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Brandes and Copenhagen: 1886–1889

Laura Mohr came to Copenhagen sometime in late October 1885.¹ Under rainy skies, she arrived at Dragør accompanied by a great deal of luggage and a sack full of bedding that her mother had packed for her, “damit ich nicht ‘in fremden Betten schliefe.’”² This paraphernalia caused one customs official to remark: “Fräulein kommt nach Kopenhagen, um zu heiraten.”³ When she arrived at her hotel and inquired about the impending state visit of the Russian Czar, one of the guests drew the conclusion that Marholm was a nihilist out to murder the Czar and that her bedding sack was probably filled with dynamite.⁴

Marholm’s immediate goals were to learn Danish and to meet and study with Georg Brandes. Marholm’s first address in Copenhagen was Leopold’s Hotel, a popular hostel for travelling literati. The chambermaid at Leopold’s was named Ingeborg, and under Victoria Benedictsson’s cross-examination, Ingeborg had this to report about Laura Mohr:

Fröken Mohrs far är någon slags embetsman i tullen. Ingeborg trodde icke att hon var förmögen, efter hon behöfde beräkna så noga för att ej öfverskrida sitt bestämda. [. . .] Hon var så mån om och så ihärdig att lära danska, att hon för öfnings skull kunde sitta qvällarne igenom och prata med Ingeborg.⁵

According to Ingeborg’s opinion, Marholm’s Danish was “ganska bra.”⁶

Although Brandes had made a faint attempt to discourage Marholm from coming to Copenhagen, he nevertheless received her warmly:

¹ In her article, “St. Annaplatz,” *Der Tag*, 13 March 1903, Laura Marholm claims that she arrived in October of 1884. Her letters to Georg Brandes, however, show that Marholm has mistaken the year.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Victoria Benedictsson, *Stora boken och Dagboken*, Vol. III, ed. Christina Sjöblad (Lund: LiberFörlag, 1985), p. 81.

⁵ Benedictsson, p. 84. “Miss Mohr’s father is some sort of customs official. Ingeborg did not think she was wealthy, since she needed to calculate carefully, so as not to exceed her allowance. [. . .] She was so eager and persistent about learning Danish, that for practice she could spend entire evenings talking with Ingeborg.”

⁶ Ibid., p. 81. “rather good.”

Georg Brandes führte mich sofort auf allen Straßen herum und schleppte mich in die Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, wo er mir Ibsens Dramen aushändigen ließ, damit ich aus ihnen “dänisch lernen könne”. Ich habe aber von Ibsen kein “dänisch” gelernt.⁷

Brandes also invited Marholm to attend a dinner party at his home at Skt. Annæ Plads. Present on this occasion were the influential German Social Democrat Georg von Vollmar and his Swedish wife, Julia, the Danish politician Viggo Pingel, the Finnish actress Ida Aalberg, and Alexander Kielland. This was a collection of celebrities the likes of which Marholm had never seen in Riga, and the experience was overwhelming: “[Es ging] mir im Kopfe herum wie ein Mühlrad.”⁸

For Marholm, this was simply the beginning: “Seitdem habe ich viele Abende in dem kleinen Salon am St. Annaplatz gegessen – das Brandessche Haus war wirklich für mich der feste Punkt in Kopenhagen geworden.”⁹ This rapid intimacy with the Brandes circle may have come about for several reasons. For one, Marholm was a gifted conversationalist, and therefore an asset to the Brandes salon. Her ability to speak German was certainly useful on a number of occasions. Most importantly, however, she managed to befriend Gerda Brandes. Brandes’ wife had the reputation of being insanely jealous of her husband’s female acquaintances, and this jealousy was not entirely without cause. Perhaps since Marholm was not a beauty, Mrs. Brandes did not consider her a threat to her marriage. As a consequence, Marholm was one of the few single women in Copenhagen who was an acceptable guest should the sex ratio at a dinner party need to be evened out.

Marholm kept her eyes and ears open during these evenings at the Brandes house. The people she met and things that she learned at such gatherings often appeared later in the feuilleton articles she wrote to support herself. For example, one need only look at the guest list of this initial dinner party. Marholm subsequently wrote articles about both Georg von Vollmar and Alexander Kielland. Kielland also gave Marholm permission to translate some of his short stories. Although she did not write about Viggo Pingel, in four years, he would be the best man at her wedding with Ola Hansson. After their falling out, Brandes accused Marholm of making her reputation by “Spionvisitter hos berømte Mænd.”¹⁰ This characterization is certainly ungenerous, but it is true that Marholm made rich use of the connections that Brandes presented to her on a silver platter.

⁷ Marholm, “St. Annaplatz.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Georg Brandes to Helga Johansen, 31 May 1897. Cited in Pil Dahlerup, *Det moderne gennembruds kvinder* (København: Gyldendal, 1984), p. 90. “Espionage visits to the homes of famous men.”

Marholm had not been in Copenhagen very long when scandal struck the house of Brandes. Georg Brandes had been involved with a woman named Bertha Knudtzon, and, one day, Gerda Brandes intercepted one of Bertha's letters to Georg. In a jealous rage, she contacted Bertha Knudtzon's family who insisted that Georg Brandes promise never to see Bertha again. The scandal reached its peak in December 1885, and, shortly thereafter, Georg Brandes left for Poland.¹¹

In Brandes' absence, Gerda Brandes and Marholm became close friends. Marholm claimed that she never sought to become Mrs. Brandes' confidant, but rather, the role was imposed upon her. In the play *Karla Bühnung*, Hildegard, the Gerda figure, admits to this and adds: "Ich muß einen Menschen haben, dem ich mich anvertrauen kann; ich muß schreien können, wenn ich getreten werde. Sonst zünde ich das Haus an, oder ich nehme meine Kinder und gehe ins Wasser —."¹² Gerda Brandes confided in Marholm many of her jealous suspicions about her husband. The bond between them was further strengthened during that winter when Mrs. Brandes' mother died and she had to travel to Hannover. Marholm looked in on the Brandes children every day while Gerda Brandes was away.

On March 7, 1886, Brandes wrote to Marholm from Warsaw. He apologized for having left Copenhagen so soon after her arrival: "De var dog nærmest kommet dertil for min Skyld."¹³ However, the real motive behind Brandes' letter seems to be curiosity as to whether his wife had gotten over the scandal or not: "Jeg hører sjældent fra mit Hjem; De kan maaske sige mig, hvorledes De har fundet Tilstanden der."¹⁴ Brandes felt that Marholm's intimacy with his wife made her a potentially valuable ally. Brandes must have destroyed Marholm's reply, but his second letter from Warsaw in which he responds to Marholm's intelligence report has been preserved. Marholm must have handled her role as intermediary very well, showing sympathy for Gerda Brandes, while at the same time withholding judgment on Brandes' behavior, hence the praise: "Deres Brev var saa smukt og godt, at jeg med største Glæde har læst det om igjen. Deres Væsens Godhed og Kløgt aabenbarer sig deri."¹⁵

Within a few months of her arrival, Marholm was initiated into the private tribulations of the Brandes family. During her years in the Brandes circle, she was often called upon to act as babysitter, marriage counselor and peacekeeper.

¹¹ Benedictsson, pp. 212–213.

¹² Laura Marholm, *Karla Bühnung* (München: A. Langen, 1895), p. 12.

¹³ Georg Brandes to Laura Mohr, 7 March 1886. "You came there essentially for my sake."

¹⁴ Ibid. "I seldom hear from my home; perhaps you can tell me how you have found circumstances there?"

¹⁵ Georg Brandes to Laura Mohr, 18 March 1886. "Your letter was so beautiful and good, that I have read it over again with the greatest pleasure. Your soul's goodness and wisdom reveal themselves there."

Marholm was a good listener, and her apparent fairness encouraged many more confidences over the years.

Perhaps in order to help her with her Danish, Brandes gave Marholm the task of translating his book *Berlin som tysk Rigshovedstad* to German. Marholm published the translated chapters in the feuilleton section of the *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, and the first of these appeared in February of 1886. At about this time, Brandes received an invitation to lecture in St. Petersburg, which he eventually did in April of 1887.¹⁶ In connection with this lecture tour, Marholm tried to arrange for Brandes to lecture in Riga, but these plans fell through.¹⁷

Marholm's collaboration with *St. Petersburger Zeitung* lasted for almost three years. The appearance of the Brandes translations in 1886 was well-timed and sparked a growing interest in Scandinavian issues, which Marholm was prepared to feed. As her network of Scandinavian connections grew, Marholm was able to supply *St. Petersburger Zeitung* with translations of novellas by Arne Garborg, Alvilde Prydz, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Jonas Lie, and August Strindberg.¹⁸ *St. Petersburger Zeitung* also became a forum for Marholm's own views on the state of Scandinavian literature. Marholm's contributions to the *St. Petersburger Zeitung* reached a peak in the fall of 1887, when hardly an issue appeared without a Scandinavian article or translation, either written or arranged by "Leonhard Marholm." At the end of December 1887, Marholm is referred to in the pages of *St. Petersburger Zeitung* as "Leonhard Marholm, der unseren Lesern als origineller und selbständiger Kritiker, wie als gediegener Übersetzer skandinavischer Novellen und Romane wohl bekannt ist . . ."¹⁹

Marholm's first stay in Copenhagen ended in the spring of 1886, when she returned to her parents' home in Riga for the summer. Her letters to Brandes indicate that she spent the summer reading and translating. Clearly discernible is an enhanced dissatisfaction with her environment. Her life in Riga was infinitely more restrictive than her life had been in Copenhagen. A further contributing factor to the bleak atmosphere in Riga was the ongoing program of intensive Russification instituted by Alexander III in 1885.

Marholm returned to Copenhagen on October 1, 1886, and moved into a pension at Holmens Kanal 18. During this winter, Georg Brandes became less involved in the affairs of Laura Mohr, even though she was still a frequent visitor in his home. Brandes had other admirers to occupy his time. On October 1, 1886,

¹⁶ Bertil Nolin, *Den gode europén. Studier i Georg Brandes' idéutveckling 1871–1893*. (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1965), p. 224.

¹⁷ Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 6/25 September 1886.

¹⁸ Arne Garborg, "Eine Großthat," *St. Petersburger Zeitung* (1/2 December 1886); Alvilde Prydz, "Das kleine Nest," *SPZ* (4–10 December 1886); Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, "Der Halbe," *SPZ* (5/6 June 1887) and "Gefährliche Freite," *SPZ* (9 June 1887); Jonas Lie, "Jon Sunde," *SPZ* (11/13–15/17–21 March 1887) and "Der Improvisator," *SPZ* (14 October 1887); August Strindberg, "Bosse's Erfahrung. Ein Bild aus dem 15. Jahrhundert," *SPZ* (4–10 December 1887).

¹⁹ "Hervorragende deutsche Journale," *St. Petersburger Zeitung* (10 December 1887).

Georg Brandes and Victoria Benedictsson had met for the first time. Brandes visited Benedictsson often at Leopold's Hotel, and these encounters are faithfully recorded in her journal. At first, Benedictsson thought that she had a rival in Laura Mohr, whose role in the Brandes household seemed to mystify her. Brandes enjoyed describing his female conquests to Benedictsson, and, on more than one occasion, he boasted that Marholm had come to Copenhagen purely for his sake.

Brandes' remarks prompted the following speculation on Benedictsson's part:

Och hur har han burit sig åt emot denna fröken Moor? Hon kom hit ungefär den 1^o November 1885, således för något öfver ett år sedan. Hon bodde här på hotellet till den 1^o Januari 86, således två månader, så flyttade hon, ingen visste hvart. Och hon är kvar ännu, bunden af honom, ännu efter öfver ett års förlopp, – föremål för hans medömksamma löje. På detta samma hotell besökte han henne nästan hvarje qväll, som han nu besöker mig, och på detta samma hotell, der han sökt henne och vunnit henne, sitter han nu för mig – sin nya, fast kanske inte nyaste bekantskap – och gör sig lustig öfver att hon är ful och trofast. Och dock säger Ingeborg att hon icke är ful, men att hon ser äldre ut än sina år (24–25). Han säger att hon har en fullständig kalmuckfysionomi. "Hun oversætter nogle Smaating for mig," sade han så der hængkastadt. Till arbete kan kalmuckskan vara god nog.²⁰

In this passage, Benedictsson reads into Marholm's situation her own fears for her relationship with Brandes, including her insecurity about her own looks. There was never any hint of romance between Georg Brandes and Laura Mohr.

²⁰ Benedictsson, Vol. III, pp. 198–199. "And how has he behaved toward this Miss Moor? She came here on approximately November 1, 1885, that is to say a little over a year ago. She lived here in the hotel until the 1st of January 86, or two months, then she moved, no one knew where. And she is still here, bound by him, even after the course of a year, – the object of his compassionate ridicule. In this same hotel he visited her almost every evening, as he now visits me, and in this same hotel, where he sought her and won her, he now sits with me – his new, although perhaps not newest acquaintance – and makes fun of the fact that she is ugly and faithful. And yet Ingeborg says that she is not ugly, but that she looks older than her years (24–25). He says that she has a completely Kalmuck physiognomy. 'She is translating some small things for me,' he said in passing. The Kalmuck can work well enough." Though this passage shows that Benedictsson had conducted research into Marholm's past, she had been misinformed on more than one account. Marholm did not leave Copenhagen in January 1886, but was there until sometime after March. At the time of her arrival in Copenhagen, Marholm was 31 years old. The editor of Benedictsson's journal, Christina Sjöblad, found that in *Nordisk familjebok* (1910), Kalmucks are described as follows: "Stort hufvud, bredt ansikte, utstående kindknotor, mörka blixtrande ögon, hvilka sitta långt ifrån hvarandra, bred, platt, något uppstående näsa, med vida näsborrar, stora, utstående öron, tjocka, köttiga läppar samt glest skägg med grofva, svarta hår." [Large head, wide face, prominent cheekbones, dark flashing eyes, which lie far apart from each other, wide, flat, somewhat turned-up nose with broad nostrils, large prominent ears, thick fleshy lips and a sparse beard with coarse, black hair.], p. 405n166.

Marholm's exuberant admiration of Brandes had been somewhat dampened by her rapid introduction to the Brandes family skeletons. Although she continued to admire him as a critic and writer, she had her reservations about him personally. Brandes' remarks about Marholm on Benedictsson's account do not put him in a very flattering light. Marholm's loyalty was simply more fodder for his vanity.

This fall, Marholm had other matters on her mind besides Georg Brandes' behavior. She returned to Copenhagen filled with ambition and a sense of purpose. In mid-October, she wrote her mentor Brandes a letter outlining her plans for the immediate future. She writes that she would like to translate J. P. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* and some works by Arne Garborg. Furthermore, she would like to write literary portraits of Scandinavian authors for German periodicals and mentions specifically the possibility of writing about Strindberg for *Neue Freie Presse*.

As to the realization of these plans, her translation of *Niels Lyhne* never came about, and her essay on Strindberg was delayed for a year. However, shortly after announcing her intentions to Brandes, Marholm wrote to Arne Garborg and asked for his permission to translate "Stordaad."²¹ Arne Garborg answered promptly and affirmatively, so that "Eine Großthat" appeared in the *St. Petersburger Zeitung* on December 1, 1886.²² This was the beginning of a rich correspondence between Garborg and Marholm which would last for several years.²³ Marholm also wrote to Theofile Zolling, editor of *Die Gegenwart*, in an effort to interest him in the fruits of her pen. She writes of herself: "Ich lebe jetzt im zweiten Winter in Kopenhagen um die neue skandinavische Litteratur zu studieren, die skandinavischen Sprachen an der Quelle zu lernen, aus ihnen zu übersetzen und mit den skandinavischen Schriftstellern persönlich bekannt zu werden um über sie zu schreiben [sic]."²⁴ Zolling was indeed interested in her works, and Marholm became a frequent contributor to *Die Gegenwart* over the next few years.

In her report to Brandes, Marholm writes further that, in addition to the translation and criticism of Scandinavian literature, she would like to develop something of her very own: "Ich sammle seit einer Weile Eindrücke zu der Entwicklungserwarten [sic] und der Psychologie der modernen Frau."²⁵ She feels

²¹ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 10 November 1886.

²² Marholm's translation of "Stordaad" also appeared later in *Magazin für Litteratur* 59 (1890), pp. 483–487.

²³ Aspects of this correspondence and Marholm's activities as Arne Garborg's translator are discussed in Johannes A. Dale, *Garborg-studier* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1969), pp. 92–93, pp. 96–98. I have also made use of Nor Torp's "En Korrespondanse mellom Arne Garborg og Laura Marholm," M. A. Diss. University of Ohio, Cincinnati, 1959; however, quotations from these letters are taken from the originals in the Lund and Oslo University Libraries.

²⁴ Laura Mohr to Theofile Zolling, 25 November 1886.

²⁵ Laura Mohr to Georg Brandes, 14 October 1886.

that modern authors tend either to depict women as fully awakened erotic beings or in a stage of ignorance devoid of erotic stirrings. But Marholm maintains: "Es giebt aber vieles was unter der Bewusstseinschwelle liegt, es giebt ein specifisch weibliches Seelen- und Vorstellungsleben, es giebt Nuancen, die zwischen dem Anziehen und Abstoßen liegen, Bedingungen die sich unter die alte Ordnung nicht klassificieren lassen."²⁶ This is the first mention of the direction which will dominate Marholm's writing in the 1890's.

Marholm's interest in women's issues was evident even in the historical dramas she wrote in Riga. It was not until the fall of 1886, however, that Marholm encountered the women's movement proper in the persons of Clara Bergsøe and Alvilde Prydz. Bergsøe was the unmarried sister of the Danish author Vilhelm Bergsøe. She was also a close personal friend and biographer of Camilla Collett. In a letter from November 2, 1886, Marholm thanks Bergsøe for the books that she has lent her and expresses an interest in receiving more: "Jeg kjender saa lidt af skandinavisk Kvindeliteratur og det jeg kjender er ofte saa [illegible] og tør, saa det jeg mødte hos Dem slaar mig desto stærkere [sic]."²⁷ Marholm closes with the wish that they can get to know each other better. Bergsøe provided Marholm with books to read; they discussed women's issues together; and Marholm even encountered Camilla Collett herself at Bergsøe's home.²⁸ Alvilde Prydz was a Norwegian author, and, at the time, a frequent visitor to Camilla Collett's salon. She was a steadfast writer of novels about women's issues throughout her life. In Copenhagen, Marholm and Prydz had a good deal of personal contact, and Marholm translated one of her novellas for *St. Petersburger Zeitung*. Although Marholm had some reservations about the women's movement, clear traces of Bergsøe's and Prydz's influence can be detected in Marholm's writing at this time.

In the fall of 1886, the "Great Northern War over Sexual Morality" began to pick up its pace dramatically, although the most heated battles would be fought in the summer of 1887.²⁹ Many of the controversial texts appeared at this time: August Strindberg's *Giftas II* and Stella Kleve's "Pyrrhussegrar" in October; Henrik Pontoppidan's *Mimoser* in November; December saw the appearance of Alexander Kielland's *Tre Par* and Arne Garborg's *Mannfolk*, as well as the appearance and confiscation of Christian Krohg's *Albertine*. The debates

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Laura Mohr to Clara Bergsøe, 2 November 1886. "I am not very familiar with Scandinavian women's literature, and what I am familiar with is often so [illegible] and dry, so that what I found in you struck me all the more intensely."

²⁸ Laura Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau, Theil I* (Berlin: Duncker, 1903), pp. 3-17. Once she married Ola Hansson, Marholm lost contact with Clara Bergsøe. Over the years, Marholm came to think of Bergsøe as representing the pathetic side of the women's movement, which is why a sketch of Clara Bergsøe functions as the introduction to *Zur Psychologie der Frau*.

²⁹ Elias Bredsdorff, *Den store nordiske krig om seksualmoralen* (København: Gyldendal, 1973).

sparked by these publications provided ample food for thought for anyone interested in the psychology of the sexes.

Marholm's position in these debates changed during the course of the next year and a half, as she became caught in a tangle of conflicting loyalties. Marholm's first utterance on the matter came in the form of a review of Bjørnson's *Det flager i byen og på havnen* in the *St. Petersburger Zeitung* in late October 1886. Bjørnson's *Det flager* was a prose rendition of *En hanske* which spelled out in detail Bjørnson's position in the morality debates and his hopes for the sexes in the future. Bjørnson favored chastity for both sexes until marriage. The arguments in the sexual morality debates were many and varied, but the opposing camps to this Bjørnsonian position might be roughly characterized as 1) the advocates of free love and 2) the preservers of the double morality of the status quo.

By and large, Marholm's review is sympathetic to Bjørnson's position. Marholm explains that up until the present, only men have had the ability to choose between sexual freedom or chastity. Women have never had a choice. However, since both men and women possess "polygamische Neigungen," the same criteria should be applied to both sexes.³⁰ Marholm seems to favor "die Gleichstellung von Mann und Frau unter erhöhten Sittlichkeitsforderungen," since she accepts as a prerequisite the fact that "physische Bedingungen sich der Lebensweise akkomodieren und durch Gewöhnung, Beispiel, Erziehung und Vererbung modifiziert werden können."³¹ Marholm seems most taken by Bjørnson's model for women's education as represented by the school established by fru Rendalen. The most attractive feature of this system is sexual education for women before marriage, so that they are able to make responsible decisions about their own lives.

Marholm made her next pronouncements on the morality debates in a journalistic sketch of Alexander Kielland's authorship. Marholm credits Kielland with the insight, "daß die conventionelle zarte Weiblichkeit ein Parasitenthum sei, das von dem Mark des Mannes lebt."³² In Kielland's *Tre Par* emphasis is placed not so much on a stricter morality as on the equality of expectations for both sexes. Marholm is drawn to the utopia that she sees in Kielland's authorship, a utopia in which woman is "kein Kind mehr, vor dem man gewisse Dinge geheimhalten muß – kein Luxus- und Genußgegenstand, den man sich nur anschaffen kann, wenn man die Mittel dazu hat" and which presents "die Voraussetzung eines weit wirklicheren Füreinanderlebens der Geschlechter in dem freiwilligen Vertrag zweier gleich freier und gleich verantwortlicher Wesen."³³ In the context of discussing Kielland's authorship, Marholm takes the opportunity

³⁰ L. Marholm, "Ein Erziehungsroman von Björnstjerne Bjørnson," *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, 23/24 October 1886.

³¹ Ibid.

³² L. Marholm, "Alexander Kielland," *Die Gegenwart*, 31 (1887), p. 151.

³³ Ibid.

to voice positions which she herself has held for some time. For example, the critique of the traditional feminine ideal as parasitic was embodied by the character of Anna Einsiedel in "Patkul's Tod."

Curiously, at the same time that Marholm was writing a positive review of Bjørnson's *Det flager*, she was also translating Arne Garborg's novella "Ungdom," a "moralische Skizze," which she offered to Theofile Zolling for *Die Gegenwart*.³⁴ This is noteworthy since Garborg's "Ungdom" was written in direct protest to the "hanskemoral" preached by Bjørnson in *Det flager*. The main character in "Ungdom" is Anne Malene, about whom it is written, "die Sünde [glitt] von Anne Malene ab, weil sie so ohne Gewissen war."³⁵ As soon as the book came out in 1885, Garborg sent Georg Brandes a copy. Brandes' reviews of "Ungdom," in which he argued that the amorality of Anne Malene was healthy and natural, caused an enormous stir in Copenhagen and upset Bjørnson greatly.³⁶

All of Scandinavia was becoming polarized over these issues, and Marholm found herself torn between Bjørnson on one side, and Garborg and Brandes on the other. At this point in time, Marholm did not perceive Bjørnson and Garborg's positions as unbridgeable. She herself was in favor of "erhöhte Sittlichkeitsforderungen;" however, as the debates grew more heated, Bjørnson grew more and more insistent upon total celibacy for unmarried men and women. The fanaticism with which Bjørnson held to this principle drove many people, among them Marholm, over to the opposition.

In March of 1887, Marholm travelled to Paris where she mingled with the Scandinavian colony and received an audience with Bjørnson himself. As Marholm tells it, when she first arrived at Bjørnson's apartments, he was still working, so she chatted with Mrs. Bjørnson until the great man appeared. Bjørnson invited Marholm to accompany him on his daily walk through the Bois de Boulogne. Bjørnson began to talk about morality and became fervently involved in his subject: "Er hatte sich allmählig [sic] in Hitze geredet, seine Stimme bebte, seine Augen funkelten hinter Thränen, die Vorübergehenden fingen an stehen zu bleiben . . ."³⁷ Bjørnson's lecture reached a crescendo with the statement: "Und die Zeit wird kommen, wo das die natürliche Form der Beziehungen zwischen edlen Männern und Frauen sein wird, daß sie nichts Anderes wollen, als

³⁴ Laura Mohr to Theofile Zolling, 25 November 1886.

³⁵ Arne Garborg, "Jugend," trans. by Leonhard Marholm, *Die Gegenwart* 31 (1887), p. 302.

³⁶ The reception of Garborg's "Ungdom" at the time of its appearance is documented in Bredsdorff, pp. 100-117.

³⁷ Laura Marholm, *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* (Berlin: Carl Duncker, 1896), p. 140. An earlier version of this essay about Bjørnson appeared as "Björnstjerne Bjørnson," *Nord und Süd*, 63 (1892), pp. 307-332. The 1896 edition of *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* states that this meeting took place in 1886. This is evidently a misprint since the date is given correctly as 1887 in the *Nord und Süd* essay.

eine geistige Vereinigung.”³⁸ It was at this point that Marholm began to realize the extremism of Bjørnson’s position: “Ich schwieg betroffen. Diese Lehre gefiel mir nicht . . .”³⁹ When they returned to Bjørnson’s apartment, Bjørnson gave Marholm a German translation of *En hanske* and sent her on her way. Bjørnson and Marholm met each other several more times during her stay in Paris, but they never had another long talk: “Ich war doch nicht der rechte Resonanzboden für ihn.”⁴⁰

However, Marholm did meet a sympathetic spirit in the person of Jonas Lie. Marholm wrote about her impression of the Lie household to Clara Bergsøe: “Hos Lie blev jeg saa inderlig venlig modtaget og Forholdet blev rigtig varm tilsidst. Jeg takker ham mange Indtryk og Paavirkninger, hans hele Væsen er Meddeling [Meddelelse?]. Hans ungdommelige Ildfuldhed og Fruens rolige fine Indsigt lukkede mig et Stykke Verden op [sic.]”⁴¹ These positive feelings were evidently mutual. Later that summer, Lie wrote to Marholm that he feels:

. . . en stærk Trang til at tage Dem i Haanden og takke Dem nu – for meget! og sige Dem, hvor høj Pris, vi sætter paa Deres Venskab. Det er, som De siger, vi fik for lidt af hinanden, det vil sige, jeg tror, vi kunde underholdt os paa den Vis – en Dag De og en Dag jeg, – ganske længe uden at komme til den slemme Ting – Gjentakelsen.⁴²

Jonas Lie took a warm, paternal interest in Marholm’s career over the next couple of years and assisted her with introductions and advice. Of all Marholm’s

³⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 144. It ought to be mentioned in this context that Bjørnson denied this conversation ever took place. When *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter* appeared in 1895, Bjørnson was so enraged by Marholm’s portrayal of him that he wrote an angry letter to the editors of *Neue Freie Presse*, who had recently run a positive review of the book. In this letter, he insists “Eine Unterredung, wie die, welche Frau Marholm behauptet, mit mir im Bois du Boulogne gehabt zu haben, hat nie stattgefunden.” [*Neue Freie Presse*, 14 February 1895]. However, he also claims that he has never been accused of fanaticism and denies any connection with the Scandinavian women’s movement, and both of these objections are not, strictly speaking, true. I am willing to believe that Marholm has embellished upon the episode and that she has perhaps reedited their conversation to suit her purposes, but I do not believe that she has completely fabricated this encounter.

⁴¹ Laura Mohr to Clara Bergsøe, 27 July 1887. “At Lie’s I was received in such a heartfelt friendly manner and our relationship became quite warm toward the end. I have many impressions and influences to thank him for, his entire being is [communication?]. His youthful fieriness and his wife’s calm, fine insights opened up a piece of the world for me.”

⁴² Jonas Lie to Laura Mohr, 24 August 1887. “. . . a strong urge to take you by the hand and thank you now – for so much! and to tell you what a high value we set upon your friendship. It is, as you say, that we got too little of each other, that is to say, I believe, we could have entertained ourselves in this way – one day you and one day me – for rather a long time without coming to that dreadful thing – repetition.”

letters that have been preserved, her letters to Jonas Lie are the most candid and provide valuable insights into her true feelings about her life in Copenhagen.

Jonas Lie's house was a collecting point for most of the Scandinavian colony in Paris. There Marholm was able to meet Walther Runeberg, Kitty Kielland, Harriet Backer and, at last, Victoria Benedictsson. Lie introduced Marholm and Benedictsson at a party, and some awkward moments ensued: "Lose Sätze glitten hin und her, wie auf Rekognoszirung; wir hatten beide von einander gehört, und wir suchten beide hinter einander zu kommen. [. . .] Wir waren beide von den gemeinsamen Bekannten vor einander 'beurteilt' worden."⁴³ Benedictsson's image of Marholm had been distorted by her own suspicions and Georg Brandes' ridicule. Marholm's impressions of Benedictsson had been filtered through the jealousy of Gerda Brandes.

Perhaps out of curiosity and a shared sense of isolation in their surroundings, Marholm and Benedictsson saw each other quite often while they were in Paris. Before leaving the party at Lie's, Benedictsson gave Marholm her address and shortly thereafter, Marholm looked her up. Benedictsson confided in Marholm her hopes and fears for *Fru Marianne*, and how much she hoped to win the approval of Georg Brandes with her novel: "Ich bemerkte, wie er von dem Augenblicke, da er genannt worden, der Dritte in der Stube war."⁴⁴ Indirectly, Benedictsson tried to make Marholm understand her relationship to Brandes – that she longed desperately to affect and impress him, but, when he had propositioned her, she had refused.⁴⁵

In Marholm's account of her visits with Victoria Benedictsson, Benedictsson is the one who does all the confiding. Judging from Benedictsson's notes, however, Marholm did a good deal of talking herself. Marholm became Benedictsson's chief source of information about Gerda Brandes and the Brandes family history.⁴⁶ The occasions for these confidences were many. Benedictsson and Marholm saw some of the sights of Paris together. For example, Benedictsson notes in her almanac for May 6, "På morgonen innan jag var klädd kom fröken Mohr. Om jag blef glad! Ifrigt prat samt gemensam frukost i mitt lilla råttbo. Sedan träffades vi på Louvren." Again on May 24, "Långt morgonsnack med fröken Mohr på hennes rum."⁴⁷ Once the two of them returned to Copenhagen,

⁴³ Laura Marholm, "Eine von ihnen. Psychologische Skizze," *Das Magazin für Litteratur*, 61 (1892), p. 466. A different version of this sketch appears as "Das Ungesprochene" in *Zwei Frauenerlebnisse* (München: Albert Langen, 1895).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁴⁵ Compare Marholm's assessment of Benedictsson's relationship with Brandes with that of Fredrik Böök's in *Victoria Benedictsson och Georg Brandes* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1949). They correspond in many respects. It is true that when Benedictsson travelled to Paris, she was not yet Brandes' lover and had turned down his proposition.

⁴⁶ See Benedictsson, Vol. III, pp. 380–383.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 412n248. "This morning before I was dressed Miss Mohr came. Was I happy! Eager talk together with breakfast in my little rat's nest. Later we met at the Louvre." "Long morning chat with Miss Mohr in her room."

however, they each returned to their respective camps and did not associate as often. In response to an inquiry from Lie, Marholm explained: “Fru Benediktson har jeg ikke mødt. Vi sees nu og da paa Foredragene, men der er ikke nogen gensidig Tiltrækning imellem os, synes det [sic].”⁴⁸

Marholm’s trip to Paris turned out to be quite lucrative for her. Bjørnson recommended Marholm’s articles to Karl Bleibtreu, the editor of *Die Gesellschaft* and *Das Magazin für Litteratur*: “Fräulein Laura Mohr aus Riga kennt die Norwegische literatur sehr wohl. Sie ist garstig genug um sein lebens-zweck ungestört nachstreben zu können, u. klug genug um seine arbeit bescheiden anzusehen! [sic]”⁴⁹ Moreover both Bjørnson and Lie gave her permission to translate some of their novellas for the *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, and Marholm arranged for the publication in *St. Petersburger Zeitung* of Mary Ottesen’s translation of Lie’s *Kommandørens Døtre* before it appeared in the bookstores. She also wrote articles about Bjørnson and Lie in which she takes the opportunity to make further observations about the status of the sexes. In “Norwegische Dichter in Paris,” Marholm writes that she was particularly impressed by the marriages of both Bjørnson and Lie: “Lie’s Produktion ist ein inniges Zusammenarbeiten mit seiner Frau, ein getheilter Gedanke, Bjørnson’s Gattin ist sein Sekretär und Rechnungsführer – beide leben sie die reformatorischen Gedanken ihrer Werke.”⁵⁰ In these relationships, Marholm has seen her own ideal for cooperation between the sexes, which has not changed substantially since her portrayals of Gertrud Lindensør and Patkul’s sister.

In this same article, Marholm does not take direct issue with Bjørnson’s strict principles, but she gives her own definition of morality as follows: “Moral ist keine Askese, Moral ist die gesunde Entwicklung [sic] aller Kräfte auf der natürlichen Basis der menschlichen Solidarität. Was weder mir noch Dir, noch einem Dritten schadet, das hat ein Recht zu sein.”⁵¹ Bjørnson would hardly agree with this viewpoint. The two, however, might have been able to agree on this pronouncement:

Was fort soll, ist die gesellschaftliche Heuchelei, die das Mädchen zur tiefsten Unwissenheit, den jungen Mann zu eingeräumten Genüssen erzieht, die den Trieb für die Hälfte der Menschen wegleugnet, für die andere Hälfte nach Möglichkeit aufstacheln läßt. Was weg soll, ja, das ist der mosaische Begriff, daß für den Mann Alles da ist und daß das Weib für den Mann da ist. Mann und Weib sind keine, nicht mit einander zu vergleichenden [sic] Gegensätze, sie sind Menschen mit ähnlichen Anlagen und Fähigkeiten und unähnlicher Entwicklung [sic]. Das ist Alles.⁵²

⁴⁸ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 25 February 1888, “I have not met Mrs. Benediktson. We see each other now and then at the lectures, but there is no common attraction between the two of us, it appears.”

⁴⁹ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson to Karl Bleibtreu, 11 June 1887.

⁵⁰ L. Marholm, “Norwegische Dichter in Paris,” *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, 7/8 May 1887.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

This final statement, that men and women are only differentiated by upbringing, is a key assumption. Later, Marholm's readings in psychophysiology will cause her to change her mind about this point. The revision of this fundamental principle will in turn result in major changes in her writing about the sexes.

On her way back from Paris, Laura Marholm stopped in Berlin where she met Theofile Zolling and made other important contacts. Marholm was beginning to feel the wind under her wings, and she boasted to Clara Bergsøe, that now she could "hviske i stedet for at raabe for at blive trykt."⁵³ Yet at the same time that professional matters were going splendidly, Marholm felt discontent with her private surroundings.

After Berlin, Marholm returned to Riga and wrote a long letter to Clara Bergsøe in which she confided her thoughts about her life at home:

De har nok Ret, ikke at vi har Retten til at arbeide, men at vi har Retten, det anerkjendte reale Ret at leve og at leve os ud, deri ligger Kvindespørgsmaalet. Gud ved om det nogensinde vil blive anerkjendt. Det er simpelthen et Magtspørgsmaal. Det er nyttigt og fordelagtigt for Mændene at Kvinderne træder i fuld Brug af alle sine Evner, derimellem Evnen at bestemme, at raade over sig selv. Jeg kommer mere at tænke over det her, hvor Formerne, især i de dannede Kredse, ere saa conventionelle at endogsaa en Spasergang i Skoven med en ung Mand ville være yderst betænkelig, ja han vilde ikke engang vove at udsætte en Dame til saadan en fordægtig Situation. I Grunden beklager jeg det, at være vendt tilbage. Det er tabt Tid – jeg føler min egen Kedsommelighed, jeg gider ikke tænke, ikke arbeide, jeg leger de selskabelige Lege, er altid med naar det gælder at løbe, springe, tage fat; [. . .] Opholdet her er som det sidste Blik i det, man har forladt. Over Menneskene her ligger en dyb Lethargie, i Kvindene er en urolig Længsel ud af de givne Forhold, de reflecterer og snakker derom indbyrdes, ikke med Mændene. De sidder meget veltilpas sammen, spiller Kort, siger ingenting, ere vittige, naar de aarker det, og tænker paa ingenting, end Deres Levebrød. Hvad ikke hører til Faget, bliver skubbet tilside: det kommer os ikke ved. Paa mig ser de med en Blanding af Velvillie og Mistillid. Jeg er dem altfor demokratisk, men jeg kan løbe omkap med dem. Og saa løber vi omkap om Aftenen og spiser vor Middagsmad i Taushed [sic].⁵⁴

⁵³ Laura Mohr to Clara Bergsøe, 27 July 1887. "whisper instead of scream in order to be published."

⁵⁴ Ibid. "You are probably right, not that we have the right to work, but that we have the right, the acknowledged genuine right to live and to live out our potential, therein lies the woman question. God knows if it will ever be acknowledged. It is simply a question of power. It is useful and advantageous for men that women assume full use of all their abilities, including the ability to decide, to have authority over themselves. I have come to think about it more here, where the forms, especially in the educated circles, are so conventional that even a walk in the forest with a young man would be extremely suspect, yes he would not even dare to subject a lady to such a suspicious situation. Basically, I am sorry to be back. It is lost time – I feel my own boredom, I don't feel like thinking or working, I play the social games, am always there when it is a matter of running, jumping, playing tag [. . .] My stay here is like the last glance at what one has left. A deep lethargy lies over the people here, in the women there is an

Marholm's experiences abroad had made her more of a misfit in Riga than she had been when she left. Although Riga was her home, Marholm realized that she could never live there happily. Yet even her return to Copenhagen in September 1887 did not dispatch her melancholy; it only served to enhance her feeling of rootlessness. She wrote to Jonas Lie shortly after her arrival:

Idag har jeg begyndt at arbeide med svagt Hjerte, og spredte Tanker. Jeg bor i en ny Pension imellem fremmede Folk og føler mig saa ensom. I et Aars løb er jeg flyttet fire Ganger, fra Hjemmet til Kjøbenhavn, saa til Paris, saa til Riga, ud paa Landet, ind paa, og hertil i den gamle, saa, da den var optaget i den nye Pension, overalt, hvor jeg slaa Rodder maatte jeg bort. Jeg har nok kjære Venner her, men jeg er ene i mit Værelse – og saa er min Moders Længsel omkring mig, som en Stemme, der raaber, Undertrykkelserne og Lidelserne i mit Fædreland har knyttet mig nærmere til Menneskenes der, meget kalder mig tilbage, Hjemmets Varme, og Forældernes Ønske – men jeg er lamslaet i samme Øieblik, jeg lever der – jeg kan ingenting, og bliver til ingenting, alt er stængt for mig, og her sidder jeg med Tankerne matte til alt, hvad er mig fjern og kan ingenting bestille [sic].⁵⁵

Marholm quickly pulled out of this paralyzing depression, and, by October, she was engaged in several new projects. For Marholm, work was always the best therapy.

Sometime between September 28 and October 1, Marholm met Henrik Ibsen. Marholm had heard that Ibsen would be in Copenhagen and had written to Jonas Lie to ask for an introduction. Of course, the writings of Ibsen had once had a major effect upon Marholm and had helped her to break away from her life in Riga. She must have had high expectations for the meeting, but was disappointed. Marholm described her encounter with Ibsen to Jonas Lie as follows:

uneasy longing out of the given circumstances, they reflect and talk about it among themselves, not with the men. They sit very contentedly together, play cards, say nothing, are witty when they can manage it, and think about nothing but their work. What does not relate to the subject, is shoved aside: it has nothing to do with us. They look upon me with a mixture of goodwill and distrust. I am too democratic for them, but I can run the race with them. And so we run the race with each other in the evenings and eat our dinner in silence."

⁵⁵ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 17 September 1887. "Today I have begun to work with a faint heart and scattered thoughts. I live in a new pension among strange people and feel so alone. In the course of a year, I have moved four times, from home to Copenhagen, then to Paris, then to Riga, out to the country, back in again and here to the old haunts, so, because it was full in the new pension, everyplace I put down roots I must leave. Of course I have dear friends here, but I am alone in my room – and my mother's longing surrounds me like a voice calling. The oppression and suffering in my homeland have bound me closer to the people there, much calls me back, my home's warmth, and my parents' wishes – but I am paralyzed in the moment I live there – I cannot do anything, and I am not getting anywhere, everything is closed for me, and here I sit with thoughts tired of everything distant and can do nothing."

Tusind Tak for det levende Billede, De giver mig of Forfattergløden, og for de varme Ord, De har skreven til Ibsen. Det hjalp til at jeg fik en lunken Modtagelse, som var ellers mere end jeg forhaabede. Ibsen var nok saa snild paa sin Vis, men den gamle Ræv satte sig med Ryggen til Lyset, saa at jeg i min Hædersplads paa Sophaen, med al de visne Buketter foran mig, ikke fik see noget, uden en sort Plet med stridig graa Haar omkring. Det virkede meget uheldig paa min Taleevne, thi mine Øine kunde ikke lade være at fare om paa den sorte Pletten for muligen at opdage en Spor af et Ansigt derin. Men Pletten blev, som den var, uigjennemtrængelig sort og taus, og jeg snakkede løst med inderlig Gru at alt dette, jeg sagde og dens forlorne Flothed. Først da vi stod med Døren paa Klem mellem os, blev Sagen hyggelig, men da var den slut [sic.]⁵⁶

Marholm's enthusiasm for Ibsen had already begun to wane, and this meeting did nothing to revitalize her interest.

In her letter to Clara Bergsøe, Marholm claimed that she was "too democratic" for her circle in Riga. After Victoria Benedictsson's first meeting with Marholm, she wrote to Georg Brandes: "Häromdagen, på en middag hos Lies, träffade jag sammen med fröken Mohr, som tycks drifva sina socialiststudier med en feberaktig iver."⁵⁷ It is useful to note what may be meant by "socialism" in this context. Marholm later described Arne Garborg's position in the morality debates as "socialist," since he was interested in reorganizing the economic structures of society that prevented men and women from obtaining an equal footing with each other. These issues, combined with a Grundtvigian interest in the grass roots of society, comprised Marholm's variety of socialism.

Marholm's "socialist" interests and her concern with systems of education led her to study the folk high schools of Denmark in the fall of 1887. She had discussed her intentions with Jonas Lie in Paris and, armed with an introduction from Lie, she contacted Ludvig Schrøder, the director of Askov High School, about a study visit.⁵⁸ Her stay at Askov resulted in an article, "Volkshochschulen

⁵⁶ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 5 October 1887. "A thousand thanks for the living picture you gave me of an author's inspiration, and for the warm words you wrote to Ibsen. They helped to procure for me a lukewarm reception, which was otherwise more than I had hoped. Ibsen was certainly quite nice in his way, but the old fox sat with his back to the light, so that I, in my seat of honor on the sofa with all the wilted bouquets before me, could not see anything but a dark spot with wild gray hair surrounding it. That had a detrimental effect upon my powers of speech, since my eyes could not stop searching the black spot in order possibly to discover a trace of a face there. But the spot remained as it was, impenetrably black and silent and I chattered at random with inner horror at everything I said and its false glory. Only when we stood with the door ajar between us did the thing become pleasant, but then it was over."

⁵⁷ Victoria Benedictsson to Georg Brandes, 7 May 1887. Printed in Georg and Edvard Brandes, *Brevväxling med svenska och finska författare och vetenskapsmän*, vol. 2 (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1939). "The other day, at a dinner at the Lies, I met Miss Mohr, who seems to be pursuing her socialist studies with feverish zeal."

⁵⁸ Jonas Lie to Laura Mohr, 24 August 1887; Laura Mohr to Ludvig Schrøder, October 1887.

in Dänemark,” which appeared in the very first issue of Friedrich Bienemann’s *Unsere Zeit*. Marholm describes the purpose of these high schools as follows: “Wenn eine Demokratie sich emporarbeitet, nach der Herrschaft strebt und Aussicht hat, sie zu erringen, wie es gegenwärtig in Dänemark der Fall ist, dann ist ihr erstes Augenmerk darauf gerichtet, die Bildung zu demokratisieren, d. h. das allgemeine Bildungsniveau so gleichmäßig wie möglich zu machen.”⁵⁹ Marholm considered equal education to be a key prerequisite for the equality of the sexes, and she expanded this principle to include equality between social classes as well. To Marholm, it was very important that Askov High School, in addition to being Denmark’s largest educational institution for “Bauern,” was also its first coeducational school of higher learning.

As Ingvar Holm has pointed out, this article received a great deal of attention both in Denmark and Germany.⁶⁰ As a result of the article, *Nationalzeitung* in Berlin recommended to the government that they send observers to Denmark, so that the high schools there might be used as models for Prussia’s own school system. Marholm wrote to Jonas Lie, “Det var jo morsom for mig at læse mig omtalt som en Skoleauktoritet . . . [sic]”⁶¹ The mouthpiece for the folk high school movement in Denmark, *Tidens Strøm*, was grateful for the publicity that Marholm’s article brought them, but registered a dissatisfaction with the tone of the article: “Det er ikke vanskeligt at mærke, at Forf. ser ned paa Bønderne.”⁶² Indeed, despite Marholm’s sincere interest in democratizing education, she evidently found it difficult to escape some of the prejudices from her upbringing in the privileged class of Riga. This article in *Tidens Strøm*, however, brought Marholm into contact with its editor, Morten Pontoppidan, brother of Henrik Pontoppidan and director of Hjørnlunde Høiskole. They became good friends, and Marholm later lived at Hjørnlunde Høiskole for a while in June of 1888.

During all this time, the morality debates continued to rage. In the spring, various members of the Danske Kvindesamfund had endorsed Bjørnson’s standpoint on morality. In July 1887, under a pseudonym, Georg Brandes wrote a sarcastic and vicious rebuttal to the opinions of these women. This was the beginning of what Elias Bredsdorff has called “The Three-Month War.”⁶³ The arguments and counterarguments printed in *Morgonbladet* and *Politiken* grew quite heated and on occasion stooped to personal insult. Marholm describes this

⁵⁹ Leonhard Marholm, “Volkshochschulen in Dänemark,” *Unsere Zeit*, Bd. I (1888), p. 16.

⁶⁰ Ingvar Holm, *Ola Hansson. En studie i åttitalsromantik* (Malmö: Gleerups, 1957), p. 287.

⁶¹ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 25 February 1888. “It was amusing to me to see myself referred to as a school authority.”

⁶² ***, “En tydsk Forfatter om danske Bønder og Højskoler,” *Tidens Strøm. Ugeblad for Land og By*, 4, no. 18 (3 February 1888), p. 138. “It is not difficult to tell that the author looks down upon the farmers.”

⁶³ Bredsdorff, pp. 269–323.

episode as a newspaper feud between Bjørnson and Brandes “in der die beiden berühmten Männer sich ihre Ansichten über ihren verschiedenen Sittlichkeitsbegriff und ihre gegenseitige persönliche Meinung von einander mit großer Offenheit gesagt hatten.”⁶⁴ The result of these squabbles was a definitive break between Bjørnson on the one hand and both Brandes and Lie on the other.

Politically, Marholm’s position was quite difficult, since she had friends on both sides of the battlefield. Clara Bergsøe and Alvilde Prydz stood behind Bjørnson’s position, and, shortly after Marholm’s visit to Askov Høiskole, Bjørnson began his famous lecture tour there. Both Ludvig Schrøder and Morten Pontoppidan were good friends of Bjørnson, thus providing Marholm with yet another conflict of interest. On the other hand, Marholm’s personal sympathies lay with Lie, whom she kept informed about the latest turns of events in Copenhagen. Fortunately, Marholm’s friendship with Lie did not conflict with her relationship with Brandes. Marholm’s place in the Brandes salon was still very important to her professionally, but personally, she had doubts about him which she had to conceal. In addition, Marholm was a supporter of both Arne Garborg and Kitty Kielland, who also became involved in the anti-Bjørnson side of the debates. No doubt this sort of tension caused Marholm to write to Lie: “Det er ingen Glæde mere at leve i Danmark. Der har bredt sig en grænseløs Sløvhed over Alt – man gider ikke. Ikke i Politik, ikke i Litteratur, ikke i sit eget Liv. Det ligger over Folk, som Trykket, der gaaer forud en Tordenveir. Jeg finder Forskellen bare imellem ifjor og iaar er stor – men der er ogsaa noget indeni mig, som har mistet Elasticiteten [sic].”⁶⁵ It was becoming more and more difficult not to take sides, but taking sides might possibly prove disastrous for Marholm personally.

November was an especially busy month for the morality discussions. On November 17, Marholm attended Bjørnson’s lecture “Engifte og Mægtige” in Copenhagen. On the same day in Christiania, Gustav af Geijerstam gave a lecture against Bjørnson’s position. The ensuing discussion awakened more interest than Geijerstam’s lecture. Dr. Oskar Nilssen, a Norwegian gynecologist, made the pronouncement that “en af de væsentligste grunde til misæren på seksualmoralens område var, at de nordiske kvinder ikke havde nogen kønsdrift.”⁶⁶ In order to discuss further the questions raised at this meeting, Arne Garborg called for another meeting to take place on November 24. Although, for the

⁶⁴ *** [Laura Marholm], “Bjørnson als Sittlichkeitsapostel,” *Die Gegenwart*, 33 (1888), p. 101.

⁶⁵ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 6 December 1887. “It is no longer a pleasure to live in Denmark. A boundless lethargy has spread itself over everything – one attempts nothing. Not in politics, not in literature, not in one’s own life. It lies over people like the tension that goes before a thunderstorm. I find that the difference just between last year and this year is great – but there is also something in me which has lost its elasticity.”

⁶⁶ Bredsdorff, p. 364. “one of the most essential reasons for the misery in the area of sexual morality was that the Nordic women did not have a sex drive.”

record, the representative of the Norsk Kvindesagsforening at Geijerstam's lecture, Ragna Nielsen, objected to Dr. Nilsson's statement, she refused to attend Garborg's event at which Dr. Nilsson's position was to be debated. In the distortions that came forth in the newspaper coverage, the women's groups supporting Bjørnson came to be caricatured as alliances of sexless beings trying to impose their own misery on others.

Marholm's response to these events was her article "Bjørnson als Sittlichkeitsapostel," which appeared anonymously in *Die Gegenwart*. This is the only time in Marholm's career that she did not sign one of her articles. In the letter in which she presents her essay to Theofile Zolling, she refers to the article as "ziemlich starken Tobak!"⁶⁷ Although Marholm is aware that some might find the subject matter of the article indelicate, that is not the reason why she requests anonymity. Marholm is simply afraid of the consequences that taking a stand on the morality issue might have on her life in Copenhagen. Considering all of Marholm's conflicting interests, this is not surprising.

In this article, Marholm describes Bjørnson's speech as the embellishment of the quaint sentiment that one should be chaste and faithful to one's spouse with elaborate but substanceless feats of rhetoric. Moreover, Marholm accuses Bjørnson: "Er findet etwas außerordentlich Versprechendes in der einträchtigen Heuchelei, mit der die gute Gesellschaft ihre Nachtseite verbirgt, er erkennt in ihr mit Befriedigung ein zartes Schamgefühl, das die Einleitung zu etwas Besserem ist."⁶⁸ Within Marholm's vocabulary, "hypocrisy" is an extremely unflattering word. Marholm has come to see that inherent in Bjørnson's platform are the same sort of societal impositions on the conscience of the free individual that she found so oppressive in her native Riga. Bjørnson's original observation that the double standard for men and women had to be abolished eventually developed into sheer moral dogmatism. Dogma which deprives the right of the individual to make his or her own moral decisions was unacceptable to Marholm.

Marholm also describes with approval Garborg's position at the meeting in Christiania:

Arne Garborg führte als Hauptursache des polygamischen Lebens der jungen Männer die Unmöglichkeit zeitiger Heirathen und die dem Mann ausschließlich zufallende Versorgung der Familie an. Die Ehe ist ein Risiko, das Viele nicht mehr Lust hätten auf sich zu nehmen, da die Annehmlichkeiten die Lasten nicht aufwögen. Es handle sich darum, daß die Frau in ihren Selbstständigkeitsbestrebungen unterstützt und dem Mann ökonomisch so gleich wie möglich gestellt würde. Es handle sich darum, daß die juristischen Bande, die Mann und Weib an einander fesselten, das Eigenthumsrecht, das die Frau an den Mann, der Mann an die Frau habe, beiseitigt würden, die Ehe werde frei und die Scheidung werde frei. Keine andere Garantie und kein anderer Zwang

⁶⁷ Laura Mohr to Theofile Zolling, 6 December 1887.

⁶⁸ *** [Marholm], "Bjørnson als Sittlichkeitsapostel," p. 101.

als die Uebereinkunft von zwei unabhängigen Persönlichkeiten. So wüssten beide Theile, was sie von einander zu erwarten hätten, ohne daß ihre persönliche Initiative der Einmischung einer dritten Macht unterläge.⁶⁹

In this summary of Garborg's views, it is clear that Marholm places a high value on "personal initiative" and is suspicious of the intervention of "a third power," which in this context might be read as Bjørnsonian moral dogma. Marholm believes that given the appropriate economic and social prerequisites, men and women will naturally behave considerately – that is to say, morally – toward each other.

Marholm also gave an approving résumé of Kitty Kielland's input in the discussion: "Kitty Kielland, die Schwester des Dichters Alexander Kielland, schilderte in feinen und scharfen Zügen die Wirkung des Cölibats auf die Geistesfunctionen eines großen Bruchtheils der Damen der guten Gesellschaft . . ."⁷⁰ Marholm wrote to Lie of this statement, "Det var godt Psychologie og rask gjort [sic]."⁷¹ These sentiments indicate that Marholm had fallen prey to the caricatures of the women who supported Bjørnson. Marholm's ties with the organized women's movement had never been very strong, but the polarizations of the morality wars caused Marholm to distance herself from it entirely. Marholm came to think of the participants in the women's movement as dogmatic, strident, and frustrated women. This image of "die Emanzipierten" never left her.

Although Marholm avoided scandal by her anonymous authorship of "Bjørnson als Sittlichkeitsapostel," she ran into difficulties over another article she published that winter: "Ein Dichter des Weiberhasses." This was an article about August Strindberg occasioned by the performance of *Fadren* in Copenhagen. Marholm reads into *Fadren* a critique of bourgeois marriage: "Und die Ehe ohne Liebe? Sie ist ein langsamer, grausamer, strafloser Meuchelmord."⁷² Marholm finds the enmity between the sexes in the play to be grossly exaggerated, but it has sprung from a seed of reality: "Denn der Mann haßt in dem Weib die Begierde, die ihn peinigt, sein Urtheil unterjocht, seine Persönlichkeit einer anderen unterwirft[,] und die Frau haßt in dem Mann ihre Abhängigkeit, ihre widerwillige oder kaltsinnige Hingabe, ihre zertretene Phantasiewelt, ihre große Enttäuschung."⁷³ Marholm characterizes Strindberg's attitude toward women as follows: "Und für jede einzelne Unthat wird das ganze Geschlecht zur Rechenschaft gezogen. Die Frau ist nicht nur naturlos, sie ist dumm, faul, die Blut-saugerin des Mannes, verlogen, zänkisch, ohne Menschenverstand und bei alledem ist sie – und das kann ihr nie vergeben werden – unentbehrlich."⁷⁴ Consi-

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 6 December 1887. "It was good psychology and well done."

⁷² L. Marholm, "Ein Dichter des Weiberhasses," *Die Gegenwart*, 33 (1888), p. 5.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

dering that critical sentiment in Sweden and Denmark was against Strindberg because of his misogyny, Marholm's review of *Fadren* is quite understanding. Marholm admires Strindberg's genius, and although she does not share Strindberg's hatred of women, she understands it. Marholm herself viewed a certain segment of women as parasitic. For Marholm, this category was chiefly populated by the women she knew back in conservative Riga.

Marholm's mistake was to pepper the article with statements such as these: "Ein Genie an der Grenze des Wahnsinns – das ist Strindberg's Physiognomie in seinem 'Vater'"; "Denn die Handlung ist von einem kranken Geist erfunden."; "Als ihren eifrigsten Gegner und schlimmsten Feind hassen sie Strindberg [. . .] und wen die Frauen hassen, der – findet keinen Verleger."⁷⁵ On January 25, 1888, the following notice appeared in *Politiken*:

Sagsanlæg mod Smædeskrivere. Forfatteren Aug. Strindberg agter ifølge "Skånes Alleh." i Lighed med, hvad Dr. G. Brandes har gjort med "Leipz. Magaz.", at anlægge Sag mod "Die Gegenwart" for Udspreddning af falske Rygter om hans Stilling som Forfatter i Sverige og om hans Sindstilstand. Artiklen, som kaldes "Ein Dichter des Weiberhasses" skal, mener "Sk. Alleh.", være forfattet af en Frøken L. Mohr i Kjøbenhavn, som sandsynligvis ogsaa vil komme til at staa til Ansvar for sine Gærninger.⁷⁶

Marholm later wrote of this episode, "Strindberg hade ungefär ett år förut angripit mig med kannibalisk ifver på grund af en mycket oförarglig uppsats af mig öfver honom i "Gegenwart", och Georg Brandes hade med knapp nöd ryckt mig undan honom, innan han helt och hållet uppslukat mig."⁷⁷ According to Ola Hansson, Marholm had originally not intended to respond to the charges, but Brandes insisted. He wrote a response in Danish and had Marholm sign her name to it.⁷⁸ The very next day, "En Redegørelse" appeared in *Politiken*.

Ironically, even though Marholm was not the actual author, "En Redegørelse" is the only thing ever published under her real name: Laura Mohr. The major points of Marholm's defense are the following:

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 4; p. 4; p. 6.

⁷⁶ "Sagsanlæg mod Smædeskrivere," *Politiken*, 25 January 1888. "Legal proceedings against a libeller. According to 'Skånes Alleh.', the author August Strindberg intends, in the manner of what Dr. G. Brandes has done with 'Leipz. Magaz.', to press charges against 'Die Gegenwart' for spreading false rumors about his status as an author in Sweden and about his mental state. According to 'Sk. Alleh.', the article, which is entitled 'Ein Dichter des Weiberhasses', is said to have been written by a Miss L. Mohr in Copenhagen who most probably will be held accountable for her deeds."

⁷⁷ Laura Marholm, "Koster," unpublished manuscript in Lunds Universitetsbibliotek, "Strindberg had approximately a year earlier attacked me with cannibalistic fury on account of a quite harmless essay of mine about him in 'Gegenwart,' and Georg Brandes just barely tore me from his clutches before he completely devoured me."

⁷⁸ Ola Hansson, "August Strindbergs Breve til Mig fra Holte," *Tilskueren*, 23 (1912), Bd. II, p. 36.

Hvor lidet det har været min Hensigt at krænke Hr. Strindberg, fremgaar formentlig med tilstrækkelig Tydelighed af, at det er mig selv, der samtidigt med, at jeg tilsendte Hr. Strindberg den pseudonyme Artikel, i et Privatbrev opgav ham mit Navn, som jeg nu paa denne, lidet berettigede, Maade ser fremdraget for Offentligheden.

Hvad jeg i min Artikel vilde godtgøre, var den store Interesse, der knytter sig til den svenske Digers Produktion. Jeg hører til hans Beundrere, om end ikke til hans blinde eller ukritiske. Jeg har givet en omstændelig Analyse af *Faderen*, men om Hr. Strindbergs private Person har jeg ikke talt; det kunde ikke falde mig ind at sige et ondt Ord om den. Selv den ene Linje i Indledningen, som formodentlig er Aarsag til Hr. Strindbergs Vrede: "Et Geni paa Vanviddets Grænse – det er Strindbergs Fysiognomi i *Faderen*" indeholder intet om Strindberg som Privatmand og Intet, som ikke et Dusin danske Blade har sagt.⁷⁹

It is indeed understandable that Strindberg took Marholm's remarks about his sanity personally, and this was an issue about which he was rather sensitive. It is also true, however, that Marholm had sent Strindberg the article in good faith, believing that he would not find it offensive.

Strindberg did not press charges, but instead contented himself with frightening Marholm with the prospect. In fact, once Strindberg learned that Marholm's article helped to spread the reputation of *Fadren* in Germany, he changed his mind about the article completely. Shortly after this exchange in *Politiken*, Strindberg suggested to his publisher Hans Österling that they might publish Marholm's article in France to get publicity for *Fadren*: "Om vi hade pengar skulle vi sända Gegenwart till Le Figaros reklamagent och fråga hvad ett referat kostade. Tyska kan de numera i Le Figaro. Jag tror nästan Gegenwart skulle kunna tas in som kuriositet i sig sjelf, men det är så slemt för en författare att reklama sjelf."⁸⁰ Moreover, Strindberg decided to send a copy of Marholm's

⁷⁹ Laura Mohr, "En Redegørelse," *Politiken*, 26 January 1888. "How little it was my intention to offend Mr. Strindberg is clearly indicated by the fact that I myself, at the same time that I sent Mr. Strindberg a copy of the pseudonymous article, in a private letter, gave him my name, which I now see dragged before the public in this unjustified manner.

What I wanted to account for in my article was the great interest that is attached to the Swedish poet's production. I count myself as his admirer, although not a blind or uncritical one. I have made a detailed analysis of 'The Father,' but I have not spoken about Mr. Strindberg's private person; it would not occur to me to say an evil word about it. Even the one line in the introduction, which is apparently the source of Mr. Strindberg's anger: 'A genius on the borderline of insanity – that is Strindberg's physiognomy in "The Father"' contains nothing about Strindberg as a private individual and nothing that a dozen other Danish newspapers have not said."

⁸⁰ August Strindberg to Hans Österling, 5 February 1888, *August Strindbergs Brev*, Vol. 7, ed. Torsten Eklund (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1961), pp. 11–12. "If we had money we should send Gegenwart to Le Figaro's advertising agent and ask what a report would cost. They know German at Le Figaro these days. I think that Gegenwart could almost be taken as a curiosity in itself, but it is bad for an author to advertise himself."

article to Emile Zola, who had promised to write a foreword for the French translation of *Fadren*.⁸¹

There was much to keep Marholm occupied during the winter of 1887/88. *Politiken* reported in November: “Kjøbenhavn sidder til Halsen i Foredrag.”⁸² In addition to the lectures by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Gustaf af Geijerstam on morality issues, Herman Bang gave a series of lectures on modern Danish literature, and Georg Brandes lectured on Young Germany. Marholm seems to have attended most of these events. In February, Brandes gave lectures on Russia, in which, according to Marholm, “længe Strækninger af Kedsommelighed afvekle med Gnister af den mest geniale Evne til at karakterisere med faa slaaende Ord [sic].”⁸³ Marholm saw Victoria Benedictsson at these lectures, though they never exchanged many words, since Marholm was usually in the company of Gerda Brandes. In March, Marholm had occasion to act as “fredsmäklerska” between Georg and Gerda Brandes, and offered to accompany Mrs. Brandes on a trip to Berlin, so that she could “förströ sig lite.”⁸⁴ Marholm continued to attend dinner parties at the Brandes house, where a meeting with Christian Krohg, “bred, fed og glinsende glad,” made a particular impression on her. Still, Marholm wrote to Lie, “Her i Kjøbenhavn lever jeg meget stille. Jeg er ikke oplagt til Selskabelighed og ‘wer sich der Einsamkeit ergiebt, / Ach, der ist bald allein.’ Jeg omgaaes næsten udelukkende med nogle nærmere Venner og venter paa Foraaret.”⁸⁵

Spring brought with it a number of important events for Marholm. Firstly, there were the preparations for the Copenhagen Exhibition of 1888, which opened on May 18. The exhibition brought Marholm some extra income, since she was able to write about it for German newspapers. Marholm’s journalistic career is sprinkled with art criticism, although she did not seem to show much aptitude for it.

More significant, however, was Georg Brandes’ famous series of lectures on Nietzsche which took place between April 17 and May 8. Marholm seems to have been quite taken by Nietzsche, especially the concept of the will to power and Nietzsche’s critique of conventional morality. This series of lectures, which in effect introduced Nietzsche to Europe, was a final barrage aimed at Brandes’ opponents in the morality debates. Marholm’s essay on Jonas Lie which appeared at this time bears the mark of Brandes’ lectures.⁸⁶ Marholm means to

⁸¹ August Strindberg to Hans Österling, 7 February 1888, *August Strindbergs Brev*, Vol. 7, p. 12.

⁸² Notice in *Politiken*, 22 November 1887. “Copenhagen is up to its neck in lectures.”

⁸³ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 25 February 1888. “long stretches of boredom alternate with sparks of the most genial ability to characterize with a few striking words.”

⁸⁴ Benedictsson, p. 360. “peacekeeper” . . . “amuse herself a little.”

⁸⁵ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 25 February 1888. “broad, fat and glitteringly happy.” “Here in Copenhagen I live rather quietly. I am not in a mood to be social and ‘wer sich der Einsamkeit ergiebt, Ach, der ist bald allein.’ I socialize almost exclusively with a few close friends and wait for spring.”

⁸⁶ Leonhard Marholm, *Unsere Zeit*, Bd. I (1888), pp. 551–564.

portray Jonas Lie as “ein Übergangsmensch,” but her analysis does not betray any deep understanding of Nietzsche. Only after her acquaintance with Ola Hansson does Marholm seriously take the writings of Nietzsche to heart. Lie thanked Marholm for the article with kind words, though he did not seem entirely convinced by her approach: “Det er vel i meget en god Venindes Øje som ser; men Tanken blir da ikke mindre for det, og De raader over en baade rig og intelligent Pen med Farver paa Spidsen.”⁸⁷

On May 24, 1888, Marholm published a review of Ola Hansson’s *Sensitiva amorosa*, which Marholm described to Lie as “noget af det best lykkede, jeg har skreven i ‘Die Neue Freie Presse [sic].’”⁸⁸ Marholm calls the book, “ein seltener Bissen für psychologische Feinschmecker.” Marholm describes the crux of Hansson’s achievement as follows:

Nur ganz wenigen Schriftstellern, und diesen nur in guten Stunden, ist es gelungen, das Unaussprechliche mit den plumpen Zungen der Sprache zu fassen und für das geheimnißvolle Wesen der Liebe die schmiegsamen Worte zu finden. Wenige haben sie zu schildern vermocht, wie sie entsteht, formlos und ungefähr im Dunkel des Unbewußten, sich selber unbewußt über ihre Natur und ihr Dasein, despotisch, unberechenbar, mit ihrer Sehnsucht, wie mit Luftwurzeln um sich greifend, sich anhäkelnd bei einer zufälligen Berührung, anziehend und angezogen ohne Vernunft, von einem Schimmer im Blick, einem Rhythmus der Bewegung, einem Hauche des Athems, von jenen Freimaurerzeichen, mit denen sich das Unbewußte dem Unbewußten offenbart.⁸⁹

It is easy to understand what appealed to Marholm in Ola Hansson’s writing. Marholm had grown tired of the polemic literature of the morality debates which depicted love between the sexes “als Gesellschaftsglied und Herdfeuer” and “als das nützlichste und bestgezugene aller Haustiere.” Instead, Hansson depicts love “als das Unerklärliche, das sich nicht registriren und rubriciren läßt.” In Marholm’s earliest expressed interest in the psychology of women, it is precisely such ambiguous and as yet unclassifiable sensations which fascinated her most.

It is also apparent in this review that Marholm and Hansson have been reading some of the same books, in particular Paul Bourget. Ingvar Holm has conducted a thorough study of the intellectual influences which affected Hansson’s writing of *Sensitiva amorosa*, and one of the most important was Bourget.⁹⁰ Marholm analyzes Hansson’s novel in the light of Bourget and Stendhal’s *De l’amour*. The nature of Marholm’s psychological studies was bringing her

⁸⁷ Jonas Lie to Laura Mohr, 17 June 1888. “Much of it is seen through the eyes of a good friend; but the thought is not diminished because of that, and you command a pen both rich and intelligent with colors on its point.”

⁸⁸ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 14 June 1888. “one of the most successful things I have written for ‘Die Neue Freie Presse.’”

⁸⁹ L. Marholm, “Ein schwedischer Liebesdichter,” *Neue Freie Presse*, 24 May 1888.

⁹⁰ Holm, pp. 56–68.

closer to the determinism that was current in such writings at the time. In the fall of 1886, Marholm had expressed a belief that the strength of human will could overcome biological inheritance. Bourget, on the other hand, believed that people lacked such a stable character, and that at any time an individual was determined by an almost mystical interaction of heredity, upbringing, and the influences of the moment. Admitting such an irrational factor into human psychology now corresponded with Marholm's own psychological speculations.

At the time Marholm wrote her review, she had never met Ola Hansson and did not even know what he looked like, yet she makes it clear in her article that she feels an affinity with him: "Man hat kein Bild von ihnen [Ola Hansson's Gestalten], aber man fühlt sie sich nah, wie man im Dunklen die Anwesenheit eines Menschen fühlt, nicht sieht."⁹¹ In June, Marholm visited Morten Pontoppidan at Hjørunde Høiskole, and from there wrote to Jonas Lie about her plans to visit Norway. She wanted to meet Kitty Kielland and Harriet Backer there if possible, and she asked Lie for Arne Garborg's address. She also added, "Ola Hansson kunde jeg have Lyst personlig at lære at kende. [. . .] Men jeg gaaer vel næppe over Sverig hjem [sic]."⁹² Not many lines further in the letter, Marholm reflected over her own life:

Jeg er skabt til den friske freidige Kamp, til at yde Hjelp og modtage Venskab og jeg staaer ganske ene. Ved De en, som trænger til en stærk Haand og et stærkt Hjerter, saa henvis ham til mig. Min Kraft fordobles, naar jeg kan bære en anden oppe – man er jo Kvinde, man maa være noget for Andre, for at føle Livet helt. Men de som knytter sig til kræftige Kvinder er gjerne de elendigste Kluds og et Hospital at være er jeg for sund til [sic].⁹³

Clearly, the weather conditions were right for lightning to strike, and strike it did. Not long after Marholm wrote this letter, she was introduced to Ola Hansson at the house of Georg Brandes.

In Sweden, Ola Hansson had just suffered a number of professional setbacks. He was no longer a welcome contributor to *Aftonbladet*, as the result of a sympathetic review of Arne Garborg's "Ungdom." When *Sensitiva amorosa* appeared in December 1887, it was met with vicious critiques in his home country. Hansson's spirits had been bolstered somewhat by a positive review in *Politiken* written by Georg Brandes, and a friend tried to cheer him up by pointing out a very

⁹¹ Marholm, "Ein schwedischer Liebesdichter."

⁹² Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 14 June 1888. "I would like to meet Ola Hansson personally [. . .] But I will scarcely be passing through Sweden on my way home."

⁹³ Ibid. "I am made for vigorous and dauntless battles, for giving help and receiving friendship and I stand all alone. If you know of someone who longs for a strong hand and a strong heart, then send him to me. My strength doubles when I can bear another person up – one is, of course, a woman, one must be something for others in order to feel life completely. But those who ally themselves with strong women are often the most miserable wretches and I am too healthy to be a hospital."

friendly review in *Neue Freie Presse* written by an L. Marholm. Hansson had reason to be grateful to Marholm for being one of the few supportive voices raised in the defense of *Sensitiva amorosa*.

The invitation to dinner was delivered to Marholm personally by Gerda Brandes, who, with a glint in her eye, told Marholm that Ola Hansson would be there. Mrs. Brandes apparently had on other occasions tried to play matchmaker for Marholm. From the impression Marholm had received from Hansson's novel, she expected a slight, nervous sort of fellow, and was surprised to be introduced to a handsome, strapping young man. Marholm instantly became self-conscious about her own appearance: "Vacker är jag inte, ty jag är inte för ingen-ting en Mohr."⁹⁴ Soon, however, they discovered an even greater obstacle to their becoming acquainted, since they could not speak to one another: "[Er] sagte etwas auf Schwedisch, was ich nicht verstand, worauf ich etwas auf Dänisch sagte, was er nicht verstand. Unser beider Aussprache hatten wir Beide noch nie früher gehört."⁹⁵ Dinner conversation stumbled along haltingly, and, afterward, the men vanished into one salon, and the women retreated to another. Gerda Brandes tried to arrange for Hansson to walk Marholm home, but her machinations failed, which Marholm took as a sign that she had made a very bad impression on Hansson.

Contrary to all expectations, eight days later on the day Marholm was leaving for Norway, a letter arrived for her from Hansson. This was the beginning of their courtship by mail which would last for about a year. Although they could not understand each other's spoken accents, they could communicate via the written word. Unfortunately, all of these letters have been lost.

Accompanied by Hansson's letter, a copy of *Sensitiva amorosa*, and a German travelling companion, Marholm left for Christiania.⁹⁶ From there, she travelled through Valdresdal to Jøtunfjeld and then over to Gudbrandsdal where she paid Bjørnson a visit. In some respects, it seems odd that Marholm would seek out Bjørnson when she had already drifted quite far away from his viewpoints. On the other hand, perhaps she felt that it was unwise not to cultivate such an influential acquaintance. She found Bjørnson "i hans Hjems Omgivelse, i fuld Travlhed med at slaa Løgnen ihjel [sic]."⁹⁷ He was surrounded by "dänische,

⁹⁴ Marholm, "Koster." "I am not beautiful, for I am not a Moor for nothing." As Ingvar Holm has pointed out, the events surrounding Ola Hansson's meeting and courtship with Laura Mohr are clearly the inspiration for his novella "Havsfåglar," *Samlade skrifter*, v. 4, pp. 175-231 and the chapters "Ut" and "Hemma" in *Resan hem II*, *SS*, v. 7, pp. 333-401.

⁹⁵ Laura Marholm, "Die Thür geht nicht auf! Eine Erinnerung aus meinem Leben," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 25 December 1902.

⁹⁶ In all likelihood, this German travelling companion was Therese Krüger, one of Marholm's closest friends in Copenhagen.

⁹⁷ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 4/16 August 1888. "in his home environment, fully taken up with killing lies."

schwedische und finnische 'Frauensach-Frauen [sic].'⁹⁸ Marholm had begun to find Bjørnson and his enterprise ridiculous: "Es ist etwas von der Naivetät [sic] des Naturkinds in diesem Bauernkenel und Pastorensohne, die flackernde Begeisterung für allgemeine Wahrheiten, das sprunghafte Denken, rasche Vergessen und dunkle Schaffen, aus der seine Größe als Dichter und seine Umschläge und Widersprüche als Persönlichkeit entspringen. Mehr Genie als Cultur."⁹⁹

After this visit to Bjørnson, Marholm returned to Christiania, but since she had three days remaining before her ship departed, she decided to visit Arne Garborg in Kolbotten. As Marholm describes it, Arne Garborg and his wife Hulda lived with their child "in einem Blockhäuschen mitten in einer wilden Einöde."¹⁰⁰ Their home was not very accessible. The journey from Christiania entailed 15 hours by steamship, several hours by train, 3 hours by wagon and 1½ hours by rowboat. In Tønset, Marholm and her companion were warned against continuing the journey: "Man deutete uns an, daß wir in irgend einem aufgeweichten Moor für ewige Zeiten festgepflanzt bleiben könnten und legte uns nahe, daß eine Person, wie Arne Garborg, ein solches Monument doch nicht werth sei."¹⁰¹ Undaunted, the two courageously set off to meet "den modernsten Dichter Norwegens in der Verschollenheit des Hochgebirges."¹⁰²

The two women arrived to find Hulda Garborg taking a nap with her infant son and their 13-year-old housegirl washing out dirty diapers. Garborg had rowed off to go fishing with Ivar Mortensen, a "radical theologian" who lived as a hermit in an even more remote dwelling dubbed "the North Pole." Garborg's young wife scraped together some refreshments for her guests. Hulda Garborg remembered later that Marholm "var da så optaget af Ola Hanssons bog 'Sensitiva amorosa', som netop var udkommet, at hun selv leende sa, at hun reiste omkring og snakket om Ola H. 'til alle som vil høre på det.'"¹⁰³ The decision was reached to row across the water to where Garborg could be found. At the North Pole, Garborg cooked a fish he had just caught for the two ladies, which they were obliged to eat with penknives. This repast was enjoyed in relative silence, and shortly after their primitive supper, Marholm left her copy of *Sensitiva amorosa* with Garborg and departed. In a letter to P. M. G. Rosenkrantz Johnsen,

⁹⁸ Marholm, "Björnstjerne Björnson," p. 319.

⁹⁹ Leonhard Marholm, "Norwegische Landschaften und Profile," *Unsere Zeit*, Bd. II (1889), p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰¹ L. Marholm, "Ein Gesellschaftsreformer auf dem Hochgebirge," *Vossische Zeitung*, Sonntag-Beilage, No.s 12 & 13, 24/31 March 1888.

¹⁰² Marholm, "Norwegische Landschaften und Profile," p. 16.

¹⁰³ Hulda Garborg, *Dagbok 1903–1914*, eds. Karen Grude Koht and Rolv Thesen (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1962), p. 51. "was then so preoccupied with Ola Hansson's book 'Sensitiva amorosa' which had just come out, that she herself said, laughing, that she was traveling around and talking about Ola H. 'to everyone who would listen to it.'"

Garborg had this to say about the encounter: "Det var Fanden til Visit; men de morede sig, tror jeg."¹⁰⁴ In a letter to Lie, Marholm summed up the escapade: "Arne Garborg er en Barnepige og har den nydeligste Kone. Det var kedeligt, jeg ikke kom rigtig i Snak med ham – jeg kunde bare blive en Times Tid. Men den jeg syntes best om, var Ivar Mortenson, den radikale Theolog [sic]."¹⁰⁵

Just before Marholm was to leave Christiania for Riga, she read in the papers about Victoria Benedictsson's suicide. Sometime during the night of the 22nd of July, Benedictsson had slit her own throat with a shaving razor. Earlier in the spring, on March 27th, Benedictsson had quite unexpectedly paid Marholm a visit.¹⁰⁶ They had not actually spoken to each other since they were together in Paris, and Marholm, though surprised, was glad to see her:

Sie war mir nie so sympathisch gewesen wie jetzt. Aus ihrem Innern klang es herauf wie ein tiefer reiner Glockenton. Einsilbige Bemerkungen fielen über unser Leben während des Winters. Wir wußten beide von einander, daß wir mehr verbargen, als wir erzählten, aber das störte uns nicht. Sie hatte ihre Erlebnisse gehabt, ich die meinen – wir hatten eigentlich einfach keine Zeit für einander übrig gehabt und kein Interesse.¹⁰⁷

However, when Marholm returned her visit a few days later, she found Benedictsson in a different mood. Benedictsson allowed Marholm to read a letter in which it became clear that she had been contemplating suicide. Marholm was taken off-guard and did not know what to say or do. They were interrupted by the arrival of Georg Brandes. Marholm excused herself and left.

Benedictsson's death made a great impact on Marholm, and she later tried several times in essays and fiction to understand it.¹⁰⁸ In part, like many friends of suicides, she may have been plagued by the thought that she might have prevented it. In addition, Benedictsson's death was particularly disturbing to Marholm, since although Benedictsson had found the great love that Marholm had romanticized in *Gertrud Lindenstern* and *Frau Marianne*, it had killed her. Throughout the years, Marholm tried out a number of explanations for Benedictsson's action, but the immediate reaction she described to Jonas Lie was the following:

¹⁰⁴ Arne Garborg, *Mogning og manndom. Brev*, eds. Johannes A. Dale and Rolv Thesen (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1954.), p. 199, "It was a hell of a visit; but they enjoyed themselves, I think."

¹⁰⁵ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 4/16 August 1888. "Arne Garborg is a nanny and has the most delightful wife. It was unfortunate that I did not really get to talk to him – I could only stay for an hour. The one I liked best was Ivar Mortenson, the radical theologian."

¹⁰⁶ Compare the entry in Benedictsson's almanac, Benedictsson, p. 421n107 with Marholm's account in "Eine von ihnen," p. 486.

¹⁰⁷ Marholm, "Eine von ihnen," p. 486.

¹⁰⁸ "Eine von ihnen," "Das Ungesprochene" in *Zwei Frauenerlebnisse*; and the play *Karla Bührung* all deal with Benedictsson's suicide.

Og saa – midt op i alle disse Indtryks Mangfoldighed – læste jeg om Fru Benediktsons freidige Død. Jeg kom ikke rigtig frem med hende i Livet – det stod en Del Bagnak imellem hende og mig – hun havde søgt mig en par Gange, men jeg manglede Tillid. Nu voxede hendes Skikkelse frem med hendes Væsens kraftige Linier – alt det Smaalige forsvand – hun havde magtet at dø – en skrækkelig, lidenskabelig, en Selvødelæggelsens Død – men en modig Daad. Hun maa have følt sig ensom, haabløs, fortvivlet, og hun var for stolt at leve under andre Krav end hendes Naturs Krav. Og hendes Natur krævede et fuld Liv, som ikke er givet til Nogen [sic.]¹⁰⁹

She also confided to Lie that her impressions in Norway became too much for her, so when she returned to Riga, she undertook a “hemlig Saltekur” (secret saltwater cure).

As had become her habit, after spending the summer in Riga, Marholm returned to Copenhagen in the fall. Marholm and Hansson corresponded regularly, and, although we cannot follow their postal courtship directly, aspects of it are reflected in Marholm’s correspondence with Arne Garborg which picked up its pace dramatically after her visit to Kolbotten. During the fall and winter, every letter between Marholm and Garborg contains a reference to Ola Hansson. Of course, Garborg is unaware that they are discussing Marholm’s future husband, so his reactions are quite frank.

During the winter and spring, Marholm provided Garborg with a steady stream of reading material, much of which had been written by Hansson. Garborg always has some appreciative words to say, but it is clear that he does not share the same enthusiasm as Marholm. Of his reaction to *Sensitiva amorosa*, Garborg writes, “Den greb mig stærkt, omtrent som en god Skildring fra et Galehus.”¹¹⁰ Marholm does not quite agree with this: “Jeg tror at Ola Hansson bare har skildret sig selv og sig selv om og om igjen i disse Smaaskitser. Han mangler vist Oplevelser, og saa fylder han nok Emner han bemægtiger sig med hans eget Følelsesliv [sic].”¹¹¹ She also reports that he has written a new collection of sto-

¹⁰⁹ Laura Mohr to Jonas Lie, 4/16 August 1888. “And so – in the midst of all of these manifold impressions – I read about Mrs. Benediktson’s brave death. I could not really relate to her in life – a good bit of gossip stood between us – she had sought me out a few times, but I lacked trust. Now her figure grew forth along the powerful lines of her being – everything trivial disappeared – she had the power to die – a frightening, passionate, self-obliterating death – but a courageous deed. She must have felt lonely, hopeless, despairing and she was too proud to live under any other demands than the demands of her own nature. And her nature demanded a full life, which is not given to anyone.”

¹¹⁰ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 3 October 1888. “It affected me deeply, somewhat like a good depiction of an insane asylum.”

¹¹¹ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 17 October 1888. “since I believe that Ola Hansson has simply depicted himself again and again in these small sketches. He is probably lacking experiences, and so he probably fills in the topics he seizes upon with his own emotional life.”

ries, *Parias*, “hvori han prøver at skildre Forbryderens Utilregnelighed. Det Lovbundne i det saakaldte Umoralske. Han har bare havt at disponere over yderst tørre og uheldige Emner, men ogsaa i dette Arbeid ere de Følelsene, som sænker sig ned i det Ubeviste, med den deterministiske Anelses Sikkerhed [sic].”¹¹² She then writes that she has promised to translate *Parias* for Hansson, but first she intends to read Cesare Lombroso’s studies of criminal psychology, so that she can steep herself in the subject.

Marholm’s reading of Lombroso’s *Der Verbrecher* had a profound effect upon her. Lombroso’s theories about criminal behavior were very closely tied to physiology. He believed that one could detect criminal tendencies from physiognomy. His theories are physiologically deterministic in the extreme. Lombroso helped Marholm to complete her 180-degree turn from the position that heredity can be overcome by will to her new belief that biology is destiny.¹¹³

Marholm had already had Garborg read Hansson’s essay on Bourget, when she asked Garborg if he would be interested in reading Lombroso’s book, and Garborg responded affirmatively, “Nervefysiologin er jo Fremtidens Psychologi, og den vil ikke blot ha Betydning for evt. religiøse (‘moralske’) Samfundsarbejder, men jeg har en uudslukkelig Overtro paa, at den vil lære os at forstaa en hel Del af det, som nu gjælder for Metafysik.”¹¹⁴ Marholm is pleased by Garborg’s interest and offers to send him *Revue de l’Hypnotisme* and works by the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot as well. She also writes, “Jeg forventer ogsaa en Del Forklaringer over det Mystiske i Naturen fra denne Side – men dermed bliver dog det Mystiske selv ikke gennemsigtig [sic].”¹¹⁵ Despite her interest in scientific explanation, Marholm still wants to leave room for the irrational.

¹¹² Ibid. “in which he tries to portray the unpredictability of the criminal. That which is bound by laws in the so-called immoral. He has only dealt with extremely dry and unlucky subjects, but also in this work are feelings which sink down into the unconscious, with the sureness of deterministic intuition.”

¹¹³ The close association of behavior with physiology was current in the scientific community for at least the next seven years, the time in which Sigmund Freud received his medical training. In 1896, Freud wrote to his mentor Wilhelm Fleiß that he hoped to find a physiological foundation for behavior, so he could cease to explain things psychologically. As his biographer, Ernest Jones, writes, “It was a long time before Freud brought himself to dispense with the physiological principles of his youth. In a sense he never did entirely, for we shall see that a good deal of his later psychology was modelled on them.” Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud. Life and Work*, Vol. I (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 329.

¹¹⁴ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 13 November 1888. “Nerve physiology is the psychology of the future, and it will not only have importance for subsequent religious (‘moral’) social workers, but I have an unquenchable confidence that it will teach us to understand quite a lot of that which is now considered metaphysics.”

¹¹⁵ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 18 November 1888. “I also expect a lot of explanations about the mystical in nature from this front – but even so, the mystical itself will not become transparent.”

Garborg also had a strong reaction to Lombroso's *Der Verbrecher* which he describes in *Kolbotnbrev*. As Garborg reads Lombroso's description of the criminal type, to his horror, he begins to recognize himself:

. . . ich liege und lese mit Grauen und es zittert mir im Brustkasten. Vieles davon kann auf mich passen. Ich bin häßlich, ich habe wenig und dünnen Bart; es ist böses Erbteil in meinem Geschlecht; Leichtsinn und Lockerheit war auch genug da und die Art ist in mir; – ich habe einmal einen Mann um zwei Kronen betrogen, mit Bewusstsein und Absicht . . . wie ich recht mitten drin bin, merke ich, daß ich an der einen Wade fast gar kein Gefühl in der Haut habe . . . ! Entsetzen richtet sich in mir auf, das Herz bleibt stehen; ich fühle das andere Bein . . . ja, weiß Gott! . . . ich fühle beide Beine; kneife, kratze, schramme . . . ja! Entsetzen schlägt über mir zusammen wie ein grünes Meer; Zittern erfaßt mich; der Wille ist machtlos; jetzt kommt es . . . jetzt . . . Ich wälze mich aus dem Bett, werfe die Kleider über; hinaus; hinein in die Altstube; nicht länger allein sein . . . Cognac trinken.¹¹⁶

Deeply shaken, Garborg sits by the fire and has his wife read Voltaire to him until he calms down. To Marholm, Garborg simply wrote, “denne skrækkelige Lombroso vil jeg ikke tale om; læste jeg for meget ad Gangen af ham, blev jeg syg og daarlig.”¹¹⁷

Marholm's studies of Hansson's *Parias* and Lombroso's *Der Verbrecher* resulted in her article “Zwangsvorstellungen in der Dichtung,” which appeared in December 1888. This article is less about *Parias* than her new understanding of the task of literature. Marholm describes Hansson's enterprise in *Parias* as “wie ein Schiff auf hoher See, dessen Kapitän seinen Kurs auf eine unbekannte Küste zuhält, die noch Keiner aufgesegelt, aber er hat berechnet, wo sie liegen muß und sie fängt an wie ein dunkler, schwebender Streifen sich über dem Wasser abzuzeichnen.”¹¹⁸ Both the poet and a scientist like Lombroso are engaged in exploring uncharted psychological territory, but “Der erste, der von ihm Besitz ergreift, dürfte kraft seiner schöpferischen Intuition der Dichter sein.”¹¹⁹ Hansson had not read *Der Verbrecher* when he wrote *Parias* and Marholm was most impressed by the fact that Hansson the poet had reached many of the same conclusions in *Parias* that Lombroso had attained through laborious scientific research.

But Marholm does not want literature to follow this path into “eine Sackgasse des Determinismus,” as she feels has been the case with Bourget and Zola in

¹¹⁶ Arne Garborg, “Kolbotten. Ein Stück Dichterleben in Norwegen,” trans. Laura Marholm, *Das Magazin für Litteratur*, 62 (1893), p. 580.

¹¹⁷ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 7 March 1889. “I do not want to talk about that dreadful Lombroso; if I read too much of him at a time, I became ill and queasy.”

¹¹⁸ L. Marholm, “Zwangsvorstellungen in der Dichtung,” *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, 15/16 December 1888.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

France. Marholm finds herself in an epoch in decay, of decadence, and looks for a means to reverse the decline of civilization. The purpose of literature should no longer be the Brandesian debate of social conditions, but rather “die Menschen mit sich selbst bekannt zu machen,” because “Die Kenntniß [sic] der Krankheitserscheinungen ist die Bedingung zur Feststellung des Wesens der Gesundheit.”¹²⁰ Marholm ends the article on a Nietzschean note and claims that the greatest and most difficult of all artistic tasks is “uns den gesunden Menschen zu schildern in seiner stolzen Lebensbejahung, in der heiteren Sicherheit noch ungedachter Lebensformen.”¹²¹

In all of these points, Marholm's thoughts were completely in concert with Hansson's during this same period. At about this same time, Ola Hansson began his correspondence with Strindberg, which was sparked by Strindberg's interest in Hansson's *Parias*. This rich correspondence is filled with speculation about psychology, Nietzsche, and the relationship between literature and science.¹²² Under the influences of both Strindberg and Marholm, Hansson submerged himself in studies of Nietzsche and psychology and began applying his conclusions to literature. The result was Hansson's series of essays against naturalism which introduced him to Germany.¹²³

An episode that plays itself out in Marholm's correspondence with Garborg during the winter of 1888 sheds some interesting light on Marholm's position in the Brandes household, as well as her talents of diplomacy and her understanding of Brandes' character. In a letter from October 21, 1888, Garborg discusses his publishing problems, and, in passing, wishes that he could have Brandes' support. He remarks that he has not heard from Brandes in a while, and probably ought to write to him. Marholm saw this as an opportunity to use her influence in Brandes' circle to help Garborg. In her response, she writes, “Jeg opdigtet en Hilsen af Dem til Georg Brandes, og fortalte ham at De havde i Sinde at skrive ham til. Jeg er der tidt, saa det manglede ikke paa Leilighed at tale om det [sic].”¹²⁴ She also warns Garborg that Brandes suspects him of being disloyal.

Marholm has confirmed something that Garborg was afraid of, and he explains in dismay that he did not maintain contact with Brandes since he was concerned with appearing as an insignificant figure courting the favor of a more important one. “Efter hvad De meddeler mig kommer jeg fremdeles ikke til at skrive til ham, hvor uheldigt det nu kan være for mig at savne den store Kritikers

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² See *August Strindbergs och Ola Hanssons Brevväxling 1888–1892* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1938.)

¹²³ Susan Brantly, “Creating an Alternative to Naturalism: Ola Hansson's Assimilation of Nietzsche,” *Orbis Litterarum*, 42 (1987), pp. 44–57.

¹²⁴ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 3 November 1888. “I made up a greeting from you to Georg Brandes and I told him you intended to write him. I am there constantly, so I did not lack for opportunities to mention it.”

Bevaagenhed.”¹²⁵ Marholm considers this a sad state of affairs and devises a clever plan to reconcile the two without either one losing face. Brandes has been complaining lately that no one has bothered to review his books on Poland and Russia. Marholm suggests to Garborg that he review these books, since it would return him to Brandes’ good graces, but could not be construed by Brandes as courting favor: “Hør nu Herr Arne Garborg, sid nu ned, læs Bøgerne og skriv Anmeldelsen, saa er Sagen i Orden – De vil have Fornøjelse af det og De skal ikke miste denne Mands Venskab. Husk paa at Manden sidder nu næsten uden Resonanz og at det er haardt for ham . . .”¹²⁶

Garborg thanks her for her concern and agrees to go along with her scheme: “Jeg synes ogsaa det er kjedeligt og meningsløst, at man skal gaa og være Uvenner, naar der egentlig sletikke er nogen Grund til det; det er nok af dem, man kan være Uvenner med *med Grund*.”¹²⁷ In her reply, Marholm promises to send Garborg the books: “Om De saa vil læse og anmelde dem, det bryder jeg mig ikke saa farlig om, bare at jeg har gjort til Brandes en Hentyding om at jeg vidste De havde saadant noget i Sindet. Han smilte sit søde djævelske Smil og saa saa rar ud, som en Kat, man klør i Nakkehaaret [sic].”¹²⁸ In the end, however, Marholm’s master plan came to naught because Garborg decided not to review the books, since he felt himself to be unqualified for the task.

During the spring of 1889, Strindberg’s *Fröken Julie* premièred in Copenhagen with Siri von Essen in the leading role. Marholm liked the play, but did not think much of the production, and especially Siri’s acting: “Disse Geniernes Koner, det er noget man aldrig faaer Ende paa at forbause sig over [sic].”¹²⁹ Georg Brandes was touring Sweden and Norway with lectures on Heine and Goethe. Marholm’s correspondence with Hansson still mostly dealt with intellectual rather than personal matters. In one letter, Hansson described the type of woman he could live with, and Marholm thought she saw herself in the portrait, but still the ice had not yet been broken.

¹²⁵ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 13 November 1888. “After what you have told me, I will still not write to him, no matter how detrimental it can be for me to lose the great critic’s favor.”

¹²⁶ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 18 November 1888. “Now listen, Mr. Arne Garborg, sit down, read the books and write a review, and then everything will be fine – You will enjoy it and you will not lose that man’s friendship. Remember that the man sits now almost without resonance and that it is difficult for him.”

¹²⁷ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 7 December 1888. “I also think that it is unfortunate and meaningless to go about being enemies when there is absolutely no reason for it; there are enough people one can be enemies with *with reason*.”

¹²⁸ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 19 December 1888. “Whether or not you read and review them does not worry me so terribly much, as long as I have indicated to Brandes that I know you have some such thing in mind. He smiled his sweet demonic smile and looked so friendly, like a cat being scratched on the neck.”

¹²⁹ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 15 March 1889. “One never ceases to be amazed at these wives of geniuses.”

In March, Marholm published two articles, one about Arne Garborg and one about the journals of Marie Bashkirtseff. In her article about Garborg, she characterized him as “der Dichter des gesunden Menschenverstandes und guten Herzens.”¹³⁰ Garborg was enthusiastic about Marholm’s article: “Jeg er virkelig lykkelig. De ved -: den Slags Lykke, man føler, naar man for en Gangs Skyld ser sig godt forstaaet og forklaret. [. . .] Der er to Ord, jeg aldrig skal glemme Dem: ‘Humor’ og ‘Wehmuth’. De er den første, som har sagt det – og det er dog det, jeg selv synes er det mest mærkværdige ved mit Forfatterskab.”¹³¹

Along with this article, Marholm had also sent Garborg “Das Tagebuch einer Künstlerin.” This article signals a new understanding of women for Marholm which will dominate her writing for the next seven years. A revised version of this essay will appear in *Das Buch der Frauen* in 1895, the culmination of this era in her life. The article is based on the journals that were published after Marie Bashkirtseff’s death at age 23. Bashkirtseff died young, before she was able to find satisfaction in life, Marholm explains, and she blames Bashkirtseff’s upbringing for putting her on the wrong track:

Aller Stolz, alle Delicatesse, alle Keuschheit des Weibes werden von der Erziehung in den Dienst des Decorums genommen, das Decorum wird ihm zur Natur, es tritt unter die Schwelle des Bewußtseins, es wird das Unbewußte. Dadurch wird das Weib nicht objectiv perfectibel, nur subjectiv auflösbar; es bröckelt ab, es kränkelt, es hört auf, Naturwesen und damit es selbst zu sein: schlechte Künstlerinnen, schlechte Berufsdamen, eventuell schlechte Frauen und Mütter.¹³²

In other words, the interdictions of society become so ingrained in the psyches of young women that these inhibitions become integrated into their very nature, and, thereby, women become deprived of their own individual natures. For such women, self-realization becomes impossible because their true nature has been confined in a straightjacket of moral convention. Even should economic and social restrictions be set aside, these internalized prohibitions would hamper them. To speak with Freud, an anachronism which is difficult to avoid, these socially conditioned repressions result in physical illness and hysteria.

In subsequent years, Marholm will spend a great deal of effort trying to describe healthy feminine nature. In her article about *Parias*, she wrote that identifying illness is a prerequisite for defining health. In her article about Marie Bashkirtseff, as in her later psychological sketches of women, Marholm seeks to point

¹³⁰ Marholm, “Ein Gesellschaftsreformer auf dem Hochgebirge.”

¹³¹ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 17 April 1889. “I am really happy. You know – that sort of happiness one feels when for once one sees oneself well understood and explained. [. . .] There are two words, for which I will never forget you: ‘Humor’ and ‘Wehmuth.’ You are the first who has said it – and it is that which I myself consider to be the most exceptional thing about my authorship.”

¹³² L. Marholm, “Das Tagebuch einer Künstlerin,” *Neue Freie Presse*, 12 March 1889.

out the “unnatural” aspects of her life in order to point toward the “natural.” It is already too late for Marie Bashkirtseff when she meets Bastien-Lepage, the man who might have been able to help her overcome her frustrated existence: “Die Künstlerin hat ihren Meister, das Weib den Mann gefunden, dem es sich unterwirft.”¹³³ Marholm believed that it was the nature of woman to live for the sake of someone else; in almost all cases, this means a man for whom they can have respect and who will cause them to cultivate their talents and strengths. Ideal mates will complement each other erotically and intellectually. Here Marholm reverts to her old ideal of the Gertrud Lindensstern type. One should also bear in mind that at this time, Marholm suspected that, at age 34, she had found her own ideal mate.

Garborg’s response to Marholm’s essay is instructive:

Marie Baschkirtzev er noget for mig. Hennes Historie synes at stemme godt med de Formodninger, jeg har gjort mig om det erotiske Betydning i Kvindens Liv, og den har desuden givet Dem Anledning til Bemærkninger om Kvindens Perfektibilitet, som er lærerige.

Det er altfor let at gjøre Rabalder à la Strindberg over dette Spørsmål; men den Vei fører intetsteds. Han bringer Evolutionslærens Teorier om den Stærkeres Ret paa en Maade som om han mente, at Mænd og Kvinder var to Racer; de er nu imidlertid én, og jo klarere dette fastholdes, des mere Mening kan der bli i Diskussionen. Jeg er sikker paa, at to helt udviklede Individuer – en helt og frit mandig udviklet Mand og en helt og frit kvindelig udviklet Kvinde – vil kunne forstaa hinanden lettere end to *ulige* udviklede – to, der staar paa hver sit Udviklingstrin, foruden at de altsaa ogsaa er forskjellig kjønsligt bestemte –; og hvad Spørsmålet om “Over- og Underordning” angaar, vil vel dette praktisk løse sig saaledes, at *den* i Forholdet – han eller hun –, der er den aandeligt overlegne, vil bli primus (prima) inter pares.¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Arne Garborg to Laura Mohr, 17 April 1889; postscript dated 19 April 1889. “Marie Baschkirtzev means something to me. Her story seems to coincide well with the assumptions I have made about the meaning of the erotic in a woman’s life, and furthermore, it has given you the occasion to make remarks about the perfectibility of women which are instructive.

It is all too easy to make a commotion à la Strindberg over this question; but that road leads nowhere. He brings in evolutionary theories about the right of the stronger as though he thought that men and women were two races; they are in the meantime one, and the more clearly that is grasped, the more point there can be in discussion. I am certain that two completely developed individuals – a completely and freely masculinely developed man and a completely and freely femininely developed woman – will be able to understand each other more easily than two dissimilarly developed individuals – two individuals, who stand upon their respective rungs of development, in addition to being differently sexually determined –; and with regard to the question of ‘domination and subordination,’ that will solve itself practically, in that the one in the relationship – he or she – who is the spiritually superior will be primus (prima) inter pares.”

Garborg has shown himself to be less traditional than Marholm in that he can envision a relationship in which the woman is the spiritual superior.

Furthermore, Garborg brings up the problem of the equality of men and women. A strong belief in physiological determinism tends to lead to the positing of immutable intellectual and psychological differences between the sexes, since such physiological differences can be empirically proven. Garborg chooses to stress the similarities, just as Marholm did two years earlier when she wrote: "Mann und Weib sind keine, nicht mit einander zu vergleichenden [sic] Gegensätze, sie sind Menschen mit ähnlichen Anlagen und Fähigkeiten und unähnlicher Entwicklung [sic]."¹³⁵ Marholm's newfound interest in psycho-physiology will lead her to emphasize the differences between the sexes, or more precisely, that which is peculiarly feminine. In this, the evolution of Marholm's thought runs parallel to that of Ellen Key. The question of "likhet" versus "egenart" has a long history, and the consequences of the elegant arguments of both Marholm and Ellen Key on behalf of "egenart" can be felt even into the present day.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Marholm would certainly agree with Garborg that a freely developed man and woman would stand a much better chance of understanding each other than the men and women who have grown up within the present system.

Sometime around May 1889, Marholm received her first love letter from Hansson. They had not seen each other since the dinner almost a year earlier at Brandes' house. Hansson suggested that they meet for a vacation on the island of Koster. Marholm wanted to bring a female friend with her, but Hansson objected, since he wanted to see her alone: "Jag var villig dertill, fastän mina föräldrar skrefve mig onda bref över min afsigt att resa dit allena."¹³⁷ When Marholm's ship arrived in Gothenburg, she had difficulty recognizing Hansson on the shore, since she had only seen him once before. Hansson was accompanied by his brother Nils, who was in a bad humor and only served to create a stifling atmosphere. Hansson and Marholm spent three weeks on Koster chaperoned by

¹³⁵ Marholm, "Norwegische Dichter in Paris."

¹³⁶ Harriet Clayhills, "'Likhet' eller 'egenart'? Ett tema i feministisk debatt i Sverige under 1900-talet," *Kvinnornas Litteraturhistoria, Del 2*, eds. Ingrid Holmqvist and Ebba Witt-Brattström (Malmö: Författarförlaget, 1983), pp. 11-33.

¹³⁷ Marholm, "Koster." "I was willing, although my parents wrote me dire letters about my intention to travel there alone." This essay was written at the beginning of 1904, and Marholm meant it to be published in *Göteborgs Handelstidning*. [See Laura Hansson to Henrik Hedlund, 19 December 1903]. One should bear in mind that Ola Hansson is responsible for the translation, so he has had an opportunity to do some editing. Judging from remarks made by Ola Hansson in "Erinnerungen an August Strindberg," *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, Jg. 23 (1912), Bd. 4, p. 1547 and p. 1724, in conjunction with Laura Marholm's correspondence with Fritz Mauthner, Marholm wanted to bring Therese Krüger with her.

Nils. They still had not overcome their language difficulties either: “Varken hon eller jag kände oss fria och naturliga.”¹³⁸

On the night before Marholm was to leave, Hansson came to Marholm’s room and asked her what her future plans were. Marholm did not feel she had anything important ahead of her: “Företaga mig? Hvad kan ett blad, som drifves af vinden företaga sig? Det måste dansa, så länge som den drifver det, och på en gång ser man det icke mer, och ingen frågar efter hvar det blifit af.”¹³⁹ The two did not want to part, so they decided to travel to Norway together. Hansson’s brother Nils still tagged along until they decided to visit Arne Garborg. Nils did not want to associate himself with Garborg, because, ever since the morality debates, Garborg had become social poison in some circles. Thus, by threatening him with the prospect of meeting Garborg, Hansson and Marholm were able to rid themselves of their unwanted chaperon. During the long trip up to Garborg, they were finally able to get acquainted.

The result of this journey was that Hansson and Marholm decided that they wanted to stay together, though they did not yet consummate their relationship: “Jag vill icke räkna detta som min förtjenst, jeg hade den allrabästa vilja, men jeg var ju oerfaren, och Ola tycktes vilja låta mig återvända oförändrad till mina för att inhemta deras samtycke. Till hvad, det var oss mindre klart; de fria förbindelserna lågo på den tiden i luften och jag ville icke veta af något äktenskap, då jag ju var et par år äldre än han.”¹⁴⁰ At the time of their visit to Koster, Marholm was 35 and Hansson was 29. Marholm describes her return to Riga with the telling word “triumftåg” (triumphal procession). Marholm could not help feeling a sense of triumph in the face of her parents, who had believed she was too homely to ever marry. Although Marholm and Hansson had not exactly decided to marry, Marholm’s parents insisted that they do so: “Fadern hade blott en enda liten anmärkning at göra: vi skulle gifta oss – på vilket sätt vi ville. Icke kyrkligt, om vi icke tyckte om det, och icke under släktens uppsikt, om detta icke behagade oss, men en liten smula gifta skulle vi vara, annars fick hon inga pengar.”¹⁴¹ Once again, Marholm’s father used the only tool at his disposal to get his

¹³⁸ Ola Hansson, *Ur minnet och dagboken*, ed. Emy Ek (Stockholm: Tidens Förlag, 1926). “Neither she nor I felt free and natural.”

¹³⁹ Marholm, “Koster.” “Undertake? What can a leaf driven by the wind undertake? It must dance as long as it is driven and then suddenly one cannot see it anymore and no one asks what became of it.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. “I cannot take credit for that, I was quite willing, but I was inexperienced and Ola seemed to want to allow me to return unchanged to my parents in order to obtain their approval. For what, that was less clear to us; free relationships lay in the air at the time and I did not want to hear of marriage, since I was a few years older than he.”

¹⁴¹ Hansson, *Ur minnet og dagboken*, pp. 113–114. “Her father had just one little comment to make: we should get married – in any way we wanted. Not in a church, if we did not want to, and not under the relatives’ supervision, if that did not please us, but we had to be just a tiny bit married or else she would not get any money.”

way. Marholm and Hansson were married on September 17, 1889, in a civil ceremony with Viggo Pingel and Rev. Henning Jensen as witnesses.

If Marholm's marriage to Hansson signaled a new era in her life, her falling out with Brandes signified the end of the old. The circumstances surrounding Marholm's break with Brandes are well-known in the secondary literature, since their quarrel played a role in the reception of Nietzsche in Germany.¹⁴² In July, Brandes had sent Marholm his essay on Nietzsche, "Aristokratisk Radikalisme," to be translated into German. The translation of "Aristokratisk Radikalisme" was delayed, and by November, Brandes was becoming very impatient. The tone of Brandes' letters to Marholm grows more and more hostile. He becomes particularly irritated when Ola Hansson publishes an essay on Nietzsche in the November issue of *Unsere Zeit*: "Det var mig ikke kjær, at en anden Afhandling kom frem i Tyskland før min."¹⁴³ He later accused Marholm of having deliberately withheld his essay on Nietzsche, so that Ola Hansson could publish his essay first.

Of course, Marholm had a great deal on her mind during these months, but Brandes' accusation is probably justified. Marholm's first priority had become Ola Hansson's best interests. When one recalls that Marholm's feminine ideal was Gertrud Lindens, who sacrificed life and limb for her beloved, one can only conclude that leaving Brandes' essay unattended on her desk would have been a small matter to Marholm. Moreover, she seemed to expect Brandes to understand her position and may have explained as much to him, which prompted the protest: "Det falder mig naturligvis ikke ind at jeg skulde gaa forud for Deres Mand."¹⁴⁴ The fact of the matter was that Brandes did expect Marholm to translate his essay first and accused her of subterfuge.

The decay of their relationship is easy to follow in their correspondence. Brandes offends Marholm by correcting not only her Danish, but her German. Brandes' disposition toward Marholm is further soured by the rumor that Marholm has been making fun of him behind his back. This accusation is not at all improbable either, in the light of comments made by Marholm about Brandes in her correspondence with Garborg and Lie. Similar charges, of course, could have been brought against Brandes with respect to Marholm. By early January, the breach between Brandes and Marholm was irreparable.

¹⁴² See, for example, Harald Beyer, "Nietzsche og Norden," *Universitetet i Bergens Årbok 1958* (Bergen: A. S. John Griegs Boktrykkeri, 1958); Harald Borland, *Nietzsche's Influence on Swedish Literature with Special Reference to Strindberg, Ola Hansson, Heidenstam and Fröding* (Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerbers Förlag, 1956), p. 56; Arne Widell, *Ola Hansson i Tyskland. En studie i hans liv och diktning åren 1890-1893*. (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1979), pp. 14-16; Nolin, p. 159.

¹⁴³ Georg Brandes to Laura Hansson, 4 January 1890. "It was not pleasing to me that another essay appeared in Germany before my own." Ola Hansson's essay was "Friedrich Nietzsche," *Unsere Zeit*, 2 (1889), pp. 400-418.

¹⁴⁴ Georg Brandes to Laura Hansson, 18 November 1889. "It would never occur to me that I should have priority over your husband."

In one of her letters to Garborg, Marholm had indiscretely hinted that Brandes spent more of his time on love affairs than academic projects, and then cautioned Garborg: “Nu skal De ikke sige at De har det fra mig, thi saa kommer Jehovas Vrede over mig, og han er ikke denne Gudhed, som glemmer, eller tilgiver, hverken Smaat eller Stort [sic].”¹⁴⁵ Marholm did indeed know Brandes well. He never forgave her for this episode and complained of it to almost anyone who would listen. Adolf Paul tells about a meeting with Brandes: “Mellan ett par förlorade ägg, som han i hast slungade i sig, tog han också, i förbifarten, död på Laura Marholm, som just då hade gjort sig saker till något slags majestätsförbrytelse emot honom.”¹⁴⁶ Brandes also wrote of her betrayal in letters to Gustaf af Geijerstam, Jonas Lie, and Ellen Key.

Eight years later, in 1897, Helga Johansen told Brandes she wanted to review one of Marholm’s books. Brandes had this to say about Marholm:

En Dag saa jeg for første Gang i mit Værelse denne skrækkelige Braksnude. I mit Hus lærte hun Ola Hansson at kjende. Hun er et aldeles uvidende Fruentimmer, for hvem Verdenshistorien begynder 1870, et nogenlunde godt Hoved, dog uden Glimt af Originalitet, i øvrigt fræk, pervers, gemen, fuld af den raaeste Hensynsløshed for at albu sig frem. Hun og hendes Mand har udviklet sig til et literært Banditpar efter Opskriften[:] Hun lever som Skribentinde paa den Opdagelse, at Kvinden er et Kjønsvæsen og paa at have gjort Spionvisitter hos berømte Mænd. Saadanne Væseners Bøger fortjener ingen Omtale eller Drøftelse. Læs de store Aanders Bøger, ikke Sligt. Det er heldigvis en 8 Aar siden jeg har set denne Megære, som jeg hader ikke ud af nogen Stemning, men med ganske koldt Blod.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Laura Mohr to Arne Garborg, 3 November 1888. “Now you must not say that you have it from me, because the wrath of Jehovah would fall upon me, and he is not a deity that forgets or forgives, neither small things nor great.”

¹⁴⁶ Adolf Paul, *Profiler. Minnen ay stora personligheter* (Stockholm: Fahlcrantz & Co., 1937), pp. 117–118. “In between a few poached eggs, which he hastily devoured, he, in passing, executed Laura Marholm who had just made herself guilty of some kind of high treason against him.”

¹⁴⁷ Georg Brandes to Helga Johansen, 31 May 1897. Printed in Dahlerup, p. 90. “One day I saw in my room for the first time that horrible snub snout. In my house, she met Ola Hansson. She is a completely ignorant woman, for whom world history begins in 1870, a fairly good head, but without a trace of originality, moreover impudent, perverse, common, filled with the coarsest ruthlessness in elbowing her way forward. She and her husband have developed into a pair of literary bandits according to this recipe[:]. She lives as an authoress by having made the discovery that women are sexual beings and by having made espionage visits to the homes of famous men. The books of such creatures do not deserve any reviews or discussion. Read the books of great minds, not suchlike. Happily, it has been eight years since I’ve seen that harpie, whom I hate, not out of a whim, but in rather cold blood.”