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## Setbacks, Conversion, and Mental Instability: 1897–1905

Laura Marholm and Ola Hansson journeyed to Skåne with empty pockets and intentions of reestablishing themselves in Scandinavia. In March of 1897, when it became obvious that they would lose the Langen case, Marholm began preparing the ground for their return to Sweden. Marholm wrote to Helena Nyblom in order to establish a connection with the intellectual circles of Uppsala and Stockholm. Nyblom was a prudent choice, since she shared many of Marholm's views on women, and as the wife of Carl Nyblom, Uppsala Professor of Aesthetics, she enjoyed respectability and a prominent position in academic life.

Furthermore, Marholm attempted to rebuild some of the bridges that Hansson had burned in the past, and with this end in sight, she wrote flattering and conciliatory letters to Gustaf af Geijerstam, who had strong connections in the publishing world. Marholm praised Geijerstam's novel *Medusas huvud*, and diplomatically added, "Om der nogen gang har været en Misforstaaelse mellem Dem og ham [Ola Hansson], vil De tilgive ham den Skyld han bær deri [sic]?"<sup>1</sup> The misunderstanding had to do with a grudge that Hansson held against Geijerstam for not coming to the defense of *Sensitiva amorosa*; in revenge, Hansson had painted an unflattering portrait of Geijerstam as Grazelius in *Resan hem*. Without Hansson's knowledge, Marholm wrote to Evert Wrangel, who was spearheading a new publishing endeavor in Lund, hoping to convince him to include Ola Hansson in the project.<sup>2</sup> Marholm herself aspired to create a literary center in Skåne which could compete with Stockholm. Such plans are reminiscent of her ambition to attract a literary coterie to Skurup in 1892.

Despite these preparations, shortly after their arrival in mid-June of 1897, it soon became evident that even this stay in Skåne would be only temporary. Wrangel proved uninterested in Ola Hansson's collaboration, and although Geijerstam's response was positive, the prospects of the Hanssons assuming an active role in Swedish literary life appeared faint. The major obstacle to a pleasant existence in Hansson's homeland seemed to be, once again, coexistence with Hansson's family. Relations were strained because of the Hanssons' precarious financial situation, and, as ever, Marholm could not get along with her

<sup>1</sup> Laura Marholm to Gustaf af Geijerstam, 10 April 1897. "If there has ever been a misunderstanding between you and him [Ola Hansson], can you forgive him his part in it?"

<sup>2</sup> Laura Marholm to Evert Wrangel, 30 March 1897.

mother-in-law.<sup>3</sup> When Geijerstam asked Marholm to translate some novels for him, she answered: "Att finna tid, går nog, då jag i denna något urolige sommarvistelse vel må afstå från egna arbeten [sic]."<sup>4</sup> Skåne always seemed to paralyze Marholm's creativity. Ola, Jr. fell ill, and became a cause of great concern. Marholm harbored suspicions that the climate in Skåne was unhealthy for her son. Marholm confided to George Egerton, "Vi har siden vi kom hertil forresten ale tre været daarlige: det var Forkølelse og Depression, værst hos mig [sic]."<sup>5</sup> Marholm was deeply unhappy about returning to Skåne.

In *Buch der Toten*, Marholm relates a curious anecdote in conjunction with her son's illness. When Ola, Jr. became sick, all of the relatives were certain that he had diphtheria and that his life was threatened. Overwhelmed by the fear of losing her son, "lag ich im Nebenzimmer neben dem fiebernden Kind auf den Knieen und betete zum ersten Mal zur Muttergottes . . . Was ich der Gottesmutter in jenen Augenblicken des Schreckens gelobte, das hab' ich später gehalten."<sup>6</sup> This gesture seems to have been inspired by J. P. Jacobsen's novel, *Niels Lyhne*; however, whereas Niels Lyhne's child dies despite his wife's prayers, confirming his atheism, the opposite happens to Laura Marholm. As *Zur Psychologie der Frau* indicates, Marholm already had an intellectual interest in Catholicism, but the experience by her son's sickbed seems to have pushed her firmly towards conversion.

The Hanssons decided to return to Schliersee, but spent a month relaxing in Helsingborg before going home. Not long after their arrival in Schliersee, the

<sup>3</sup> In her later paranoid musings, the animosity between Marholm and Hansson's family took on sinister dimensions for her: "Denn ebenso hier in Schweden wie früher draußen fühlte ich das geheimnisvolle Tasten und Lauern um mich herum und es waren einzelne uns sehr nahe stehende Personen, die wie vom bösen Geist besessen, wie in einem geheimen Einverständnis mit feindlichen Mächten zu handeln schienen." Laura Marholm, *Buch der Toten* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1900), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Marholm to Gustaf af Geijerstam, 2 July 1897. "Finding time will probably be possible, since during this somewhat turbulent summer visit, I have to give up my own work." Geijerstam wanted Marholm to translate *Lille Karl* by Karl Tavaststjerna and *Inferno* by August Strindberg. In a letter from 30 July 1897, Marholm agreed to translate Tavaststjerna's book, but had reservations about Strindberg's: "Men hvad der angaaer en Bog af Strindberg med mig som Oversætterinde, saa kan jeg naturligvis ikke love nogetsomhelst, før jeg har læst hver Linie deraf. Mit litterære Navn i Tyskland udtrykker baade en Personlighed og en Retning saa bestemt og klart, at det ikke kan forbinde sig med nogen anden Navn og Retning af kanske modsat Beskaffenhed [sic]." ("But with regard to a book by Strindberg with me as translator, I can naturally not promise anything whatsoever before I have read every line of it. My literary name in Germany expresses both a personality and an orientation so defined and clear that it cannot ally itself with any other name and orientation of perhaps a contradictory nature.")

<sup>5</sup> Laura Hansson to Chavelita Dunne, 16 July 1897. "Since we came here we have been sick, all three of us: it was colds and depression. I was worst off."

<sup>6</sup> Marholm, *Buch der Toten*, pp. 143–144.

Hanssons' fortunes went from bad to worse. Marholm became ill, though the nature of her malady is somewhat vague. Marholm only explains: "daß das 'Unwohlsein' von der ganz naturnotwendigen Beschaffenheit war, gegen die man überhaupt keine Mittel anwendet."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the case may have been, Marholm did not feel well for quite some time. In October, she received a telegram informing her that her mother was dying, and this message was soon followed by a second telegram asking her if she wanted to come to the funeral. Marholm was too ill to travel alone, and since they could not afford a trip to Riga for both of them, Hansson attended the funeral in her stead.

Marholm and Hansson invited her widowed father, Fredrik Mohr, to come and live with them in Schliersee. Hansson returned to Schliersee, and Fredrik Mohr followed not long after, but Marholm's father did not enjoy the company of his daughter and son-in-law and left after only a few days. He returned to Riga and, thereafter, his only form of communication with his daughter was a yearly allowance of 300 rubels, sent more for his grandson's sake than for Marholm's.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after the beginning of the new year, Hansson received a telegram summoning him to the funeral of his own mother. Since Marholm was still in poor health and their funds were extremely low, neither of them was able to attend.

This string of family tragedies signaled the beginning of an exceptionally difficult period for the Hanssons: "Die Zeiten [. . .] waren die der zunehmenden materiellen Bedrängniß und des endlichen äußersten und wörtlichsten Kampfes ums Dasein für uns. Auch Krankheit kam uns beiden immer Gesunden in verschiedener Weise und mit überraschender Plötzlichkeit."<sup>9</sup> It is important to bear in mind that these circumstances constituted the background to the Hansson's decision to join the Catholic Church.

Both Hansson and Marholm have provided an account of their motives for converting to Catholicism. Hansson gives primarily intellectual reasons for his conversion. Living in Bavaria helped to lead him to Catholicism, but "ifølge en organisk tvingende magt, en indre lov."<sup>10</sup> He reasons, "Alt det, der gav det gamle skaanske bondeliv dets præg, [. . .] var de omhyggelig [sic] opbevarede kultur-rester fra den katholske tid."<sup>11</sup> The books which influenced him include Paul Garin's *Dulcamara* and Georg Ratzinger's *Geschichte der kirchlichen Armenpflege* and *Die Volkswirtschaft in ihren sittlichen Grundlagen*. *Dulcamara* appealed to the mystical leanings in Ola Hansson's personality. Ratzinger's works presented a social utopia grounded in Catholicism and a cult of the Catholic Middle Ages. This utopia, which of course includes social welfare, was

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Ola Hansson, "Rustgården II," galley proof in Lunds Universitetsbibliotek, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ola Hansson, "Min Omvendelse," *Samtiden*, 11 (1900), p. 211. "according to an organic compelling power, an inner law."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. "Everything that gave the old Scanian farmers' culture its special character was the carefully preserved cultural remnants from the Catholic era."



quite attractive to both the Hanssons. Marholm emphasizes that "besonders die Traditionen der katholische Wirthschaftspolitik" appealed to them.<sup>12</sup>

The Hanssons became personally acquainted with Ratzinger, probably in connection with their interest in the Bavarian *Bauernbewegung*. In conjunction with this cause, Ratzinger had worked closely for some years with Dr. Sigl, about whom Marholm had written an article for *Die Zukunft*. Furthermore, Ratzinger had written a monograph about "Die Erhaltung des Bauernstandes" and published a political pamphlet entitled: "Bauern, einigt euch!"<sup>13</sup> Because of the interest in Catholicism his works had inspired in the Hanssons, Ratzinger suggested to them that they might consult Hofprediger Josef von Hecher for further instruction: "Aus dem Unterricht entwickelte sich wieder eines Tages, gewissermaßen ganz von selbst, die Konversion."<sup>14</sup> Marholm and Hansson were both accepted into the Catholic Church on August 22, 1898.

Marholm admitted that she had a greater interest in converting than Hansson and had to persuade him to do it. She became particularly eager to convert when she noticed that her son was being strongly influenced by his Catholic environment. Their cook taught Ola, Jr. how to cross himself and to say the Paternoster and Ave Maria. Ola, Jr. was the first in his family to announce a desire to become Catholic. Marholm reasoned, "daß es einfach Pflicht der Eltern sei, den Glauben, in dem ihr Kind aufwachse, zu theilen."<sup>15</sup>

An accurate account of the events following their conversion is difficult to establish, since one has only Marholm's and Hansson's highly subjective and paranoid versions of the story to build upon. It seems clear that both Marholm and Hansson expected their conversion to bring about an improvement in their financial status. They felt themselves worthy of Christian charity. Quite to the contrary, their finances took a turn for the worse. Both Hanssons blamed Hofprediger Hecher for their predicament, which commenced "nachdem die vom Hofprediger anbefohlene Geheimhaltung der Conversion und die dadurch bewirkte Isolirung, in der er uns stecken bleiben ließ, uns jeder Verbindung und alles Erwerbes beraubt."<sup>16</sup> Both Hanssons had difficulties placing articles, and Marholm expected the Catholic Church to exert its influence on their behalf. Marholm claims that she was told instead: "Suchen Sie sich einen Platz als Näherin in einem Geschäft."<sup>17</sup> Marholm's version of these events might be counterbalanced by Ellen Key's equally subjective assessment of their situation: "Sedan hon och hennes Ola tråkat ut den protestantiska pressen, posera de nu

<sup>12</sup> Laura Marholm, "Pater Salvator," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 7 October 1900.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Fränkel, "Ratzinger, J. Georg," *Biographisches Jahrbuch und Deutscher Nekrolog*, Vol. 4, ed. Anton Bettelheim (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1900), pp. 246-247.

<sup>14</sup> Marholm, "Pater Salvator."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Marholm, "Die Nonne im Anger," manuscript in Lunds Universitetsbibliotek.

<sup>17</sup> "Pater Salvator."

som martyrer för sin omvändelse och påstå sig bli refuserade af denna frisinande press! Ren Schwindel!”<sup>18</sup>

Marholm was experiencing a period of critical disfavor, in part brought on by the publication in Germany of Ellen Key's *Mißbrauchte Frauenkraft* in 1898. Marholm's popularity had dropped markedly after *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, since the book was so poorly written. Public taste was changing, and Marholm's revelations about female sexuality were no longer titillating. On November 12, 1897, Marholm delivered a talk to the *Münchener Journalisten und Schriftsteller-verein*; the next day, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported, “Sie hat keine Freunde.”<sup>19</sup> In a way, Ellen Key had usurped Laura Marholm's position in Germany. *Mißbrauchte Frauenkraft* was kinder to the women's movement than Marholm's writings had been, and therefore, made fewer enemies among the emancipationists. Marholm and Key were often compared by critics, to Marholm's detriment. One such critic was Lou Andreas-Salomé who also began receiving attention for her essays on women at this time.<sup>20</sup> Marholm's writing became eclipsed by her competition.

Whatever the reasons for their lack of publishing success, the Hanssons' economy was seriously undermined. They were forced to pawn all their valuables in order to live. Hansson became quite ill, and the pair was thrown out of their house since they could not pay the rent. In April of 1899, Hansson and Marholm moved to Sofienstraße 5 in Munich, but left their son in the care of their former landlords in Schliersee. Hansson explains that they left their son in Schliersee for the sake of his schooling.<sup>21</sup> As it turned out, because of the turbulent years that followed in Munich, living apart from his parents was probably the best thing for Ola Hansson, Jr. Apart from sporadic visits to him in Schliersee, the Hanssons were separated from their child for almost seven years.<sup>22</sup> From this period of extreme hardship in Munich dates the onset of the Hanssons' mutual paranoia and mental instability.

Despite the stresses, 1900 proved to be an extremely productive year for Marholm. She wrote a number of autobiographical sketches for *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Neue Freie Presse*, which she later meant to assemble under the title “Mohrenfratz.” The strangest of these is “Das Amulet,” in which Marholm claims her

<sup>18</sup> Ellen Key to Georg Brandes, 26 August 1899, in Georg and Edvard Brandes' *Brevväxling med svenska och finska författare och vetenskapsmän*, Vol. 2 (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1939), p. 193. “Since she and her Ola have bored the protestant press, they are now posing as martyrs for their conversion and claim to be refused by the liberal press! Pure chicanery!”

<sup>19</sup> Laura Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau, Theil II* (Berlin: Carl Duncker Verlag, 1903), p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> For an account of the reception of *Mißbrauchte Frauenkraft* in Germany, see: Barbara Gentikow, *Skandinavien als präkapitalistische Idylle* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1978), pp. 158–170.

<sup>21</sup> Hansson, “Rustgården II,” p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> Ola Hansson, Jr., “Några drag ur min fars liv,” *Svensk Litteraturstidskrift*, 5 (1942), p. 51.

father is an English Freemason and blames his behavior after her mother's death on this circumstance.<sup>23</sup> Marholm's paranoia seems to have burst forth in force in December of 1900, but before this crisis, she was able to publish three books through the Franz Kirchheim Verlag. In August, a collection of novellas entitled *Der Weg nach Altötting und andere Novellen* appeared. November saw the publication of *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung* and *Buch der Toten*. These two last books were also published in Holland, where Marholm suddenly received a great deal of attention through the efforts of Cornelia Huygens and Anna de Savornin Lohman.<sup>24</sup>

In a notice for *Die Zukunft* about *Der Weg nach Altötting* and *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung*, Marholm wrote that the two books could finally appear "nach dreijährigem unfreiwilligen Schweigen."<sup>25</sup> She remarks further, "Beide Bücher sind fast vollständig im Laufe des letzten Jahres geschrieben; zwei Jahre habe ich überhaupt fast nichts geschrieben, da ich ja doch nicht die Möglichkeit hatte, es zu veröffentlichen."<sup>26</sup> Marholm felt that she had been intentionally boycotted by publishing houses after the Langen case and her conversion. Marholm preferred to believe that she had been unjustly persecuted, rather than accepting any responsibility for the state of her affairs. The paranoia that would eventually take hold of her thinking arose out of a mixture of her denial of her own culpability and the real hardships caused by people who were genuinely unfriendly toward her.

Marholm writes that the five novellas in *Der Weg nach Altötting* were inspired by the light shed by her new Catholic world view "auf die 'geistige Freiheit', dann auf die 'Würde des Weibes', auf ihre 'rechtliche Stellung in der Gesellschaft', auf die 'Pflege des weiblichen Gefühlslebens', auf das gute Verhältniß von Eltern und Kindern und auf viele andere Dinge."<sup>27</sup> The first three novellas read like parables. "Burgmädl" tells the story of an unmarried woman who finds fulfillment in taking care of another woman's child. "Auf der anderen Seite" describes a woman who marries late in life, suffers through hardships with her husband, and then becomes religious. In "Der Weg nach Altötting," an unmarried woman meets a happily married childhood friend. The tale is a celebration of motherhood and of love matches. "Im Bann," the fourth novella, is a well-executed portrayal of the relationship between a mother and daughter. The fifth novella is rather different and perhaps falls under the heading of the "viele

<sup>23</sup> Laura Marholm, "Das Amulet," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 25 November 1900.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, "Laura Marholm," *Het Zontagsblad*, 5 and 12 November 1900 or Cornelia Huygens, *Die liefde in het vrouwenleven voorheen en thans, naar aanleiding van "De liefde in de vrouwenquestie" van A. de Savornin Lohman* (Amsterdam, 1899) or Anna de Savornin Lohman, *De liefde in de vrouwenquestie* (Amsterdam, 1899). Anna de Savornin Lohman translated Marholm's *Buch der Toten* under the title *Levenservaringen*.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Marholm, "Der Weg nach Altötting – Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung," *Die Zukunft*, 32 (1900), p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

andere Dinge.” “Schwesternliebe” describes the fortunes of two sisters living in Riga. They both marry, but their happiness is undermined by a conniving Jewess. The tale is highly anti-semitic.

“Im Bann” constitutes the highpoint of Marholm’s literary career. The story consists of a nighttime conversation between two figures in a dimly lit room. One figure is not described at all except for the deep compelling quality of his voice. From his role in the conversation, one might assume he is a priest. The other figure is a woman whose emotional state is revealed by the activity of her hands: “Die andere öffnete die Hände, als ob sie nach etwas griffe . . .;” “Die weißen Hände bewegten sich nervös auf dem Tischtuch . . .;” “Die weißen Hände lagen wieder ineinandergefaltet, unbeweglich auf der Tischplatte . . .”<sup>28</sup> The woman seeks help from the other figure. She is tormented at night by a vision of her dead mother, who seems to need her daughter’s help to give her peace. In order to lay her mother’s spirit to rest, the woman makes “die Beichte einer Todten;” she confesses her mother’s sins to the priest.<sup>29</sup>

What emerges is a fascinating portrait of a love-hate relationship between mother and daughter. In confessing her mother’s sins, something her mother could never have done for herself in life, the woman must allow herself to admit that her mother was not a good mother, but rather, a parasite on her daughter’s affections. Her mother did not allow her to have any friends and demanded her daughter’s complete devotion. The woman must confront the guilt she feels about leaving home, since she believes that if she had made her mother the center of her existence, she could have prevented her from sinking into self-indulgent depressions. Her confessor absolves the woman by saying, “Niemand hat das Recht, eines anderen Leben in sich aufzusaugen, an eines anderen Ent-sagungen sich stark zu wachsen und einen anderen den Kampf für sich selbst führen zu lassen, den jeder für sich selber führen muß.”<sup>30</sup>

Artistically, the story is interesting since the possibility is left open that the entire exchange takes place in the mind of the woman herself. The mysterious atmosphere of the novella makes it a departure from Marholm’s other literary works, which are by and large realistic down to the most improper details. The narrator of “Im Bann” sets a minimal stage on which the conversation takes place; the result is effective. Furthermore, the didactic tone that can be somewhat disturbing in the first three novellas of this volume has disappeared.

Marholm’s next book, *Die Frauen in der socialen Bewegung*, takes up many old themes from Marholm’s earlier writings, though now they are viewed through an unabashedly Catholic filter. Women are best suited to being wives and mothers, and their right to these callings should be protected by the church. A woman may find fulfillment through being the wife of a good man or a bride of Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Laura Marholm, *Der Weg nach Altötting* (Mainz: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1900) pp. 91, 100, 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Perhaps the most striking difference from Marholm's earlier works is a raised socio-economic consciousness. Marholm advocates a society run on the lines of a type of Catholic socialism, which she believes to have existed in the Middle Ages. All work together for the good of society and the church, and, in turn, the church protects its members. The enemy of this social organization is capitalism, but "er verträgt nicht als Weltbeherrscher sichtbar zu werden."<sup>31</sup> Further, Marholm observes, "Alle materiellen Kämpfe gehen unter geistiger Deckung vor sich, und die Berufenen des Worts, die Dichter und Denker, sollen sie decken."<sup>32</sup>

Marholm views the women's movement not as a moral issue, but as an economic one; society does not want to support and protect its unmarried women. The current age is unfriendly to women and merely wishes to exploit them economically. In her chapter on prostitution, Marholm goes so far as to set aside her antagonism toward the women's movement and agrees that prostitution is the worst kind of exploitation of women. Cesare Lombroso had argued that women become prostitutes because of an innate inclination towards criminality. From Marholm's standpoint, they are driven to it out of financial necessity by an unsympathetic society. The remedy for this way of thinking is the veneration of women embodied in the Catholic Church and the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Even though Marholm's utopias border on the fantastic, *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung* was written by someone of sound mind. Yet, she clearly feels that her misfortunes of the recent years have been brought about by powers who do not approve of her writing: "Wer aber öffentlich reden und drucken läßt, was er will, und dabei vielleicht der Majestät der kapitalistischen Ringe oder der Majestät der Landesfürsten, oder anderen heimlichen oder offenen Majestäten, die die Macht sich zu revanchieren haben, zu nahetritt, – dem geht es böß."<sup>33</sup> Further, Marholm reflects, "Es wäre mir gewiß sehr viel besser im Leben gegangen, wenn ich mich mit der Frauenfrage nicht so eifrig befaßt und statt dessen Novelletten und Romane geschrieben hätte."<sup>34</sup>

*Buch der Toten* is probably Laura Marholm's most curious work. In the form in which it was published, the book contains three essays. The first, "Aus Liebe," describes the obsessive devotion of a Fräulein Schricking, who became a Marholm follower after having read *Das Buch der Frauen*. The second essay, "Die kleine Fanny," is an interesting account of life in Riga as Marholm was growing up. According to Marholm, she and her cousin Fanny were both considered "unmarriageable," Marholm because of her homeliness and Fanny because of her poverty. The final essay, "Dreimal," describes the three times that she and her husband had tried to settle in Skurup with Hansson's family.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Marholm, *Die Frauen in der sozialen Bewegung* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1900), p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 19.



Even though Marholm's narrative voice is sometimes tinged with suspicion, there is nothing particularly offensive about the book, except perhaps to Fräulein Schricking and Hansson's family. Nevertheless, when Marholm offered the book to Karl Bonnier, he responded, "Den förläggare som utgifver dem [uppsatserna] på svenska går utan tvivel ett nederlag till möte."<sup>35</sup> The original version seems to have contained much more explosive matter. In a letter to Bonnier, Marholm mentions having written in the book about "Langen-Bjørnsonske Processen [. . .] og den falske Dom."<sup>36</sup> On another occasion, Hansson described *Buch der Toten* as a portrait of "den internationella tjuf- och mördarligan i dess verksamhet i min och min hustrus familj."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, if this material ever existed, it has been lost. It was never included in the published version of *Buch der Toten*.

At the root of Marholm's growing mental instability lay the stress of extreme poverty, the humiliation of critical disfavor which deprived her of publishing possibilities, physical illness, and a keen sense of guilt about her family in Riga. Marholm was obviously very upset by the death of her mother. They had been close when Marholm was young, but had drifted apart, and a note of hostility had crept into the relationship. Amalie Roeder Mohr died before Marholm could become reconciled with her. Marholm dealt with the guilt she felt by making her mother a "bad mother;" in this way, Marholm's hostile feelings toward her mother became her mother's fault. Her story, "Im Bann," is an attempt to work out this strained relationship.

In her writings of this period, Marholm became quite fascinated with the subject of mothers and upbringing. This fascination was brought on, no doubt, not only by her guilt toward her own mother, but also by the fact that she had been separated from her son. In *Die Frauen und die socialen Bewegung*, she relates the following anecdote:

Ich kannte eine Frau, die mit viel Willen und gutem Mut sich ihren eigenen Lebensweg gesucht und gefunden hatte. Sie hatte dabei ihrer Mutter immer mit Zärtlichkeit und Verehrung angehangen. Sie wurde selbst Mutter, und wie sie nun ihr kleines Kind zwischen den Händen hatte und neben sich aufwachsen sah, da fiel ihr nach und nach und immer schwerer die Erkenntnis auf's Herz, daß ihre eigene Mutter ihr keine gute Mutter, sondern ein Quälgeist gewesen war.<sup>38</sup>

This anecdote is about herself. Once again, Marholm shows that she can only express intensely personal feelings in the third person. Her rejection by her

<sup>35</sup> Karl Bonnier to Laura Marholm, 26 September 1900. "The publisher who publishes them [the essays] in Swedish will without a doubt meet with defeat."

<sup>36</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 9 November 1900. "The Langen-Bjørnson case [. . .] and the false verdict."

<sup>37</sup> Ola Hansson to Karl Bonnier, 28 November 1901. "the international ring of thieves and murderers in action within my and my wife's family."

<sup>38</sup> Marholm, *Die Frauen in der socialen Bewegung*, p. 174.

father came hard on the heels of her mother's death. She had never been particularly close to her father, but the rejection hurt nonetheless. In this case, she chose to blame his alliance with the Freemasons for his behavior. At this point, Marholm began to suspect the intervention of outside agencies in her life; later on, during the worst of her mental illness, Marholm constructed an astonishingly complex paranoid system of conspiracies.

It is revealing to compare Marholm's type of paranoia with that of August Strindberg, who had gone through his crisis a few years earlier. Strindberg came to believe in "powers" that were shaping his destiny, but these powers belonged to the realm of the supernatural. Marholm reviewed Strindberg's *Inferno* and had this to say about the powers: "Die 'Mächte' lassen in unserer Zeit viele tanzen [. . .] Sie kommen mir auch weder so geheimnisvoll, noch so unmateriell vor, wie Strindberg und ihre anderen Dichter sie erscheinen lassen möchten."<sup>39</sup> For Marholm, the meddling powers belonged to this world, not the next. The spirits that sought to manipulate her destiny included the Freemasons, the Catholic Church, the Jews, and the royal houses of Europe. Despite this central difference between Marholm and Strindberg, their paranoia seemed to move along quite similar lines. Strindberg would take note of cloud formations, street signs, the name of his hotel, and so forth, and give a meaning to these items. Similarly, when Hansson fell ill after imbibing a schnaps at the inn *Zum Heiligen Franziskus* shortly after midsummer of 1899, the name of this inn became for both Marholm and Hansson a sign that the Catholic Church had tried to poison Hansson.<sup>40</sup> The situation was even more ominous since, at the time, the Hanssons were living in the *Hotel Deutscher Kaiser*.<sup>41</sup>

In April of 1900, Marholm published a prose poem entitled "Die Hände der Angst" in a women's magazine named *Haus und Welt*. It is Marholm's only attempt at poetry, and it gives powerful expression to Marholm's emotional make-up at the time:

Ich sehe sie nicht, aber ich fühle sie –, die Hände, die sich an mich klammern möchten.

Nachts im Schlaf greifen sie nach mir mit den verlängerten Fingern der Angst.

Sie suchen sich festzuhängen an meine Seele wie mit zitternden Tentakeln. Sie wecken mich auf mit ihrem Tasten, und ich fühle den keuchenden Atem der Besessenen in meiner Nähe.

Immer sind sie da, wenn die Nacht gekommen und die Stille, und umkreisen mich. Sie haben sich an mir festgebunden mit ihrem Denken und ihrem Wollen; mit ihrem bösen Wollen und ihrem schändlichen Denken und mit dem vorausgeworfenen Schatten ihrer lichtscheuen Thaten.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Marholm, "Etwas nordische Mystik," *Die Zeit*, Nr. 208 (24 September 1898), p. 202.

<sup>40</sup> Ola Hansson, "Die Geschichte von einem Schnaps," *Die Zukunft*, 35 (1901), p. 387.

<sup>41</sup> Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau, Theil II*, p. 108.



Sie suchen ihr Leben in mir, wie der Vampyr das Blut der Lebendigen sucht.  
Ihr Leben ist an mir festgebunden durch die scheuen Werke der Nacht.

Ich fürchte sie nicht. Aber ich fühle den heißen Dunst ihres angstvollen  
Atems.

Und eine große Traurigkeit kommt über mich, und ich werde sehr müde von  
der Last der vielen Hände, die nach mir greifen. [. . .]<sup>42</sup>

Judging by this poem and the story “Im Bann,” Marholm’s emotional crisis had a salutary effect on her writing, just as Strindberg’s “Inferno crisis” revolutionized his authorship. Unfortunately, Marholm’s condition shortly deteriorated beyond the point where it was artistically productive.

In September, Marholm’s disillusionment with the Catholic Church became painfully evident. She wrote an article entitled “Pater Salvator,” which described her family’s conversion and subsequent victimization by the Catholic Church. Marholm saw to it that the article was published in Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. She sent “Pater Salvator” to Karl Bonnier with the comment: “Jeg tror at den smager besk i hele Norden, men den maa svælges. Lad ingen gemme sig bagved at Tidningerne ikke vil betale ‘honorar’ – jeg giver ‘Pater Salvator’ *gratis* til Sverige. Den er mig lige kjær som ‘Kronprinsessen . . .’ er til Sverige [sic; original emphasis].”<sup>43</sup> Marholm had begun to imagine a connection between the Catholic Church and the royal house of Sweden, which is why she thinks that Sweden will be disturbed by her article.

In December of 1900, Marholm’s sanity became seriously impaired. She began writing to various officials in Munich, complaining of the treatment she and her husband had been subjected to by the church. This behavior brought her to the attention of the Munich police. One such letter was sent to Dr. von Laubmann, librarian at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: “Uns ist unser sämtliches Eigenthum sofort nach der Conversion durch den Hofprediger Canonicus J. Hecher, und zwar ausschließlich von katholischer Seite abgefordert oder sonst weggekönnert worden, worüber auch Herr Finanzminister v. Rieche Klage entgegengenommen hat.”<sup>44</sup> On December 13, Marholm wrote to Karl Bonnier asking him to put a notice in the Swedish papers announcing the reversal of their conversion.

Also, in the letter to Bonnier, Marholm expresses the belief that Bonnier has accepted *Buch der Toten* for publication. In fact, Bonnier had not, but this notion became an obsession with Marholm. Over the next few months, a bizarre correspondence ensued, in which Marholm ignores Bonnier’s protestations that he never accepted the book. She suggests in one letter that he consult with the King

<sup>42</sup> Laura Marholm, “Die Hände der Angst,” *Haus und Welt*, nr. 28 (7 April 1900).

<sup>43</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 28 October 1900. “I believe that it will taste bitter to all of Scandinavia, but it must be swallowed. Do not let anyone hide behind the excuse that the newspapers do not want to pay the honorarium – I give ‘Pater Salvator’ to Sweden *for free*. It is as dear to me as ‘The Crown Princess . . .’ is to Sweden.”

<sup>44</sup> Laura Marholm to Dr. von Laubmann, 3 December 1900.

of England and the King of Sweden about publishing *Buch der Toten*.<sup>45</sup> In another, she refers to the Prince of Wales, "hovedet af Frimureriet," who is somehow involved in "vore Mødres og Slægtninger Død, Navneforfalskningen, Testamentsforfalskning, Tullbedrag, Conversion etc [sic]."<sup>46</sup> Marholm believed that the royal houses of England and Sweden, the Freemasons and the Catholic Church were conspiring to keep *Buch der Toten* out of print in Sweden.

In May, Marholm made this plea to Bonnier: "Jag tror at De ikke vil nægte mig Udgivelsen af denne Bog af en svensk Medborgerinde paa svensk om ikke af andre, saa af den Grunden for at bevare hende og hendes Familj fra at svælte ihjel [sic]."<sup>47</sup> Out of compassion for her plight, Bonnier sent Marholm a gift of 300 marks. The money was immediately construed by Marholm as an honorarium for *Buch der Toten*. Irritated by her irrational letters, Bonnier wrote: "Jag har dock upprepade gånger försäkrat Eder att jag alldeles bestämt ej ämner trycka denna bok och jag begär att bli trodt på mina ord [. . .] Ty från min sida voro dessa pänger – som jag skref Er i mitt bref – endast en gåfva åt en familj som, enligt Ert brefkort af den 28 maj, var 'husvill, utsulten och blottad på allt.'"<sup>48</sup> Marholm could not accept the notion of receiving charity. Even though she eventually understood that the money was not an honorarium, she wanted to think of it as a stipendium awarded on merit.

Soon, Karl Bonnier refused to accept correspondence from the Hanssons. Hansson had laid down a barrage of odd letters as well. Under the circumstances, Bonnier showed a remarkable tolerance toward the couple. Later, Karl Bonnier wrote about the Hanssons in his family history: "Hur hans [Ola Hansson's] – och hans hustrus – fixa idéer om bojkott och förföljelse till slut växte till mani, och hur hans förebråelser mot mig och mot andra – och just mot dem, som verkligen velat hjälpa honom – växte till förolämpningar av den mest kränkande art, vilka tvang mig förklara för honom, att jag aldrig mera ville ha något med honom att skaffa – redogörelsen härför faller ej inom ramen för detta arbete."<sup>49</sup> The Hanssons' suspicions and complete lack of diplomacy lost them a

<sup>45</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 18 April 1901.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 29 April 1901. "the head of the freemasons" "the deaths of our mothers and relatives, name forgery, will forgery, customs fraud, conversion, etc."

<sup>47</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 12 May 1901. "I do not think you want to deny me the publishing of this book by a Swedish citizen in Swedish, if for no other reason than to prevent her and her family from starving to death."

<sup>48</sup> Karl Bonnier to Laura Marholm, 1 August 1901. "I have repeatedly assured you that I most definitely do not intend to print this book, and I demand to be taken at my word [. . .] As far as I am concerned, this money was – as I wrote to you in my letter – only a gift to a family which, according to your post card from May 28th, was 'without shelter, starving, and destitute.'"

<sup>49</sup> Karl Otto Bonnier, *Bonniers. En Bokhandlarefamilj*, Vol. IV (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1931), p. 215. "How his [Ola Hansson's] – and his wife's – fixed ideas about boycotts and persecution finally grew into mania, and how his accusations against me and others

potentially valuable ally. They interpreted Karl Bonnier's rejection of them as a sign that he was part of the conspiracy. Marholm wrote accusingly to Bonnier: "Utsvältningen mod os fortsætter ufortrødent og nu helt öppen mod os fra Sverige, efter at have smyget os i Hælene siden vort Giftermaal. Vi har ikke ens kunnet betale Maten for vor Son i Schliersee for Juli maaned [sic]."<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning of 1902, the Hanssons moved to Königstraße 61, most likely because they were in arrears with their rent. At this juncture, Carl Duncker Verlag's lawsuit against Marholm took a peculiar turn. Duncker Verlag had purchased the rights to *Zur Psychologie der Frau*, and somehow was able to compel Marholm to write sequels to both *Zur Psychologie der Frau* and *Das Buch der Frauen*. Many years later, Marholm explained that Duncker:

. . . krävde av mig på processvägen, utan kontrakt, andra delen av "Psykologien" och "Kvinnornas bok," som icke förefanns, samt för rätten att utge andra delen av min mans "Resan hem," vilken förelåg. Naturligtvis måste jag skriva dessa två andra delar, men jag skrev dem sedan med sådana anspelningar på höga personer och de smygande giftmorden att han blev rädd och jag blev fri från honom.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that these books were written under duress may explain, in part, why they were so strange.

*Zur Psychologie der Frau II* is a peculiar book, but evidently not peculiar enough to prevent Duncker from publishing it: a double edition of *Zur Psychologie der Frau, I & II* appeared in 1903. The work could just have easily been entitled *Wir Frauen und unsere Dichter II*, since five out of the eight essays have to do with literature. In the book, bizarre arguments are sometimes punctuated with moments of unsettling lucidity. For example, the first essay deals with psychological differences between men and women which, Marholm would like to insist, are somehow connected with the way they smell. Yet, at the same time, she is also able to describe clearly how sexual inhibitions are dinned into young women: "Was so in uns hineingeschreckt worden ist, bleibt unerhört lange sit-

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– and against precisely those who actually wanted to help him – grew to insults of the most offensive sort, which forced me to explain to him, that I never again wanted anything to do with him – an account of this does not fall within the purview of this book."

<sup>50</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 8 August 1901. "The campaign to starve us out continues undaunted and now entirely in the open against us from Sweden, after having followed upon our heels since our marriage. We could not even pay for our son's food in Schliersee for the month of July."

<sup>51</sup> Laura Marholm, "Kvinnornas valrätt," *Folkets Dagblad Politiken*, 31 January 1919. "demanded of me through a lawsuit the second parts of 'Psychology' and 'Modern Women,' which did not exist, as well as the right to publish the second part of my husband's 'Journey Home,' which did exist. Naturally, I had to write the two second parts, but I wrote them with such allusions to high personages and the secret murders by poison that he became frightened and I was free of him."

zen.”<sup>52</sup> Marholm’s clear-sighted view of the beginnings of feminine psychoses is ironic since, at the same time, she was blind to her own deteriorating mental health. The essays in which Marholm actually does discuss topics pertaining to the psychology of women touch frequently upon mental illness. The subject seemed to preoccupy her.

Among other oddities in the book is the following statement: “Die meisten Menschen pflegen als persönliches Erlebniß, persönliches Mißgeschick, persönliches Glück und persönliches Unglück aufzufassen, was gar nicht persönlich ist und gar nicht auf sie ankommt.”<sup>53</sup> Curiously, Marholm is describing, in part, her own syndrome, but does not seem to notice its relevance to her own case. For example, in one letter to Bonnier, Marholm drew threatening significance from the fact that shortly after the settlement of the Langen case, Einar Bjørnson, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson’s son, founded the East Asian Company, and the Crown Prince of Sweden presided over the first meeting.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, this event had nothing to do with her, but she managed to draw a personal connection nonetheless: this was proof that Bjørnson and Langen were involved in a plot with the royal house of Sweden to bring about her ruin.

Marholm allows more personal references than usual to infiltrate her essays. “Die Besessenheit” is equipped with the following interesting introduction:

Ich greife nun auf jene Johanniswoche 1899 zurück. Während mein Gatte Ola Hansson von Fieber ermattet lag und die Veröffentlichung der *Conversion* mit allen Mitteln unterdrückt werden sollte, schrieb ich, nach Gesprächen mit ihm, die folgenden Seiten nieder, deren geistiges Eigenthumsrecht er später an mich abgetreten hat, nachdem er damals nicht im Stande gewesen, die Arbeit allein auszuführen und sie doch sofort gemacht werden mußte, um mit dem Honorar Obdach und Nahrung für den Kranken und mich zu bezahlen. — — —<sup>55</sup>

This anecdote gives some idea of how closely Hansson and Marholm worked with each other, especially in this time of crisis. The great intimacy that caused them to dispute the authorship of an essay also fostered the sharing of the same paranoid delusions. As in the case of “Die Besessenheit,” the origin of these delusions — Marholm or Hansson — is difficult to ascertain.

After compiling *Zur Psychologie der Frau II*, Marholm wrote the sequel to *Das Buch der Frauen*, which was to be called, appropriately, *Buch der Frauen II*. With this book, Marholm succeeded in frightening Duncker: the project was curtailed in galley proofs. Among Laura Marholm’s papers in the Lund University Library, there are two sets of galley proofs from this volume dated May 28 and June 11, 1903. As soon as one begins to read the work, it is not difficult to understand why the book was never published, and it is surprising that it actually reached the galley proof stage.

<sup>52</sup> Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau, Theil II*, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>54</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 4 November 1901.

<sup>55</sup> Marholm, *Zur Psychologie der Frau, Theil II*, p. 125.

Ostensibly, the first essay is about Princess Emanuela Theresa, daughter of Kurfürst Max Emanuel, who became a nun. The second essay is nominally about Hedwig Elisabeth Charlotte, the chronicler of the court of Gustav III of Sweden. In essence, however, the work comprises Marholm's historical research into the fantastic and amazingly tangled conspiracy she believed to exist between the royal houses of Bavaria and Sweden, Freemasons, Catholics and Protestants. Duncker Verlag is, of course, also included in the plot. In the first essay, Marholm speaks of the spreading "cancer of conversion" that "schließlich alle protestantischen und katholischen Fürstenhäuser zu einem einzigen geheimen Haus- und Freimaurerverband in einander verschlang."<sup>56</sup> In the second essay, Marholm describes the "Calvinistische Militärloge" in Sweden, which she maintains has been "in alle Verschwörungen, von Fersen bis Dreyfuß verwickelt."<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Marholm documents the historical disinclination of the monarchs of Sweden toward women, citing as examples Gustaf Adolf, Karl XI, Karl XII and Gustav III. She delves into the rumoured conspiracy, conducted by the Freemasons of course, to provide Gustav III with an heir. Historically, it has been suspected that Stallmeister Munck was the real father of Gustav IV Adolf.

Although she does not draw this conclusion in the essay, the reason Marholm was so interested in the libidos of Swedish kings was that she believed that the Swedish royal family wished to abduct Hansson and use him to father an heir to the Swedish throne. It goes without saying that these suspicions were without any foundation in reality. This delusion, however, seems even more peculiar when one considers that at the time, Oscar II was still reigning over Sweden, and his grandson, Gustav VI Adolf, had just married Margareta of Great Britain and Ireland. In other words, the royal succession was guaranteed for three generations and there were no grounds for fearing that the Swedish royal line was about to become extinct.

By 1902, family and friends had become quite concerned about the Hanssons. On May 30, 1902, Adolf Oberländer reported to Hansson's family in Skåne:

Ich glaube nun dass Frau Hansson, veranlasst durch wirkliches Missgeschick, auf Wahnideen gekommen ist, Vervolgung [sic] von Schweden aus, die sogar von den *allerhöchsten Kreisen* geleitet wird. Boykottierung durch die Verleger. Mord an einem Familienmitglied etc. etc., alles geht so wirr durcheinander, dass ich nichts mehr verstehe.

Auf meine ernsthafte Frage an Herrn Ola Hansson: "Glauben Sie das alles was Ihre Frau Gemahlin erzählt?" antwortete er bestimmt: "Ja". – Es musste also der psychologisch seltene aber doch schon dagewesene Fall einer *Übertragung der Wahnidee* vorliegen. [. . .]

<sup>56</sup> "Die Nonne im Anger. Buch der Frauen, Theil II," 28 May 1903, Lunds Universitetsbibliotek.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Herrn Hansson *allein* zu sprechen wird kaum möglich sein, er ist *immer* von seiner Frau begleitet und kann nicht aus ihrem Ideenkreis herausgebracht werden. [original italics]<sup>58</sup>

This portrait of the Hansson marriage is in many ways typical of the way the pair was perceived by the outside world. Marholm had always been the gregarious, outspoken member of the family, and Hansson had always been shy and withdrawn. Under the influence of mental illness, Marholm became the spokesperson for the couple, and Hansson remained quiet, merely confirming his wife's statements when asked a direct question. From this circumstance, many drew the conclusion that the delusions all belonged to Marholm, and she had somehow forced these delusions upon her unfortunate husband. It is more than likely, however, that Hansson contributed his share of odd notions to their communal paranoia. Both Marholm and Hansson were mentally disturbed, but Marholm was the one committed to a mental hospital, because she was the more outspoken of the two.

Around Christmas 1902, Hansson's brother Jöns died, and Hansson fell ill after drinking some wine. Both Marholm and Hansson believed that the wine had been poisoned. Marholm wrote to Karl Bonnier that she believed that Jöns had been demanded as a human sacrifice by "den høieste Logeledningen," which always required a sacrifice at Christmas.<sup>59</sup> During 1903, Marholm physically assaulted Stiftprobst von Türck, an assistant to Hofprediger Hecher, and thereby was brought to the attention of the Munich police.<sup>60</sup> At the beginning of 1904, an episode played itself out in Marholm's correspondence with Henrik Hedlund, editor of *Göteborgs Handelstidning*, similar to the misunderstanding with Bonnier over *Das Buch der Toten*. This time, Marholm offered Hedlund "Koster," an account of her courtship with Ola Hansson, which Hedlund declined. Marholm became obsessed with the idea that he had ordered the article from her and demanded her honorarium. She assumed that Hedlund's refusal to print her article had to do with the King of England's visit to Copenhagen.<sup>61</sup> On her own behalf, Marholm invoked the influence of Julia and Georg von Vollmar.

Marholm tried to draw on her old acquaintance with the Vollmars and wrote Julia von Vollmar a long letter describing how both she and Hansson had been

<sup>58</sup> Ingvar Holm, *Ola Hansson. En studie i åttitalsromantik* (Malmö: Gleerups, 1957), p. 397. Holm has made a careful study of the events from the middle of 1902 leading up to Marholm's commitment to a mental hospital in April 1905. Holm had access to records from the Oberbayerische Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Haar-München, which have since been misplaced. (Confirmed to me in a letter dated 26 August 1986 from Dr. Schulz, Director at the Bezirkskrankenhaus Haar bei München, as the hospital is now called.) For this reason, this study must rely on Holm's citations in Swedish of this missing archival material.

<sup>59</sup> Laura Marholm to Karl Bonnier, 13 October 1903. "the highest lodge leadership."

<sup>60</sup> Holm, p. 398.

<sup>61</sup> Laura Marholm to Henrik Hedlund, 15 April 1904.

mistreated by both Hedlund and Bonnier.<sup>62</sup> In another letter to Georg von Vollmar, Marholm tried to enlist his aid in recovering the belongings they had pawned in the fall and spring of 1898 and 1899.<sup>63</sup> Marholm also tried to sell some of her family's books to Vollmar, which he politely refused.<sup>64</sup> These letters bear witness to Marholm's readiness to hurl accusations, as well as an increasing note of desperation in her circumstances.

In the first few months of 1905, the hostility and frequency of Marholm's accusatory letters to state officials and Catholic dignitaries increased. As Ingvar Holm relates:

Den bayerska regenten furst Luitpold hade hon kallat en 'kalvanistisk hund', som mördat sin föregångare Ludwig II. Prins Ludwig, Luitpolds son, var en lögnare – han hade lovat hennes man en konservatorplats vid Pinakoteket men hade inte hållit sitt löfte. Både Ludwig och Luitpold handlade 'im Auftrag der englischen Loge, aber das Ende des Hauses Birkenfeld ist nicht mehr ferne.' Vidare beskyldes prosten Türck för skamlöshet och det katolska prästerskapet för att ha ekonomiskt ruinerat henne och hennes man. Yttermera hade den påvlige nuntien (på uppdrag av svenske kungen) försökt förgifta Ola Hansson.<sup>65</sup>

On March 3 and 17, 1905, letters were sent to Prince Ludwig, which caused the police to investigate. The police report provides a view of the marriage not unlike Adolf Oberländer's.

Upon his arrival, the investigator was told that Hansson was ill and could not be questioned. Marholm said she would speak for them both. With little prompting, Marholm began to elaborate the plots that had been hatched against them until the investigator halted her. On his way out, the investigator caught sight of Ola Hansson in an adjoining room and walked in to ask Hansson what he meant "*med sina brev till H. K. H.*" [my italics].<sup>66</sup> Hansson had written the letters which prompted the police to intervene, but the significance of this detail seems to have been subsequently overlooked by the police, the press, and Hansson scholarship, since it was against Marholm that action was taken. Hansson, in fact, had a history of writing to Prince Ludwig, for he had written an accusatory

<sup>62</sup> Laura Marholm to Julia von Vollmar, 12 July 1904.

<sup>63</sup> Laura Marholm to Georg von Vollmar, 22 June 1904.

<sup>64</sup> Laura Marholm to Georg von Vollmar, 6 July 1904; Georg von Vollmar to Laura Marholm, 8 July 1904.

<sup>65</sup> Holm, p. 398. "She had called the Bavarian regent, Prince Leopold, a 'Calvanistic dog,' who had murdered his predecessor Ludwig II. Prince Ludwig, Luitpold's son, was a liar – he had promised her husband a position as conservator at the Pinakotek, but had not kept his promise. Both Ludwig and Luitpold acted 'im Auftrag der englischen Loge, aber das Ende des Hauses Birkenfeld ist nicht mehr ferne.' Furthermore Dean Türck was accused of shamelessness and the Catholic priesthood of ruining her and her husband economically. Even further, the papal nuncio had (under the instructions of the Swedish King) tried to poison Ola Hansson."

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 399. "with *his* letters to H. R. H."



letter to Ludwig as early as May 30, 1901.<sup>67</sup> The fact that Marholm received the inspector while Hansson was hidden in another room seems to indicate that Marholm was trying to protect him. In later years, Marholm explained that she had drawn the attention of the police because she was so vocal in rising to the defense of her family.<sup>68</sup> With Marholm in the spotlight, Hansson's role in these events was overlooked.

Hansson responded to the investigator's inquiry about his intentions: "att han tillräckligt ingående hade förklarat detta i sitt brev. Men därefter började han komma med samma påståenden om tyske kejsaren i mycket upprörd ton och i nästan samma ordalag som hustrun . . ."<sup>69</sup> The inspector drew the following conclusion from his visit:

Vid mina upprepade samtal med fru H. fick jag det intrycket, att jag hade att göra med en utan tvivel sinnesjuk, av fixa idéer besatt kvinna, som med hänsynslös energi behärskar människorna i sin omgivning och även påverkar deras tal.

Men även hennes man måste jag betrakta som sinnesjuk, ty endast så förklaras dennes motståndslösa inträngande i hustruns sjukliga fantasier, som tydligen saknar varje verklighetsunderlag. Det sätt, på vilket han framställde dessa, visar att han fullständigt har tillägnat sig dem. Vidare har han de sinnessjukas egendomliga blick, som är riktad rakt fram brinnande och tom.<sup>70</sup>

Like Oberländer, the inspector drew the conclusion that Marholm had forced her delusions upon her husband, although there is no clear evidence for this. As Ingvar Holm has pointed out, the notion of "induced insanity" was popular in Munich at the time. Marholm's volubility made her the easiest choice for the originator of the insanity.

The inspector was no doubt also influenced by the sensational testimony he gathered from the Hanssons' landlord, a Frau Betty Schweizer. The Hanssons were three months behind in their rent, but Frau Schweizer observed that they still had sufficient funds to purchase eight liters of beer a day. Indeed, Hansson's

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>68</sup> Laura Marholm, "Omrids til en Biografi," manuscript in Göteborgs Universitetsbibliotek.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 399. "that he had explained that in sufficient detail in his letter. But afterward, he began making the same assertions about the German Kaiser in a very disturbed tone and in almost the same words as his wife."

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 399. "During my repeated conversations with Mrs. H. I received the impression that I was dealing with an undoubtedly insane woman, possessed by fixed ideas, who with ruthless energy dominates the people in her surroundings and even influences their speech.

But I must regard even her husband as insane, because only in this manner can his unresisting participation in his wife's sickly fantasies, which apparently are without any foundation in reality, be explained. The manner in which he presented them shows that he has completely incorporated them. Furthermore he has the peculiar glance of the insane, which is directed straight forward, burning and empty."

excessive drinking habits may have contributed to the severity of their situation. However, Mrs. Schweizer also held Marholm responsible for the pair's problems:

Som fru Schweizer redan sedan 2 år hade kunnat iaktta, stod herr H. som en viljelös varelse under sin frus inflytande, han sade endast efter, vad denna inbillade honom, och trodde sig inte om att kunna göra något utan henne.

Nu var han säkert inte sjuk, ty på kvällarna hörde man, hur de båda gnabbades och krattade i vardagsrummet som nygifta 20-åringar. Efter sina iakttagelser de sista månaderna kom fru Schweizer endast till den slutsatsen att fru Hansson antingen var en demonisk, ofattbart dålig kvinna eller sinnessjuk.<sup>71</sup>

Ever since the two were married, Marholm had acted as business manager, impresaria, secretary, and housekeeper for Hansson, who never showed a great interest in taking care of such things himself. The conclusion many drew from this circumstance was that Marholm completely dominated her husband. Within their own home, however, Hansson dictated how things should be, and Marholm catered to him out of a sense of devotion. Frau Schweizer was evidently put off by what she perceived to be Marholm's aggressive manner. There are signs that Frau Schweizer's assessment of the Hanssons is not entirely reliable. In her testimony, Frau Schweizer also accused Marholm of abusing her son, who had returned to live with his parents when they could no longer pay Ola, Jr.'s caretakers in Schliersee. I agree with Ingvar Holm, who finds these accusations highly unlikely.<sup>72</sup>

The police wished to examine Marholm further, and on April 11, she was requested to come to the police station for an appointment with the police doctor. Marholm was not allowed to return home and was sent to the Kreisirrenanstalt München "wegen Gemeingefährlichkeit."<sup>73</sup>

The newspapers turned this event into a sensation. The *Berliner Tageblatt* reported on April 14: "Amtlicherseits ist durch Irrenärzte nunmehr festgestellt worden, daß die Dichterin Laura Marholm an unheilbarem Wahnsinn leidet."<sup>74</sup> The Munich newspapers turned the episode into a local controversy. The *Münchener Post* tried to draw political import from the story by reporting it under the headline "Bayerisch-Russisches."<sup>75</sup> The *Münchener Post* claimed that Marholm

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 400. "As Mrs. Schweizer had been able to observe already two years ago, Mr. H. stood as a will-less being under his wife's influence. He simply repeated what imaginings she gave him and did not believe himself capable of doing anything without her.

Now, he was certainly not sick, because in the evenings, one heard how they both fussed and tussled in the livingroom like newly-wed 20-year-olds. According to her observations during the past few months, Mrs. Schweizer came to the conclusion that Mrs. Hansson either was a demonic, incomprehensibly bad woman or insane."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 400.

<sup>73</sup> "Laura Marholm geisteskrank," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 15 April 1905, *Morgenblatt*, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> "Telegramme: 13 April," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 14 April 1905.

<sup>75</sup> "Laura Marholm," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 April 1905, p. 10.

had been taken to the mental hospital by means of "gewaltsamen Schleppen."<sup>76</sup> This dramatic version of the story caused other Munich newspapers to come to the defense of the Munich police. The *Allgemeine Zeitung* objected to the *Münchener Post*'s article, stating: "Gewissenlos aber ist es, den Fall als Sensation auszuschlachten oder ihm eine politische Bedeutung unterzuschieben."<sup>77</sup>

*Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* provides the most lengthy account, and the paper is clearly on the side of the Munich officials: "Wenn von einer gewaltsamen Verbringung der Schriftstellerin in die Anstalt die Rede ist, so muß dazu bemerkt werden, daß wohl kaum je ein Geisteskranker freiwillig eine solche Anstalt aufsucht, aus dem einfachen Grunde, weil den Kranken die Einsicht in ihren Zustand fehlt."<sup>78</sup> *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* also provides an account of Marholm's letter-writing and her delusions. Hansson is accused of nothing in the newspaper reportage. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* claims that Marholm had written "Bettelbriefe," and when these were rejected she responded with "Droh- und Schmähbriefe."<sup>79</sup> Accusing Marholm of begging is not entirely fair, since in her view she was only trying to regain what had been taken from her. It was not in her nature to beg. Nonetheless, Marholm was clearly a very ill woman, but she received no sympathy from the press.

The official diagnosis of Marholm's condition came from Dr. Fritz Ast, a physician at the Kreisirrenanstalt. In 1906, he published an article entitled, "Beitrag zur Kenntnis des induzierten Irreseins," in which he uses Laura Marholm and Ola Hansson as one of his case studies. Dr. Ast made an effort to research Hansson's and Marholm's prior history, though the picture he paints is not entirely accurate. Furthermore, he makes his diagnosis without ever having examined Hansson: "Der Mann in Freiheit, konnte nur gelegentlich, bei Besuchen usw. beobachtet werden."<sup>80</sup>

Ast made a laudable attempt to read the writings of Laura Marholm, but he clearly did not read everything. Ast writes, "Die Beziehungen ihrer paranoischen Veranlagung zu ihre produktiven Begabung überhaupt hier weiter zu verfolgen, würde zu weit führen. Der Einfluß derselben auf die letztere wurde erst gegen das Jahr 1897 so stark, daß er den Verlegern merkbar wurde und diese nicht mehr drucken lassen wollten."<sup>81</sup> Ast makes a false assumption here. Marholm's lack of publishing success in 1897 was brought about by the alienation of her old publishers through lawsuits and her concurrent fall from critical favor. Of course, this publishing "boycott" later became part of Marholm's system of conspiracies. Ast merely assumes that Marholm was already unstable and

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> "Der Fall Marholm," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 16 April 1905, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Fritz Ast, "Beitrag zur Kenntnis des induzierten Irreseins," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, 63 (1906), p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

because of this drove her publishers away. Ast is wrong to assign Marholm's irrationality such an early date. Marholm's first truly bizarre work was *Buch der Toten*, written at the end of 1900.

Ast does give a very interesting account of Marholm's paranoid beliefs, though to what extent Marholm actually was the author of these delusions can never be ascertained with certainty. In particular, the designs of the European royal houses upon Hansson are fascinating:

Um nun die Fortpflanzung der durch und durch verfaulten Dynastien zu sichern, sind die oft impotenten Machthaber gezwungen, potente Bürgerliche die entsprechenden Funktionen ausüben zu lassen – was mit einem erstaunlichen Aufwand von Kenntnissen in der Familiengeschichte der Fürstengeschlechter bewiesen wird. Eine solche Funktion soll auch ihrem Mann zugemutet werden, den man deshalb mit allen Mitteln von ihr trennen will.<sup>82</sup>

This particular twist to the conspiracies quite likely did emanate from Marholm. She was able to astonish Dr. Ast with the historical research she had done for *Buch der Frauen II*, which indicates that this theme was a pet project. Considering how important her husband was to her, it makes a certain amount of psychological sense that she would fear losing what she valued most highly. Marholm had made a career arguing for the importance of a normal sexual relationship with one beloved man for the psychological well-being of a woman. In her view, Hansson had made her life complete, and the conspiring powers could hurt her most by taking him away.

Another theme that Ast elaborates, however, is the Freemasons' alleged use of "Doppelgänger" in carrying out their sinister plans. This interest in "doubles" seems to bear Hansson's stamp. Hansson wrote a strange essay entitled "Mein Doppelgänger" as early as 1900,<sup>83</sup> but his interest in the theme goes back even farther. One might take as an example "Heimatlos" from 1890, in which a man is persecuted by a double projected by his psyche, a "double" who ultimately drives the man to suicide in an effort to rid himself of his tormentor.<sup>84</sup> Ast is aware of the odd essays published by Hansson in *Die Zukunft*, but he believes, "daß sie [Marholm] die eigentliche Schöpferin auch dieser Elaborate ist, mögen dieselben auch zweifellos eine gewisse selbständige Weiterverarbeitung seitens des Mannes verraten."<sup>85</sup> Ast draws this conclusion because, when asked about the essays, Marholm displayed an intimate familiarity with Hansson's works. This proves nothing, however, since from the outset of their marriage, the Hanssons had been closely acquainted with each other's writing.

Ast concludes from his evaluation of the Hanssons' psychosis: "Es ist ferner ohne weiteres ersichtlich, daß es die Frau ist, welche primär an ihr leidet und sie

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 44–45.

<sup>83</sup> Ola Hansson, "Mein Doppelgänger," *Die Zukunft*, 32 (1900), pp. 573–575.

<sup>84</sup> Ola Hansson, "Heimatlos," *Wiener Mode, Im Boudoir*, Jg. 3 (1890), nr. 7–10, pp. 247–50; 283–84; 315–16; 349–52.

<sup>85</sup> Ast, p. 49.

auf den Mann übertragen hat.”<sup>86</sup> Ingvar Holm has objected to Ast’s diagnosis, because it is based on the supposition that Ola Hansson was healthy before he came under his wife’s influence. Holm is able to document an extensive history of nervousness, mistrust and paranoia in Hansson’s character. For example, Hansson wrote to Mathilda Malling back in 1886, “[Jag] har lärt mig misstro mig sjelf och hela verlden. Det kan vara ett ingenting som gör mig skygg: en nyans i en blick, en gest, något som kanske icke fins [sic] utom i min misstanke.”<sup>87</sup> The novellas in *Frau Lilly as Jungfrau*, *Gattin und Mutter* suggest that Hansson had a greater dependency upon alcohol than Marholm. Hansson’s considerable alcohol consumption would have done nothing to improve his mental stability.

One of Marholm’s few champions, Lars Nilsson, who was the Hansson family doctor in Skurup, gives this opinion on the issue:

Den åsikt som jag flera gånger hört framkastas att fru Ola Hansson genom sin påverkan skulle delvis ha varit skulden till mannens psykiska depression är enligt min ofrånkomliga mening oriktig. Ola Hansson var en sjuk man långt innan fru Laura Hansson psykiskt trycktes ner av deras gemensamma motgångar. Fru Laura höll sig längst uppe, men det är ju lätt förståeligt [sic], att med det intima själsliga samliv som förefanns dem emellan, hon förr eller senare också skulle mentalt gå under.<sup>88</sup>

Although Lars Nilsson had not had the opportunity to examine the Hanssons as had Dr. Ast, he was thoroughly familiar with the Hansson family history.

According to the newspapers, Marholm was well treated during her stay in the Kreisirrenanstalt. She was housed in the best quarter, “um der Internierten jeden unangenehmen Eindruck zu sparen und sie in einen Gesellschaftskreis zu bringen, der ihrem Stande und ihrer Bildung angemessen ist.”<sup>89</sup> Hansson visited her every day and wrote letters to various German newspapers in order to obtain the release of his wife. He completely denied that Marholm was ill and saw only political motivations behind her commitment to the hospital. He claimed that he was denied access to the police records, but “Däremot har man upprepade gånger förklarat för såväl mig som min hustru, att hon genast skulle återfå sin frihet, om vi ville lämna München och Bayern. Detta är alltså afsikten med in-

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Holm, p. 413. “[I] have learned to mistrust myself and the whole world. It can be nothing at all which makes me timid: a nuance in a glance, a gesture, something that perhaps does not exist except within my suspicion.”

<sup>88</sup> Lars Nilsson, “Minnen och reflexioner,” *Skåne Årsbok* (1928), p. 123. “The opinion which I have heard put forth many times, that Mrs. Ola Hansson through her influence was partially responsible for her husband’s psychic depression, is in my firm opinion incorrect. Ola Hansson was a sick man long before Mrs. Laura Hansson became psychically downtrodden by their common misfortunes. Mrs. Hansson held herself up the longest, but it is easily understandable, considering the intimate spiritual cohabitation which existed between them, that she would sooner or later also mentally go under.”

<sup>89</sup> “Der Fall Marholm,” *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 16 April 1905.



terneringen.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, he saw the action as an attempt to break up their marriage and informed the press that they intended to remarry in both a civil and a Catholic ceremony.

Marholm’s stay in the Kreisirrenanstalt lasted approximately seven months, from April to October.<sup>91</sup> Immediately after her release, the Hansson family moved to Austria. Evidently, Hans Larsson, Hansson’s relative and long-time friend, wanted to bring the Hanssons back to Sweden. No doubt, Larsson had the best of motives. Under the circumstances, he must have felt that Marholm and Hansson would be better off under the supervision of their family. He even went so far as to inquire of a local mental institution, whether it could provide Marholm with adequate care. Regardless of his actual motives, Larsson’s actions were viewed as hostile by both Marholm and Hansson. Marholm wrote many years later, “Vi reste till Feldkirch, och dit sändes oss ett brev efter, vari Hans Larsson krävde mig till inspärning i Lunds dårhus. Brevet var skrivet i den förmodan att vi skulle resa upp till Sverge [sic], och han bad ‘direktören’ om en autoritativ fullmakt, varmed han kunde lägga handen på mig.”<sup>92</sup> Marholm also blamed Larsson for the loss of her correspondence with Hansson which disappeared at about this time: “Jag ved at Professor Hans Larsson var baade i München og i Schliersee – ikke blot en Gang. Jeg sjelv saa Rummet hvor han boede i München og jeg ved med hvem han omgikkes. Om De *ikke* har Olas Brev til mig og mine – *saa har han dem* [sic; original emphasis].”<sup>93</sup> Such suspicions did nothing to bring Hansson and Marholm closer to his family in their final years.

Even if she was treated relatively well in the Kreisirrenanstalt, the experience devastated her. Marholm’s pen remained inactive for 14 years. Considering that she had written almost unceasingly all her life, this lengthy hiatus seems to indicate a major spiritual defeat. After her hospitalization, Marholm lapsed into an uncharacteristic passivity. For the first time since their marriage, Hansson took charge of the family’s business arrangements, until his son became old enough to relieve him of these duties. Marholm seems to have eventually re-

<sup>90</sup> Ola Hansson, “Laura Marholms öde,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 June 1905. “On the other hand, it has been explained to me and my wife many times that she would instantly regain her freedom if we were willing to leave Munich and Bavaria. That, therefore, is the reason for the incarceration.”

<sup>91</sup> The newspaper notices indicate she was incarcerated in April. Ola Hansson claims in “Rustgården II,” p. 228, that Marholm was released in October.

<sup>92</sup> Marholm, “Kvinnornas valrätt.” “We travelled to Feldkirch and a letter was forwarded to us there, in which Hans Larsson demanded that I be locked up in Lund’s madhouse. The letter was written under the assumption that we would travel up to Sweden, and he asked ‘the director’ for a power of attorney, by which means he could get his hands on me.”

<sup>93</sup> Laura Marholm to Nils Hansson, January 1925. “I know that Professor Hans Larsson was both in Munich and in Schliersee – not only once. I myself saw the room where he lived in Munich and I know with whom he associated. If you do *not* have Ola’s letters to me and mine – *then he has them*.”

covered from her mental illness, but this healing process is shrouded in 14 years of silence.

News of Marholm's collapse reached Scandinavia. Hulda Garborg knew Marholm from better days and noted sadly in her diary:

Fra München skrives, at Laura Marholm Hansson er blit sindsyg. Hun blev indespærret mod sin egen og sin mands vilje, da hun mentes å være farlig for omgivelserne. Det er forfærdelig trist. Jeg husker, hvor hun var strålende, da hun første gang kom til Kolbotn, og da jeg senere traf hende i Berlin. Ikke så ganske ung længer; men kraftig og gjennom sund og freidig.<sup>94</sup>

Marholm never fully regained her old self.

<sup>94</sup> Hulda Garborg, *Dagbok 1903–1914*, Karen Grude Koht and Rolv Thesen, eds., (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1962), p. 51. "From Munich comes the news that Laura Marholm Hansson has become insane. She was locked up against her own and her husband's will, since she was considered dangerous to the public. It is terribly sad. I recall how radiant she was when she came to Kolbotten for the first time, and then when I later met her in Berlin. Not quite so young any longer; but vigorous and thoroughly healthy and dauntless."