piece together an account of what happened.

As a result of her literary successes, Marholm was invited to become a contributor to a local newspaper, *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*. Between the years 1878 and 1886, Marholm’s articles appeared in this paper under the signature “-m.”<sup>40</sup> At the home of her editor, she made the acquaintance of the man who was to be her first love. He was a scholar and, as a man of learning, was able to appreciate Marholm’s intellectual gifts. The two were instantly attracted to one another. Marholm was convinced that he would have proposed to her if he had had the means. But since this poor scholar was the sole supporter of his mother and sisters, a marriage of inclination was out of the question. When a brother-in-law died leaving him with even more financial responsibilities, he began to avoid Marholm’s company. Marholm experienced this as a bitter disappointment, and, at the same time, an underestimation of her personal qualities: “Sie hätte Muth gehabt, wozu er nicht den Muth hatte, – sich ein Hüttchen zu gründen, wenn es kein Haus werden konnte.”<sup>41</sup>

This episode is significant from two perspectives. Firstly, the theme of willingness to sacrifice everything for the beloved is already present in *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, and will repeat itself often both in Marholm’s fiction and in her life. Her experience with this first love gave her fantasies of self-sacrifice a dimension of reality. Secondly, this disappointment reinforced in her mind the injustices of the prevailing marriage system, where money and social status were primary considerations, but talent, character, and, most of all, love were merely of secondary importance.

In 1881, she published in *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* a novella entitled “Verklungne Namen,” about the Baroque poet Johann Christian Günther. A local actor, in all likelihood Otto Vischer, saw dramatic possibilities as well as a good role for himself in her study of Günther and encouraged Marholm to develop the novella into a play.<sup>42</sup> Flattered by the attention, Marholm complied and wrote *Frau Marianne*.

*Frau Marianne* is a less ambitious project than *Johann Reinhold Patkul*, and, perhaps for this reason, it succeeds somewhat better. Marholm has followed her

<sup>40</sup> Hildegard Reinharde, “Laura Marholma-Hansona,” *Filoloģijas materiāli. Prof. J. Endzelīnam sešdesmitajā dzimšanas dienā veltīts rakstu krājums* (Riga, 1933), p. 207. Regrettably, because of the inaccessibility of *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, I have not been able to obtain or identify any of these articles.

<sup>41</sup> Laura Marholm, “Nur die Stimme,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 13 April 1902.

<sup>42</sup> Compare Marholm’s account in “Die schiefe Nase” with the information given in: Reiner Böhlhoff, *Johann Christian Günther 1695–1975*, Band I (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1980), p. 478.

own artistic inclinations, rather than simply copying old forms. The play is a tragedy, but not in the traditional sense of the word. *Frau Marianne* has four acts, broad insets of humor, some realistic pub scenes, and a hero who is an alcoholic. The plot is based on elements from the biography of Johann Christian Günther, and the central event is his unsuccessful bid to become the Saxon court poet.

Once again, Marholm seems fascinated by the women in the play, as the title seems to admit. Marholm creates a triangle similar to that of Grillparzer's *Sappho*. Günther is loved by two women: Marianne von Breßler, referred to as the Sappho of Silesia, Günther's intellectual equal and moral superior, and the young Leonore, an inexperienced and characterless beauty. Günther's affections turn to Leonore, and, succumbing to her jealousy, Marianne refuses to support Günther at a critical moment, and he is banished from court. Once Günther has lost his prospects for material success, the fickle Leonore deserts him. Marianne repents her jealousy and dedicates herself to serving Günther's genius. She publishes his poetry and locates the author just in time for him to die in her arms.

The subtext of the play is that Günther should have valued Marianne's intellect more highly than Leonore's beauty. Marholm also takes the opportunity to sow some cautious social criticism into the play. Günther has been destroyed by a hierarchical social structure that stifles creativity and enthusiasm. Marholm would imply that the failings of Günther's society are also the faults of her own environment.

Marholm probably came upon this subject matter while doing research for *Johann Reinhold Patkul*. The intrigue of *Frau Marianne* is still attached to the court of August II, although it has been sixteen years since Patkul's execution. Yet, whatever her motives for choosing this material, Marholm found herself in the midst of a trend. In the same year that *Frau Marianne* was published, no less than two other plays were published in German based on the same subject: Ludwig Fulda's *Christian Günther. Ein Trauerspiel in 5 Aufzügen* and Max Grube's *Christian Günther. Schauspiel in fünf Acten*. Each of these three plays treat the material quite differently, though a common denominator seems to be an interest in the clash of poetic genius with restrictive societal norms. The figure of Christian Günther even continued to fascinate authors in subsequent years.<sup>43</sup>

Of the three dramatizations of Günther's life from 1882, only Marholm's play came to performance. With Otto Vischer in the role of Günther, *Frau Marianne* was performed six times in Riga, but the run was stopped when the theater burned down.<sup>44</sup> Despite the short run, critics could speak "vom durchschlagenden Erfolge, den das Drama bei seiner Aufführung in Riga erzielt hat."<sup>45</sup> Vischer

<sup>43</sup> For an account of the portrayals of Johann Christian Günther in literature, see Bölhoff, pp. 466–492.

<sup>44</sup> Marholm, "Zum Wahlrecht der Frauen," manuscript in Lunds Universitetsbibliotek.

<sup>45</sup> Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, "Frau Marianne," *Baltische Monatsschrift*, 29 (1882), p. 602.

brought *Frau Marianne* to the attention of the famous German actor Ludwig Barnay, who hastened to secure the rights to the play, in order to open the fall season of the Berliner Residenztheater with it. He, of course, would star as Günther. The success of *Frau Marianne* seemed to have been rescued from the ashes of the Riga Stadttheater.

Marholm also sent a copy of the play to the director of the Burgtheater in Vienna, Adolf von Wilbrandt, who declined to accept the play for performance, but kindly expressed an interest in future plays by the author. Marholm's play also came to be read by the former persecuted member of *Das Junge Deutschland* turned influential potentate of Viennese theater, Heinrich Laube. Laube, a retired director of the Burgtheater, praised the piece highly and, in a personal letter, promised her success in Berlin.<sup>46</sup>

Receiving no support from her parents, Marholm used her own savings, consisting of years of collected birthday gifts and her few honoraria, to pay for a trip to Austria and Germany so that she could make the acquaintance of her admirers and be present at the première of her play in Berlin. Her journey brought her through Bremen, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich and then to Vienna where she was taken under the wing of the aging Laube, who introduced her to members of the Viennese theater world. After her stay in Vienna, she moved on to Berlin to await her première.

Barnay had rechristened *Frau Marianne* to *Ein Verkommener*, a maneuver which focused attention upon the male lead, rather than the female lead. He admonished Marholm not to speak to the press and made her wait ten days before allowing her to attend a rehearsal. When she was finally able to view a rehearsal, what she saw was less than encouraging: "Schon nach den ersten Szenen sah sie, daß noch alles ganz unfertig war und nicht klappte. Nach dem zweiten Akt, in dem der Titelheld auftrat, wußte sie mit Bestimmtheit, daß man das Stück fallen lassen würde."<sup>47</sup> The première itself confirmed her fears and she left the theatre before the performance was over. The play closed on the third night. The failure of *Ein Verkommener* came as a tremendous blow to Marholm, and, back in her hotel room, she toyed with thoughts of suicide. She dreaded returning to the gossip of Riga and to her family, "wo die Frage: 'Was werden die Leute sagen?' der entscheidende Maßstab für Alles war."<sup>48</sup> She describes her situation to Georg Brandes: "Die Dinge lagen so, daß ich damit den Boden unter den Füßen verlor und in eine alte Abhängigkeit zurücksinken mußte, wenn ich mich nicht ohne Zaudern zusammennahm."<sup>49</sup>

Marholm did pull herself together after this fiasco and returned to Riga to deliver a series of lectures for women on Baltic history. The series was comprised of no less than 25 lectures. To begin with, attendance was quite high, but

<sup>46</sup> Marholm, "Die schiefe Nase."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 1/19 June 1885.



toward the end of the lecture series interest began to flag.<sup>50</sup> As she describes to Brandes, she made a discovery during her lecture preparations: "Ich erkannte, daß die Methode, nach der baltische Geschichte bei uns getrieben wird, aus einem politischen Zweck, nicht aus historischer Kritik hervorging."<sup>51</sup> With this initial questioning of the prevailing authorities, the foundations were laid for Marholm's intellectual revolution.

At some point in 1883, Marholm came across the writings of Henrik Ibsen and Georg Brandes. Marholm's aesthetic views changed drastically; however, the most profound impact was made on her moral universe. Ibsen's social dramas revealed to her that society was not the faultless bastion of morality that it pretended to be, and in fact, an individual could have moral right on his or her side while society was in the wrong. Marholm felt she recognized her own situation in Ibsen's dramas: "Die Menschen und die Verhältnisse in seinen Gesellschaftsdramen, das war ja eben mein Kreis, meine Verhältnisse, meine ganz persönliche Umwelt. Ich sah alles, was mich band und unterdrückte mit einer Deutlichkeit wie nie."<sup>52</sup>

Ibsen suggested to Marholm the possibility that, in the fashion of Dr. Stockmann in *En folkefiende*, she could flaunt tradition and public opinion and rely on her own judgment of what was right and wrong. The nature of her altered values is expressed in the following comparison between Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Ibsen: "Während Bjørnson das gesellschaftliche Gewissen als Regulativ der Einzelhandlung gelten läßt, statuiert Ibsen zwischen dem sittlich strebenden Individuum und der gesellschaftlichen Moral einen Gegensatz, den man vielleicht nicht ganz unzutreffend mit jenem in glaubensstarken Zeiten zwischen 'Christ' und 'Welt' angenommenen vergleichen könnte."<sup>53</sup> All at once, Marholm had support for the belief that the societal norms that regulated her behavior were

<sup>50</sup> In later years, Marholm blamed the thinning attendance at her lectures on unfriendly agents who frightened away her audience. (See Marholm, "Kvinnornas valrätt.") The phenomenon of steadily decreasing attendance for such a long lecture series, however, seems neither ominous nor inexplicable.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 1/19 June 1885.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Marholm, *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* (Berlin: Verlag Carl Duncker, 1896), pp. 13–14. In context, this speech is presented as an account given to Laura Marholm by a gifted woman of her acquaintance. Marholm is, however, obviously citing herself. It is characteristic of Marholm throughout her authorship that she is not able to express intense personal feelings directly. Either she writes about herself in the third person, or she cites herself, but puts the words in a non-existent third party's mouth. Compare, for example, Marholm's account of Paul Heyse's rejection of a book, "dessen litterarischen Wert und dessen Verfasser ich sehr hochstellte, während er mir zugleich sehr nahe stand." [Laura Marholm, "Erinnerungen an Paul Heyse," *Die Kultur*, 1 (1900), p. 358.] Their correspondence reveals that it was Marholm's own *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* that Heyse rejected.

<sup>53</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Vom Rigaschen Stadttheater," *Nordische Rundschau*, 2 (1884), p. 182.



wrong, and furthermore, the individual who follows his own conscience against the prevailing order is comparable to Christ. Throughout her childhood and youth, Marholm had been sensitive to the approval and disapproval of her parents and of Riga society, but she had always chafed in the role of dutiful unmarried daughter of the bourgeoisie. Marholm's reading of Ibsen encouraged her to break with tradition. In many respects, Ibsen's social dramas exerted a liberating influence on Marholm and other women in the 1880's, comparable to the impact that Nietzsche's writings would have on the intellectual world in the 1890's.

Of Brandes' work, Marholm read, in German translation, *Moderne Geister und Hauptströmungen der Literatur des XIX Jahrhunderts*. In Brandes, she found liberation from the weight of the intellectual traditions which stifled creativity in Riga. She also found in Brandes an interpreter of Ibsen. On April 22, 1884, Laura Mohr wrote Georg Brandes a fan letter. In this letter, she describes her intellectual revolution:

Ich hatte mich aber schon schwerer [?] freigerungen, seit ich vor einem Jahr halb zufällig über Ibsens vier Hauptdramen gerathend, die mir noch ziemlich barock schienen, mehr und mehr von dieser großartigen Vertiefung des sittlichen Begriffs erfasst ward. Sie haben mich seitdem keinen Tag mehr verlassen, diese befreienden, erhebenden und zugleich so furchtbar peinigenden Forderungen, sie sind um mich bei der Arbeit, sie haben Besitz von mir bei der Erholung, sie machen einem das Leben lebenswerther. Ich sehe in ihnen die Hauptzüge der modernen ethischen Ideen, die die künftigen Geschlechter erziehen werden. Den Ausdruck, der mir mangelte, fand ich in Ihren Hauptströmungen scharf zugespitzt in dem Ausspruch: die wahre Moral ist das radikalste Element, das es giebt. Zugleich aber fand ich, daß wer als Schriftsteller wirklich etwas leisten will, das Anspruch auf Bedeutung und Dauer hat, sich Probleme zum Vorwurf nehmen muß, wie Ibsen sie aufstellt, nicht bloß psychologische, sondern ethisch-soziale.<sup>54</sup>

The four "Hauptdramen" of Ibsen to which Marholm refers are *De unges forbund* (1869), *Samfundets støtter* (1877), *Et dukkehjem* (1879), and *En folkefiende* (1882). Marholm explains further in her letter to Brandes that she sees it as her task to breathe some fresh intellectual air into the stagnant atmosphere of Riga by writing essays and reviews about and inspired by Ibsen's and Brandes' ideas. As an indication of her earnestness, she enclosed a copy of her first substantial literary essay, entitled "Henrik Ibsen. Literarische Skizze."

In her study of the German reception of Ibsen's *Nora* before 1890, Barbara Gentikow describes Marholm's Ibsen-essay as "eine der wenigen verständnisvollen und positiven 'Nora'-Rezensionen aus diesem Zeitraum."<sup>55</sup> Gentikow considers Marholm's essay remarkable, since at this early stage of Ibsen recep-

<sup>54</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 10/22 April 1884.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Gentikow, *Skandinavien als präkapitalistische Idylle* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1978), p. 120.

tion, Marholm seemed to be the only German critic capable of treating *Nora* as a drama of ideas; other critics could not move beyond a discussion of the psychological improbability of Nora being able to leave her children. Moreover, Gentikow views Marholm's essay as especially significant for Ibsen reception, since Marholm possessed a sufficient knowledge of the current German theater repertoire to treat *Nora* in the context of public taste.

Georg Brandes answered Marholm's fan letter. Pil Dahlerup in her book, *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder*, documents the fact that Brandes frequently received letters of admiration from struggling young women writers.<sup>56</sup> Brandes was looked up to as the father figure for a literary generation, and many women wrote to credit him with their spiritual awakening. Brandes enjoyed such letters and usually answered them quite kindly.

Dahlerup illustrates the phenomenon in detail by following the correspondence between Amalie Müller Skram and Brandes. The patterns which Dahlerup finds in their initial exchange of letters correspond precisely to those in the first letters between Laura Mohr and Brandes:

Amalie Müller spiller i et og alt op til Brandes egen faderfornemmelse og rammer i øvrigt på en plet hans syn på kvindekunst som formløs. Desuden rummer brevet jo en god portion smiger ved siden af den utvivlsomme ægte beundring. Og Brandes svarer som en kærlig fader sin søde, men lidt ubehjælpelige datter.<sup>57</sup>

Marholm excelled in the art of flattering Georg Brandes, which, in part, explains her later success in his literary circle in Copenhagen. It is apparent from her letters and her essay that Ibsen was her primary intellectual liberator; Brandes was secondary. She is very careful of Brandes' ego, however, and makes him responsible for her understanding of Ibsen. In her first letter to Brandes, with generous amounts of flattery, she humbly submits her own Ibsen-essay for his approval, after having first praised his superior insights. Brandes' fatherly reply to this homage reads as follows:

Sie sollen sich in Ihrem tapferen Streben nicht entmuthigen lassen. Was bedeutet es wohl, daß ich Ibsen genauer kenne als Sie, es ist ja nur selbstverständlich, daß mein Aufsatz eindringlicher ist als der Ihrige.<sup>58</sup>

At this point in time, Marholm did not seem to mind Brandes' condescension, but instead was flattered that he took the time to answer her letter. Brandes expressed no appreciation for Marholm's relatively progressive approach to

<sup>56</sup> Pil Dahlerup, *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (København: Gyldendal, 1984), pp. 93–104.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 97. "In everything, Amalie Müller plays up to Brandes' own paternal feelings and furthermore hits Brandes' view of women's art as formless right on the head. In addition, the letter contains a good portion of flattery alongside undoubtedly genuine admiration. And Brandes, as a loving father, answers his sweet, but slightly awkward daughter."

<sup>58</sup> Georg Brandes to Laura Mohr, 26 April 1884.

Ibsen. For her part, however, Marholm considered Brandes' reply an affirmation of her new-found goals, and promptly began breaking lances for her new convictions in the conservative arena of Baltic journalism.

One profound effect of Marholm's aesthetic revolution was that she came to view her own previous literary efforts as epigonal romanticism. Perhaps for this reason, Marholm stopped writing fiction for over 10 years, devoting herself instead to translations and criticism.

Marholm's immediate forum for her new views was *Nordische Rundschau*, a Baltic periodical which had asked Marholm to become its theater critic in Riga. Her first review, in 1884, begins with a diatribe against the intellectual isolation and conservatism in her home town: "Es ist ein abgeschlossenes, engumfriedetes Leben, das wir führen, wir Ostseeprovinzialen. Fernab von dem rauschenden Durcheinanderschießen der Dinge sitzen wir still in verlorener Ecke, den Blick mehr nach innen gewandt."<sup>59</sup> She writes in Brandesian terms of a transitional age of overcoming the old forms and creating new. One can also clearly perceive the undertone of Marholm's own frustration with her circumstances and environment.

This irreverent tone and dramatic change of attitude raised eyebrows in Riga. Marholm had been warmly received by the nobility as long as she was writing patriotic, historical dramas. She retained their support even for *Frau Marianne*, though some objected to her choice of low subject matter: "Wenn er in Zukunft Stoffe wählt wie 'Patkul' und sie behandelt wie 'Frau Marianne', darf er des Siegeszuges über die Bühne'sicher sein!"<sup>60</sup> Delivering lectures on Baltic history was also a sanctionable endeavor. Her new critical attitude, however, was unacceptable.

In this same review, Marholm further alienated politically important circles in Riga by harshly reviewing Ernst von Wildenbruch's *Opfer um Opfer*. Marholm later summed up her objection to the piece with the question: "Ist die Dummheit tragisch?"<sup>61</sup> Rashly, Marholm pulled no punches in assessing Wildenbruch's authorship: "Wildenbruch ist kein Dichter, einen wirklichen poetischen Werth hat keines seiner Werke, das ich kenne, und bis auf 'Harold' und 'Väter und Söhne' kenn ich sie so ziemlich alle; einen wirklichen poetischen Werth etwa in seinen künftigen Schöpfungen zu erreichen, traue ich ihm auch nicht einmal zu."<sup>62</sup> Wildenbruch, whose father was an illegitimate son of Prince Louis Ferdinand, enjoyed an influential post in the German Foreign Ministry and had powerful connections in Riga. Marholm's opinions about Wildenbruch were not appreciated, and a mild retraction of her views in her second review for *Nor-*

<sup>59</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Vom Rigaschen Stadttheater," *Nordische Rundschau*, 1 (1884), p. 310.

<sup>60</sup> Ungern-Sternberg, p. 606.

<sup>61</sup> Marholm, "Das Amulet."

<sup>62</sup> Marholm, "Vom Rigaschen Stadttheater," 1 (1884), p. 319.

*dische Rundschau* did not help much. Marholm was on her way to becoming *persona non grata* in Riga.

Marholm continued in the same vein with an essay entitled "Georg Brandes und die moderne literarische Kritik," which appeared in the *Rigasche Zeitung*.<sup>63</sup> Marholm explained her intentions to Brandes: "Ich schrieb den Aufsatz über Ihre litterarische [sic] Persönlichkeit, Ihre Methode und Ihre Ziele, den ich mit-zusenden mir erlaube. Durch die Anknüpfung an unser geistiges Leben, oder vielmehr den Mangel desselben, suchte ich ihn gleich für unsere heimische Production fruchtbar zu machen . . ."<sup>64</sup> The novel that she chose to examine with Brandes' methods was Theodor Pantenius' *Die von Kelles*. *Die von Kelles* is a realistic historical novel set in Latvia during the 1500's. The novel graphically portrays the self-indulgence of the nobility, the greedy rivalry of the burghers, the abuse of the farmers, and the inhuman treatment of the "Undeutschen".<sup>65</sup> Marholm found in the novel a mirror for the present day.

This time, she provoked the ire of Friedrich Bienemann, then the editor of *Baltische Monatsschrift*, who responded in the pages of his journal. Bienemann takes exception to her charge of intellectual isolationism, and remarks, "Zwischen den Zeilen ist vielleicht der Vorwurf zu lesen, daß er von den heimatlichen Interessen sich abgewandt, daß er ihr entfremdet sei."<sup>66</sup> In passing, Bienemann points out some factual errors, and then arrives at the controversial part of her essay, namely, her praise of Pantenius' *Die von Kelles* and her dissatisfaction with the reception given the novel in Latvia. Bienemann defends the Latvian press from the charge that it has ignored the novel, but he does not himself go so far as to endorse Pantenius' work.

Marholm answered Bienemann's charges in "Ein Widerhäkchen" in *Baltische Monatsschrift*. Marholm is able to grant Bienemann some of his criticisms, but is generally unrepentant. On the issue of Pantenius' novel, she claims that *Die von Kelles* should be made "ein Hausbuch der Balten." She further charges that realism used upon German or Norwegian society is accepted, "auf uns selbst angewendet aber ist uns das zu nackt, unsere Scham und unsere Selbstliebe empören sich dagegen."<sup>67</sup> By exploiting the privileges of editorship, Bienemann, however, was able to get the last word. He allows Pantenius' novel certain literary praise,

<sup>63</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Georg Brandes und die moderne literarische Kritik," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1 June 1885.

<sup>64</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 1/19 June 1885. During the period in which Marholm published most of her articles, there seems to have been little consensus over whether the German word for literature should be spelled "Literatur" or "Litteratur." Publications which chose the spelling, "Litteratur," include: *Das Magazin für Litteratur*, *Freie Bühne*, and Leo Berg's *Der Übermensch in der modernen Litteratur*.

<sup>65</sup> Theodor Pantenius, *Die von Kelles* (Bielefeld und Leipzig: Verlag Velhagen & Klasing, 1885).

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Bienemann, "Ein Häkchen an 'Georg Brandes etc.' von L. Marholm," *Baltische Monatsschrift*, 32 (1885), p. 612.

<sup>67</sup> Leonhard Marholm, "Ein Widerhäkchen," *Baltische Monatsschrift*, 32 (1885), p. 794.

however: “So warnen wir doch ausdrücklich, es als Quasi-Handbuch der Zeit- und Sittengeschichte aufzufassen.”<sup>68</sup>

Although Marholm was unrepentant in public, she was somewhat chastened in private. She sent a copy to Brandes on the day the essay appeared, which he thanked her for, but he did not comment on it. When Marholm brings up the issue in her correspondence with Brandes more than a year later, it is to describe Bienemann as follows: “. . . unser ‘großer’ Bienemann, Stadtbibliothekar, Dr. [sic] honoris causae der Berliner Universität, baltischer Historiker und strenger Conservativer, der mich vorigen Winter wegen meines mangelnden Patriotismus in dem schlechten Aufsatz angriff, den ich über Sie geschrieben.”<sup>69</sup> It may be said to Bienemann’s credit that he did not hold a grudge. In 1888, he moved to Leipzig and took over the editorship of *Unsere Zeit* and *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*; he invited Marholm to contribute to both of these journals, a considerable break for her at the time.

Even before this debate over Pantenius, Marholm had begun to realize that overcoming tradition and intellectual conservatism in her home province was much more difficult than she had imagined. She told Brandes that “Die geistige Atmosphäre, die mich umgiebt, mich bis zum physischen Schmerz einschnürt.”<sup>70</sup> She can only see one remedy: “Ich möchte nach Kopenhagen.”<sup>71</sup>

Brandes’ response to her wish is positive with reservations: “Sie wollen nach Kopenhagen – es kann mir nur lieb sein, daß eine Ausländerin sich um uns kümmert und uns studieren will; insofern werde ich gewiss nicht abrathen. Indessen möchte ich Sie doch gerne vor Täuschungen bewahren.”<sup>72</sup> He explains that his position in Copenhagen is not as glorious as she might imagine and tells her of the “betrayals” of Drachmann and Gjellerup. He also brings up the practical point that if Marholm wants to attend his lectures, she has to learn Danish.

Despite having a Danish father, Marholm had never learned Danish. In her response to Brandes’ letter, she assures him that she had already begun studying Danish and that she plans to arrive in Copenhagen a few months before his lectures begin, so that she can begin to grow accustomed to spoken Danish. In the fall of 1885, Marholm arrived in Copenhagen.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Bienemann, “Nachwort der Redaction,” *Baltische Monatsschrift*, 32 (1885), p. 795.

<sup>69</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 6/25 September 1886.

<sup>70</sup> Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 1/19 June 1885.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Georg Brandes to Laura Mohr, 29 June 1885.